

The project *Innovative Study of Prehistoric Clay Figures by Chemical and Cognitive Analyses* investigates the way that artefacts from the middle and later parts of the Japanese Jomon period (from c. 5000 – 3000 years ago) moved through the landscape, on the basis of scientific analysis of the materials from which they made (clay and stone). Over 180 objects were analysed in late summer 2023.

The project was hosted by Prof Naoko Matsumoto, Research Institute for the Dynamics of Civilization, Okayama University and involved Niigata Prefectural Museum of History, Umataka Jomon Museum, Sanjo City Museum, Morimachi Museum, Hokuto City Museum, Museum of Kyoto. The collaboration began with a pilot project on XRF analysis on the pottery sherds from Tsukumo Shell Midden in 2019.

Participants benefitted through discussion of analytical methods of Jomon artefacts with international researchers, from new understanding of how materials moved through the landscape, and will be included in a peer-reviewed publication. The project has created a new research network. Key findings to date include identifying certain artefact types that are more likely to have been made from locally available clays, and others that were not.

The project was not without challenges. My visit took place during the first wave of foreign academics allowed to enter Japan after the pandemic. On the day of my arrival 17% of all Covid cases globally were recorded in Tokyo. Travel to parts of the country where we planned to undertake research became restricted and travel advised against. Despite this, and operating cautiously, we obtained excellent results, thanks to the flexibility of our Japanese partners.

We are planning to carry out further research in 2023 advancing our knowledge of the prehistoric communities in the Japanese archipelago as well as using scientific methods in interpreting prehistoric art.

Explanation of the two photos below:



This is the Jomon earring placed on the XRF machine in preparation for analysis.



This is the Jomon figurine in the shape of a squid, Washinoki stone circle.