

## Feasting and inter-village networks

**Takamune Kawashima**

*Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Japan*

k\_takamune@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT** – *While the exchange of material goods and techniques is thought to be the main reason for the existence of exotic materials at Jomon sites, it is not clear what kind of exchange occurred. I propose that feasting could be one of the reasons for the diffusion of material goods and even techniques. As feasting is connected to activities such as exchange and ritual, feasting remains could be an indicator of exchange. This paper uses exotic materials and feasting remains to analyze the distribution of goods, using ethnographic data related to ritualized exchange and feasting.*

**IZVLEČEK** – *Čeprav pojav eksotičnih dobrin na Jomonskih najdiščih pogosto razumemo kot posledico menjave, ne vemo za katere vrste menjavo je šlo. Gostije so lahko eden poglobitnih medijev širitve dobrin in tehnik. Če torej gostije lahko povežemo z rituali in z menjavo, potem so ostanki gostij lahko poglobitni vir za preučevanje menjav. V članku analiziram distribucijo dobrin s pomočjo etnografskih primerov ritualizirane menjave in gostij ter ostankov gostij in eksotičnih predmetov.*

**KEY WORDS** – *Jomon; Japan; exchange; ritual; feasting*

### Introduction

Exchange is thought to be the main reason for the existence of exotic materials from the Jomon, the Japanese prehistoric period (Tab. 1). Some archaeologists assert that trading as subsistence must have existed in the Early and Middle Jomon period because exotic materials like jade and obsidian were widely distributed (*Daikuhara 2002; Kosugi 2003*). From the perspective of ethnography, however, most hunter-gatherers were not involved in trading for subsistence. Hunter-gatherers do not follow the strategies of a capitalistic market economy to earn profit by exchange (*Teshigawara 2007*). Therefore, it is difficult to support the existence of traders throughout Jomon society. The subsistence of Jomon society is principally based on hunting, fishing and gathering. However, it has been pointed out that the natural environment and subsistence of the eastern Jomon culture is similar to the pacific coast of North America, in which ranked society existed in spite of a hunting-gathering economy (*Anzai 2002; Watanabe*

*1990*). The ethnography of tribes on the pacific coast of North America implies that hunter-gatherers in a particular situation can possess a hereditary ranked society without agriculture. Although it is not clear whether a hereditary ranked society existed in the Jomon period (*Yamada 2003; Pearson 2007*), it is thought that Late and Final Jomon society was a transegalitarian society (*Hayden 1995; Takahashi 2001*), which is the middle stage between egalitarian societies and chiefdoms.

In order to investigate the exchange system during the Jomon period, an example of exchange from a transegalitarian society should be used for comparison, as social development and exchange are correlated. For example, in the Kula exchange system in Melanesia, leaders made great efforts to collect valuables such as necklaces and bracelets for exchange (*Malinowski 1922*). It is apparent that this kind of exchange needs inter-village networks and

leaders to maintain this type of relationship. Although some rituals may have been held to maintain inter-village relationships in the Jomon period, it is difficult to recognize such relationships by their material remains. In order to solve this problem, it is helpful to consider the rituals and feasts involved in the exchange process.

Evidence of the rituals and feasts which were part of exchange activities would have been left at the sites. Therefore, feasting could be an indicator of exchange. In larger scale feasting, usually guests from other villages are invited (Hayden 2001). According to the ethnography of the potlatch on the Northwest coast of North America, valuables such as gifts and food were prepared for guests from different villages (Birket-Smith 1967; Hayden 1995; Kan 1989). After that, the guests had to repay such gifts at another potlatch. Repeating such ceremonies, gifts could be distributed within the area. Although the aim of potlatch is not exchange, this case may explain how the patterns of pottery and exotic goods were diffused over a broader area. As feasting is one of the aspects of the potlatch, it could represent the foundation of inter-community relationships, as well as intra-community socio-political organization.

In this paper, I will argue that feasting could be another cause for the diffusion of material goods and even techniques. At archaeological sites, it is difficult

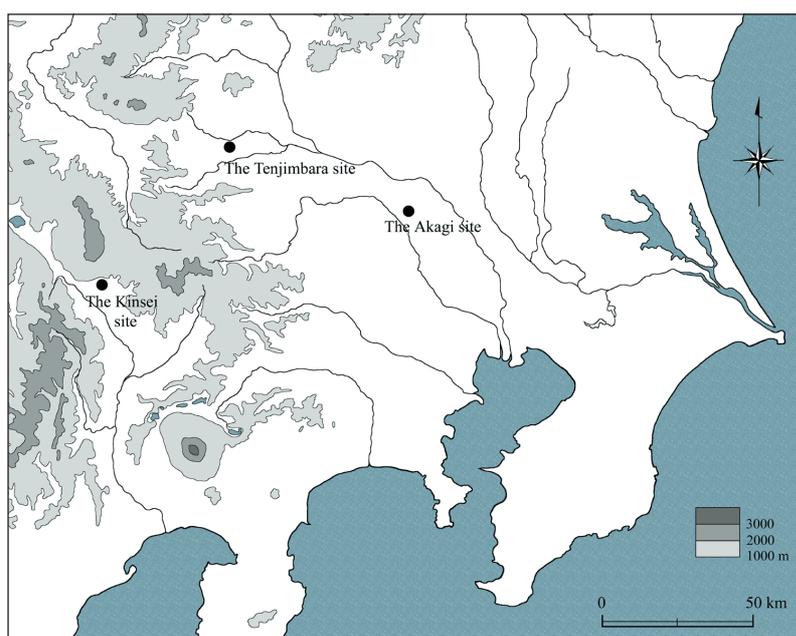
	<sup>14</sup> C-date(year BP)	year cal BC	Duration
Final Jomon	3000–(2400)	1260/1230/1220–(410)	(c. 810–850)
Late Jomon	4050–3000	2580/2510–1260/1230/1220	c. 1250–1360
Middle Jomon	4800–4050	3630/3550–2580/2510	c. 970–1120
Early Jomon	6300–4800	5300–3630/3550	c. 1670–1750
Earliest Jomon	9800–6300	9250–5300	c. 3950
Incipient Jomon	13 000–9800	13 680–9250	c. 4430

**Tab. 1. Radiocarbon dates of the Jomon period (after Taniguchi 2001. Tab. 1).**

to recognize each ritual, but there could be an accumulation of ritual and feasting remains, because feasting requires more food than is usually consumed. Evidence of feasting is recognized by food processing facilities, special hearths, charcoal, animal bones, botanical remains and so on (Hayden 2001. Tab. 2.1; Kawashima 2007). Although these features are reported from sites in the Late and Final Jomon period, they have not been recognized as evidence of feasting. I will look for the remains of ritual and feasting in Jomon sites and try to investigate the exchange system, focusing on the Late to Final Jomon period (Fig. 1).

### The social function of feasting

Jomon society could be categorized as a transegalitarian society. The social function of feasting in transegalitarian societies is described by Hayden (1995). He classified transegalitarian society into three types: despot communities, reciprocator communities, and entrepreneur communities. In despot communities, the scale of feasting is small, and the food is mainly served as wealth. Although this case does not show individual contributions, feasting already functions as a tool for mobilizing surpluses (*ibid.* 38–39). Feasts in reciprocator communities can mobilize more surpluses and expect more benefit (*ibid.* 47). Entrepreneur communities perform competitive feasts, such as the potlatch on the Northwest coast of North America (*ibid.* 51). The types and function of feasting are thought to increase with its extent and development (Hayden 2001). Feasting has various purposes and functions. It can be also seen as a tool for the manipulation of wealth based on surpluses and



**Fig. 1. Location of sites mentioned in the paper.**

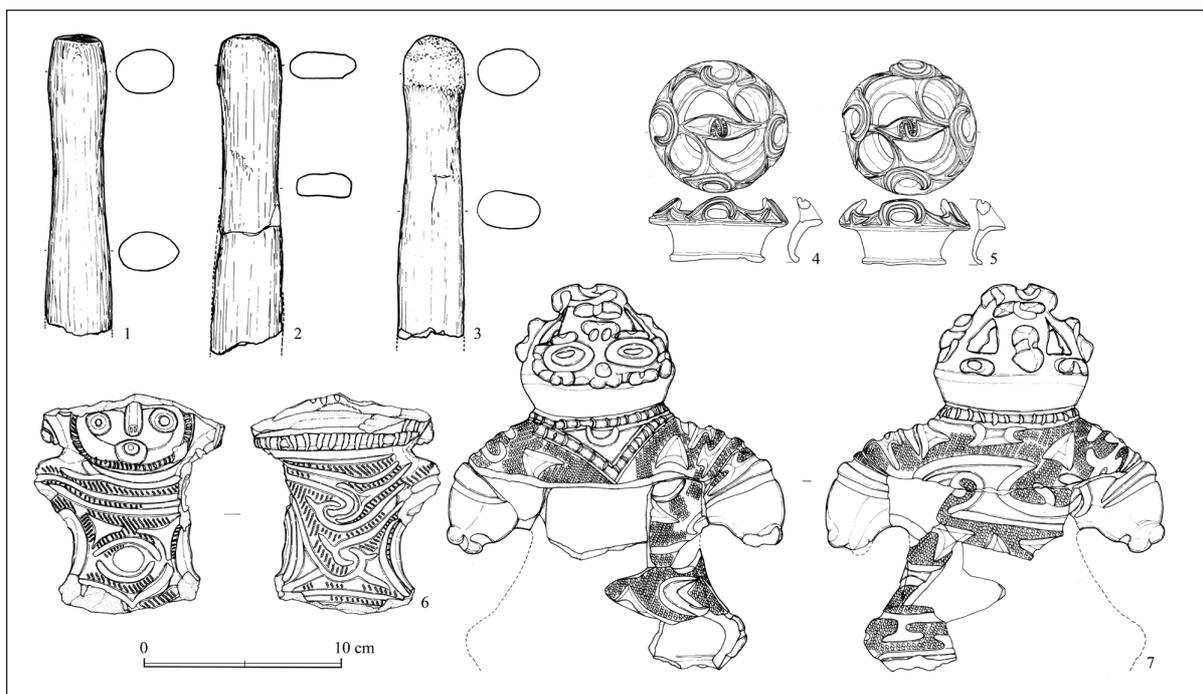
prestige goods. While there is competition for power within a community, large scale feasting includes guests from other communities. Apart from exchange, funerals and weddings are good examples of large scale feasting, where we can expect archaeological remains and the transportation of gifts such as prestige goods and food. As a result, goods must have been transferred, even if exchange itself was not the main purpose.

### The mechanism of Kula exchange

A brief explanation of Kula exchange based on Malinowski is described as follows (*Malinowski 1922*). Kula exchange was observed in the eastern part of New Guinea, and is known as ritualized inter-tribal exchange. In this area, social structure is recognized as one of the most stratified in Melanesia. Especially in the Trobriand Islands, leaders have influence over some villages. Generally, high ranking people participate in Kula exchange, and the partnership of Kula between two men lasts for a lifetime. The main treasures of Kula exchange are *mwali* (bracelet) and *soulava* (necklace), which are transported in opposite directions. *Soulava* always moves clockwise, and *mwali* rotates counterclockwise among the villages. There is no direct exchange of *mwali* and *soulava* at the same time in a village, so two expeditions are needed for one set. In order to obtain honour, the Kula members may not keep these treasures for a

long period. The transfer of *mwali* and *soulava* is in the focus when the Kula exchange is described, but in fact various goods are simultaneously transferred as gifts. In addition, during the expeditions, visitors acquire shells for making beads by themselves. It is notable that many kinds of goods were circulated through or along the Kula exchange network.

The whole process of Kula contains various rituals, which include exchange, gift giving, feasting, and so on. Once a Kula expedition is proposed, all the canoes must be repaired or rebuilt instead of using the old canoes. This is recognized as the first part of a Kula. In the canoe building stage, feasting can be observed at events such as the felling and moving of trees to a village (*ibid.* 129), launching (*ibid.* 147), and the trial run of new canoes, which is combined with a preliminary exchange of Kula (*ibid.* 164–165). Most of these activities are held within a village, but neighbouring villages give gifts for the trial run. Even before the expeditions, there are some opportunities for exchange. During the expeditions, treasures and food are given to the visitors. In the case of the Trobriand natives, who due to prohibition, do not eat food from the Dobuans, their Kula partner, but Dobuans can obtain food in the Trobriand Islands. Besides the exchange, a funeral is one of the most important events for a Kula partner. The host invites the partners to the funeral where there is feasting and food distribution. This shows that the



**Fig. 2.** Ritual artefacts from the Akagi site (1–3 stone rods: After Araya et al. 1988.Fig. 348; 4–5 clay earrings; *ibid.*Fig. 316; 6 owl-faced figurine; *ibid.*Fig. 333; 7 snow-glassed figurine; *ibid.*Fig. 339).

Kula partners are not merely exchange partners, but have important social relationships beyond exchange.

The food for feasting is based on the cultivation of yam, which is the staple in this area. The harvest is usually greater than the amount consumed, which is apparent because of there is yam storage and an indication that people could not consume all the preserved yams (*ibid.* 169–170). Pigs are also important for ritual and feasting.

**Ritual and feasting in the Jomon**

I will outline the evidence of ritual and feasting from the Akagi site, the Kinsei site, and the Tenjimbara site, which are located in Kanto district (Fig. 1). At these sites, ritual objects such as clay figurines, clay earrings, and stone rods were found (Fig. 2). On the other hand, most other sites rarely yield ritual objects. It seems that in Jomon society, archaeological sites can be divided into at least two types, according to ritual activity. As a large number of figurines were uncovered from Jomon sites, and figurine types were sensitive to influence from other cultures, they are

suitable for use in the analysis of feasting and exchange activities. Stone rods must have been involved in exchange, as material for stone rods was limited. Stone rods were widely distributed in the Kanto district, even in areas where stone objects were not produced. Finished stone rods could be produced near a quarry, and then transferred. Geographical conditions influence the number of stone rods which accumulated at a site, but I suggest that human activity was important in the diffusion of such ritual objects.

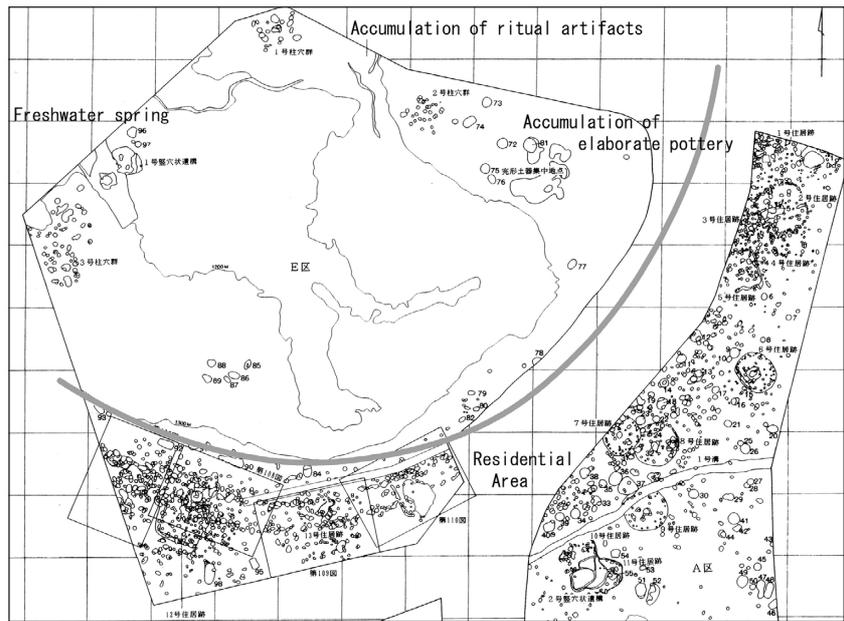


Fig. 3. Site Plan of the Akagi site (after Araya et al. 1988.Fig. 91).

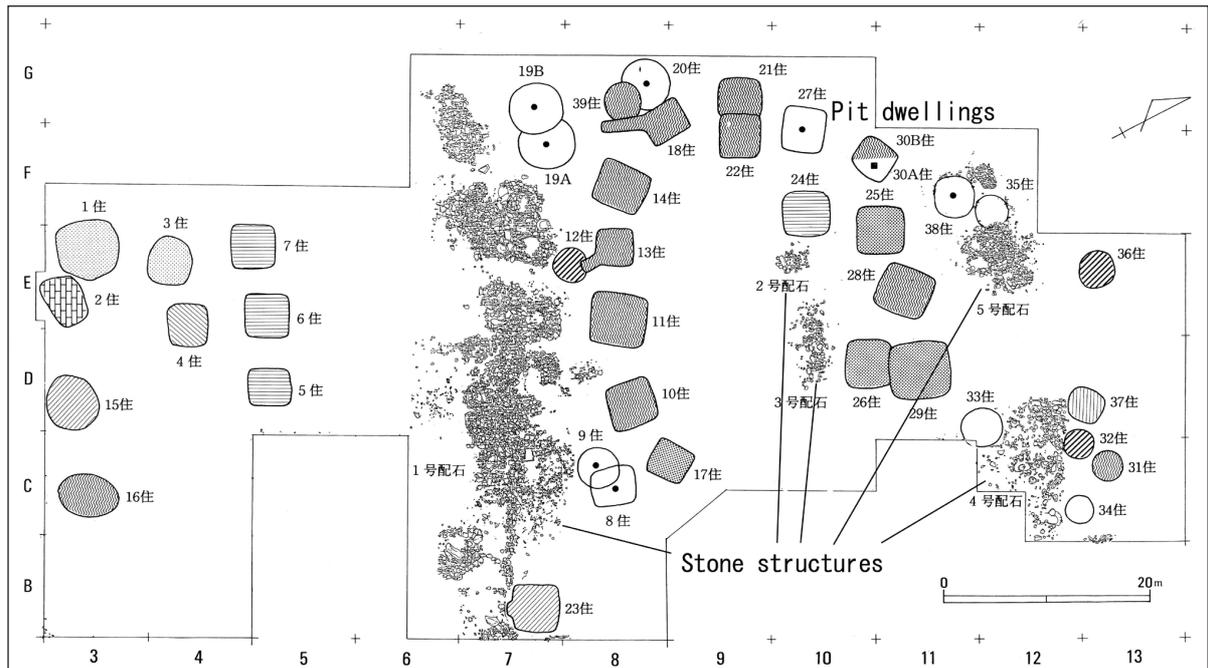


Fig. 4. Site Plan of the Kinsei site (after Niitsu et al. 1989.Fig. 158).

### The Akagi site

The Akagi site is located on the northwest of the Omiya tableland (Araya *et al.* 1988) (Fig. 1), at approximately 14m above sea level. This site can be divided into different areas, such as the residential area, ritual area and central space (Fig. 3). Most of the ritual artefacts were found accumulated in one place, which is approximately 3m in diameter, and consisted of pebbles and boulders (Tab. 2). This could be recognized as a place connected with ritual activity. Near this accumulation, the distribution of almost intact elaborate pottery was concentrated in an area approximately 15m in diameter. It is apparent that the number of ritual artefacts is concentrated in this accumulation.

### The Kinsei site

Pit dwellings of the Late and Final Jomon were uncovered at the Kinsei site, where 233 figurines, 560 earrings, 133 stone rods were uncovered (Niitsu *et al.* 1989) (Fig. 4). This site is located in the mountains, approximately 760 to 780m above sea level. The site is close to the source of materials which were used for stone artefacts and stone structures. It is also remarkable that a number of clay earrings were found. This site is located in mountains where stone was quarried. Stone objects including rods and clay figurines were discovered. While some of the stone structures are related to graves which were constructed during the Late Jomon, others are recognized to be connected to rituals. A figurine which is influenced by northern culture was found with stone rods at a stone structure which belongs to the Final Jomon. Stone structures for ritual were used in the Final Jomon and possibly in the Late Jomon. A large number of artefacts were connected to the area of stone structure 1, which is over 60m long, where 41 figurines, 91 earrings, and 22 stone rods were discovered. As stone structure 1 can be considered a complex of structures, these artefacts must have accumulated over a long period. As at the Akagi site, compared to neighboring sites, the Kinsei site yields more clay figurines (Fig. 5). Not only figurines, but other ritual artefacts were apparently abundant at this site.

### The Tenjimbara site

At the Tenjimbara site (Fig. 6), 40 clay figurines and 40 clay earrings, and 61 stone rods were uncovered, and 74 stones which resemble stone rods were also found (Dai-

	figurine	stone rod	earring
accumulation of ritual artefacts	48	18	11
accumulation of elaborate pottery	1	1	8
total number	86	36	57

Tab. 2. The number of ritual artefacts from the Akagi site.

kuhara *et al.* 1994a; 1994b). The combination of ritual artefacts is almost the same as at the Akagi and Kinsei sites, but stone rods are dominant. There are stone graves which belong to the Late Jomon, and stone structures which were constructed mainly in the Final Jomon. In the Final Jomon, stone structures were grouped close together, surrounded by a shallow ditch and a bank. As some stone structures were connected to surrounding post holes, it is possible to imagine a superstructure covering the stone structures. These ritual structures could have been used repeatedly and for multivarious purposes.

### Feasting

After the Late Jomon period, food processing facilities were constructed near freshwater springs to leach

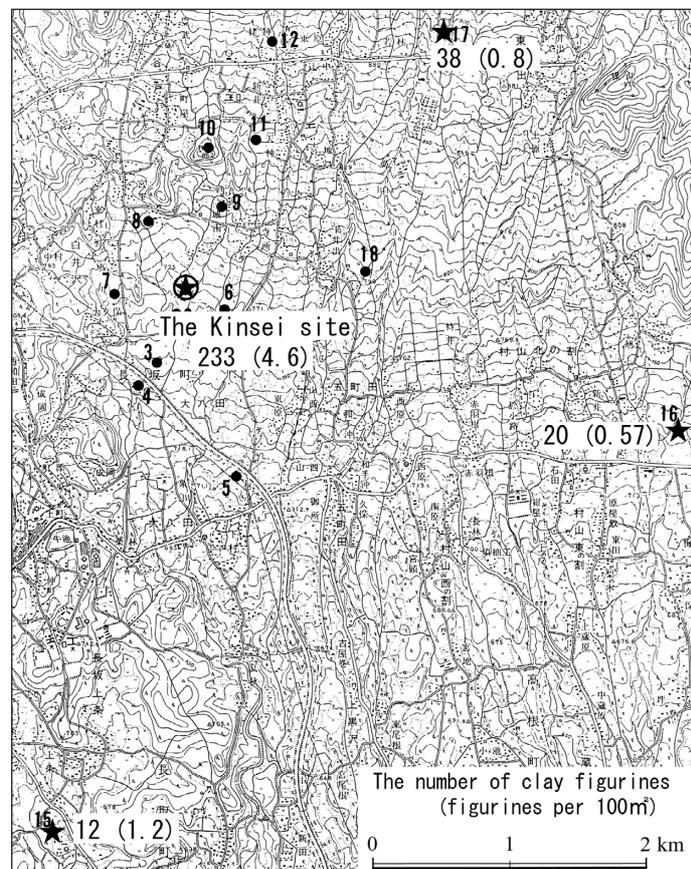


Fig. 5. The distribution of clay figurines around the Kinsei site (after Niitsu *et al.* 1989, Fig. 3).

horse chestnuts, where an accumulation of nut shells is often found. In the Akagi site, in the lowest point of the excavated area, a part of the food processing facility which extends to the lowland area was located at the freshwater spring. In the spring, wooden parts and small amounts of nut shell were uncovered. In this site, the area of concentration of elaborate vessels can be recognized as a place related to rituals, and these vessels may have been used for serving food.

At the Kinsei site, it is noteworthy that a pit was found from which the jawbones of 138 individual wild boar, mostly yearlings, were recovered (Kaneko 1989). As there were some layers of dark soil in this pit, not all the boar were consumed at the same time. This is an extreme example, but it is generally reported that the soil of the Final Jomon period contains small fragmented bones, besides burned soil and charcoal. These features, which were not observed before the Late Jomon, imply an increase in food production for special occasions, which supports an increase in feasting (Kawashima 2007).

### The correlation between ritualized exchange and feasting in the Jomon

As mentioned elsewhere, the distribution of clay figurines at different sites in the same period was not even (Kawashima 2005). Sites with and without clay figurines co-existed in the same period. In the Omiya tableland, which is approximately 35km long and 20km wide, at least 280 figurines from the Angyo period were uncovered from 25 out of 76 sites. In the area around the Akagi site, not only the number of figurines, but also the quality was found to be uneven. The Akagi site yielded the largest number, and at the same time yielded examples which were influenced by northern Japan. Such figurines are larger than the indigenous ones and have a hollow structure. Compared to those found at other sites, those from the Akagi site are more elaborate and closer to the original shape of this type. The percentage of exotic examples at the Akagi site is much higher than at other

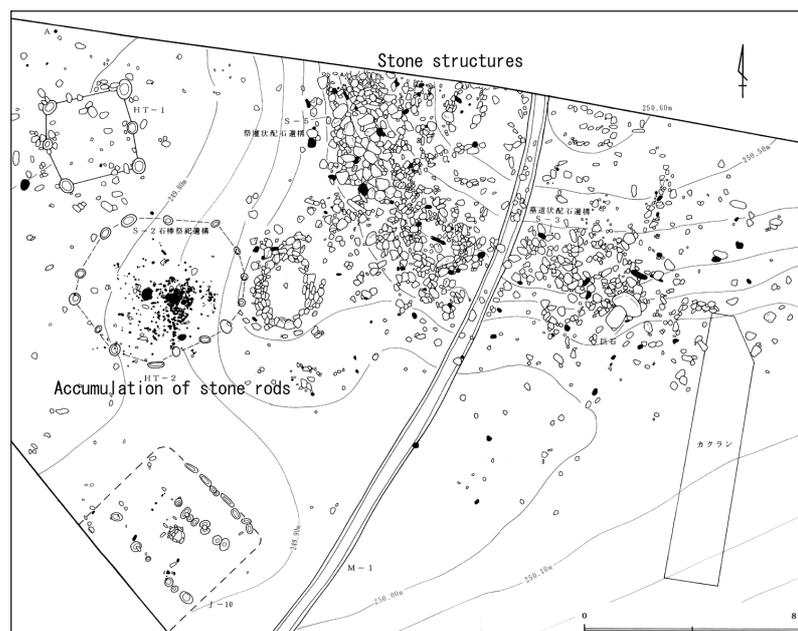


Fig. 6. Stone structures at the Tenjimbara site (after Daikuhara et al. 1994b).

sites which yielded figurines in this area. The figurines themselves may not have been exchange objects, but information about making them would have been gained through exchange networks.

Comparing the Utaya site and the Sasara site (Fig. 7, Tab. 3), which yielded a relatively large number of clay figurines, the Akagi site contains more, and the ratio of Snow-glassed figurines is higher. The Snow-glassed figurines uncovered from the Omiya tableland were thought to have been made in the Kanto region, because the pattern and decoration are different from the original ones (Kaneko 1993). Therefore, information on the structure and pattern for copying this type must have been transmitted to particular settlements.

As well as clay figurines, stone rods should also be examined, as they were transported from production sites. The distribution of stone rods is as uneven as the distribution of clay figurines. At each of the three sites, six to seven kinds of material were found. Chlorite schist was the most common mate-

	Total number of figurines	Total number of exotic figurines	Percentage of exotic figurines
Akagi	86	28	32.6
Sasara	43	2	4.7
Utaya	42	1	2.4

Tab. 3. The ratio of exotic (Snow-glassed) figurines of the three sites.

rial for stone rods, but the percentage varies (Tab. 4). The Akagi site is located closer to a quarry, which is 40km to the west. Because it is not far between the Akagi site and the other two sites, they shared the custom of using stone rods and there must have been various exchange routes.

Earrings are usually found in the mountainous regions, rather than on the plain where the Omiya tableland is located. While the Akagi site is closer to the mountainous region, approximately 100 fragments of earrings were uncovered from the Sasara and Utaya sites (Tab. 5). It is uncertain whether the earrings were brought to the sites through exchange, but even if they were made at the sites, the design must have been acquired from other sites. A type of decorative earring may have been brought from other settlements. At the concentration of the pottery at the Akagi site, these kinds of earring were uncovered in pairs (Fig 2: 4–5).

The distribution of artefacts shows a tendency of some settlements to have more power to collect par-

	Total number of stone rods	Total number of chlorite schist	Percentage of chlorite schist
Akagi	36	30	83.3
Sasara	47	23	48.9
Utaya	37	16	43.2

Tab. 4. The ratio of chlorite schist at the three sites.

ticular artefacts both quantitatively and qualitatively. On the other hand, as a small number of ritual artefacts are distributed at the other sites, there must have been a relationship between the two kinds of sites. Although the exchange system was not completely the same as the Kula, it appears that settlements were uneven in terms of access to prestige goods. We can see only a part of the result of activity in the past, but it is possible to assume the exist-

	figurine	stone rod	earring
Akagi	84	36	57
Sasara	43	47	100
Utaya	42	37	95

Tab. 5. Number of artefacts from the three sites.

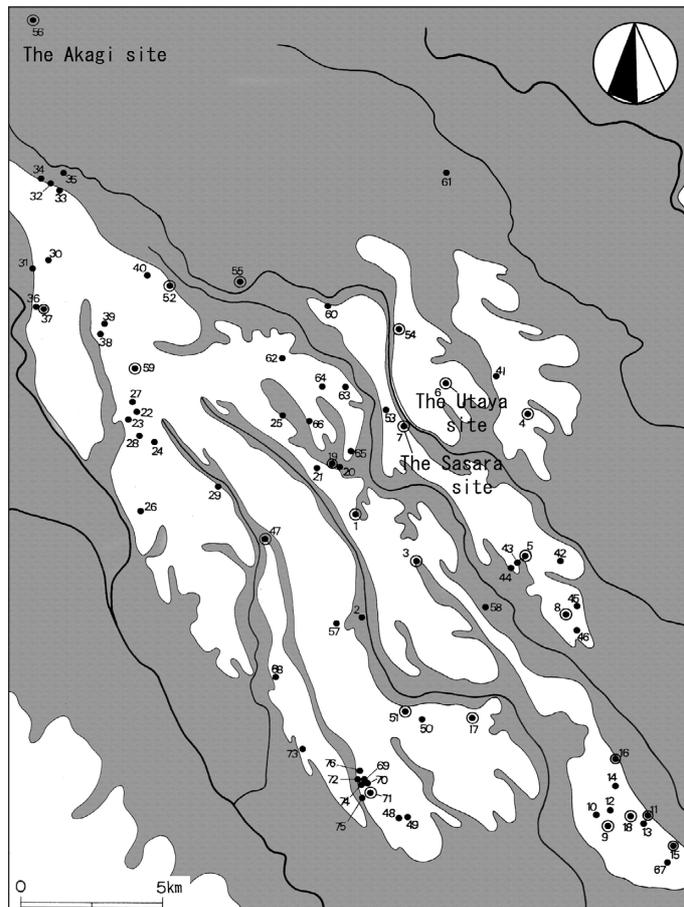


Fig. 7. Archaeological sites in the Omiya tableland (after Kawashima 2005.Fig. 3–4).

tence of inter-village networks and exchanges which were connected to feasting and based on personal connections between leaders.

As I mentioned above, because feasting is strongly connected to ritual, it is possible to assume that rituals with guests from other settlements were held, and that networks were constructed on such occasions. According to the evidence of ritual activity and feasting, a ritualized exchange system could have developed in the Late to Final Jomon period, which was still at the stage of reciprocity. The argument in this article is based on the hypothesis that feasting is observed universally in various societies and that the development of feasting and social complexity are correlated. The Kula exchange shows that exchange activity includes rituals and feasting. In the Late and Final Jomon period, ritual activities were not carried out in all but in particular settlements. The goods and the information would have been accumulated once in the 'core' settlement, such as Akagi site, and then exchanged in the region. This does not mean 'redistribution', because there is no evidence for the existence of chiefs and

associated power in the whole exchange process. Stone rods and a particular type of earring would have been exchanged, and the technique and design of figurines could have been transferred through the 'core' settlements. As the increase of the size and frequency of exchange could be evaluated by ritual and feasting, I propose the evidence of ritual and feasting from the Jomon sites. The emergence of food processing facilities in the Late Jomon is not necessarily correlated to population growth, because the number of pit dwellings decreased in this period. Therefore, food processing facilities are not used only for the minimum usual consumption of food, but also used for atypical consumption, and the amount of animal bones uncovered from the Late and Final Jomon sites increased, which is observed not only at the sites located in the mountains, but also those on the plain. Pits containing animal bones, like those at the Kinsei site, were found, and small fragments of animal bones were observed in the dark soil. These characteristics of the Late and Final Jomon could be recognized as contributing to feasting activities.

## Conclusion

My suggestions in this paper do not mean that the exchange system in Jomon society was same as the Kula exchange, but I consider that there could be si-

ilarities. The treatment of ritual and feasting which are observed in the various societies could be an indicator of inter-village relationship during the Jomon period. In fact, stone rods, a particular type of earring, and the design of Snow-glassed figurines were brought from other settlements and accumulated at a site in the Omiya tableland. Like Kula exchange, commodities also could have been distributed through networks mediated by ritual and feasting in the Late and Final Jomon. It has not been clarified that Jomon society achieved social complexity at the same level as Kula communities, but the evidence of feasting in the Jomon implies the development of social complexity to some extent. Exchange in transegalitarian societies is a candidate for comparison with the Jomon. It is necessary to consider ritualized exchange in order to investigate the exchange system in Late and Final Jomon period.

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