

News Hunter-gatherers and farmers: a report from the recent WAC Inter-Congress in Osaka, Japan

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The recently concluded Inter-Congress of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) focused on the theme of 'coexistence in the past – dialogues in the present' (WAC 2006). Held in the Japanese city of Osaka in January 2006, it provided an opportunity for Japanese archaeologists to bring their work to the wider attention of colleagues from other countries, but also offered a platform for overseas participants to interact with Japanese workers. Such dialogues were particularly evident in Session 6 of the conference, which focused on the relations between hunter-gatherers and farmers. Organised by Dr Kazunobu Ikeya of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, and Dr Hidefumi Ogawa of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, this session brought together a wide range of speakers active in four different regions, Japan, China, Southeast Asia and southern Africa. Unusually, at least for this WAC conference, it also emphasised the exchange of views between archaeologists and other disciplines, notably cultural anthropology, but also linguistics and biological anthropology. The necessity of such interdisciplinary approaches to the productive study of forager/farmer interactions was a central theme of Ikeya's opening address, along with the potential of Japanese data to contribute to this topic.

Eleven papers were then presented, five of them reflecting fieldwork within Japan itself. Key questions here included the duration and nature of contacts between Jomon hunter-gatherers and early Yayoi wet rice-cultivators (Wakabayashi & Misaka), with papers by Takahashi and Hosoya emphasising the relevance of 'social' rather than 'ecological' factors in explaining the transition from one subsistence mode to the other. That Jomon society was substantially more sedentary and transegalitarian than is typical of many lower latitude hunter-gatherers (see <http://www.jomonjapan.org>; Habu 2004) encourages exploration of ethnographic parallels from horticulturally based, 'big men' societies, such as those of New

Guinea, in framing these explanations. Comparison with Hopewell and related societies in the American Midwest might also be a profitable avenue to pursue since there too hunter-gatherer-fishers who were socially complex and materially rich began to experiment with the cultivation of indigenous plants prior to the more wholesale introduction and adoption of exotic domesticates (in this case maize and beans). Miyamoto's paper showed how, in Japan, that introduction in the form of non-paddyfield rice cultivation was already evident by the start of the late Jomon period, with climate change at least partly implicated in its stepwise adoption across northern Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's main islands.

The final Japan-focused paper, by Tezeka, turned to historical and ethnographic records of relations between mainland Japanese and the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido, complementing these with unusually well-preserved wooden artefacts that suggest increasing dependence on Japanese-derived trade goods. How far such relations should necessarily be construed in terms of exploitation is, of course, a matter of longstanding debate, not least in Southeast Asia and southern Africa, from which most of the remaining contributions were drawn. From the Philippines these took two forms: an archaeological study by Ogawa that explored changes in settlement pattern at the interface between forager and farmer societies; and an analysis by Minter of contemporary relations between Agta hunter-gatherers and their agricultural neighbours, again on the island of Luzon. Both papers emphasised that forager/farmer relations are likely to take many, locally specific forms and that, as a result, hunter-gatherers may find themselves more socially and economically empowered than is often stated. Nan's paper, examining the contestation of resources between Mlabri foragers and Hmong farmers in northern Thailand, and the construction (by self and others) of the Mlabri's identity as hunter-gatherers, made the

same point. So too did Ikeya, who presented an overview of the Kalahari debate that drew heavily on his own fieldwork with Botswanan San to illustrate how more equitable forms of interaction can be sustained over the longer term.

The two remaining papers were largely archaeological in nature. Lu considered the results of recent fieldwork in southern China, which are interpreted as indicating substantial farmer migration into the area around 7000-4000 years ago, producing a situation of long-term coexistence with indigenous foraging groups. Another example of such long-term hunter-gatherer persistence close to areas occupied by incoming farmers was presented by Mitchell, who surveyed relevant archaeological evidence from southern Africa's Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. He argued that any use of the region's admittedly limited hunter-gatherer ethnography must acknowledge how the situation described in the nineteenth century – and instrumental for current understandings of Bushman rock art – must acknowledge its derivation from a long and by no means unilineal trajectory of social and material change. With such a tightly packed schedule there was, as ever, not as much time for formal discussion of the issues raised as one would have wished, but illuminating overviews were provided by Laurence Reid (formerly of the University of Hawaii and co-author of a landmark paper on hunter-gatherer/farmer relations [Headland & Reid 1989]) and Keiichi Omoto (of Japan's Graduate University for Advanced Studies).

For those, like me, not as familiar with Japanese archaeology as its abundant riches and high technical

standards demand, an added attraction of the meeting was being able to tap into other aspects of Japanese hunter-gatherer research. Session 3, for example, focused on the movement of obsidian by Palaeolithic and Jomon hunter-gatherers, while elsewhere papers on the symbolism of Jomon figurines by Jane Oksbjerg, Elisa Ferroni and Ilona Bausch, were also of interest. So too were those considering some of the issues that arise where archaeological research is undertaken on the pasts of indigenous peoples – once again a Japanese perspective was also present, considering the past of the Ainu hunter-gatherers of Hokkaido.

Papers from the Ikeya/Ogawa session will be published through the Senri Monographs Series of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, the leading centre for researching contemporary hunter-gatherers in Japan (Ikeya & Matthews 2003). The connections they explore will hopefully receive further investigation at the next full WAC conference, which is scheduled to be held in Jamaica in 2007 (for further information on which, see http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/wac/site/confer_fut.php).

Acknowledgements

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References

Habu, J 2004. *Ancient Jomon of Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Headland T & Reid, LA 1989. Hunter-gatherers and their neighbours from prehistory to the present. *Current Anthropology* 30: 43-66.

Ikeya, K & Matthews, P 2003. National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan. *Before Farming* online version 2003/3 article 8 and print version 2003: 450-454.

WAC 2006 <http://wacosaka.jp/Pages/main.html> Accessed January 25th 2006.

List of papers given in Session 6 of the Osaka WAC Inter-Congress, Interactions between Hunter-Gatherers and Farmers in Prehistory and History

Hosoya, LA (Waseda University, Japan). What leads to a subsistence shift? An ethnoarchaeological approach to the Jomon-Yayoi transition.

Ikeya, K (National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan). The Kalahari model and the symbiotic relationship between hunters and farmers.

Lu, TL-D (Chinese University of Jonh Kong, China). Prehistoric coexistence: the expansion of farming society from the Yangzi River Valley to western South China.

Minter, T (University of Leiden, Netherlands). Interactions between foragers and farmers in

contemporary history: the Agta and their agricultural neighbours of north-east Luzon, Philippines.

Mitchell, PJ (University of Oxford, United Kingdom). Hunter-gatherers and farmers: 2000 years of interaction in the Maloti-Drakensberg region of southern Africa.

Miyamoto, K (Kyushu University, Japan). How the irrigated agriculture of the Yayoi in northern Kyushu developed.

Nan, SN (Hug Muan Nan Foundation, Thailand). The contest for resources between hunter-gatherer and farmer societies: revisiting the Mlabri and the Hmong communities in northern Thailand.

Ogawa, H (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan).

Interdependent relationships between prehistoric hunter-gatherer and farmer societies based on archaeological data from the Lower Cagayan River, northern Luzon, Philippines.

Takahashi, R (Waseda University, Japan). How symbiosis between hunter-gatherers and farmers began in Japanese prehistory.

Tezuka, K (Historical Museum of Hokkaido, Japan). Interaction between the Ainu and Main Island-Japanese during the past 1000 years.

Wakabayashi, K & Misaka, K (Doshisha University, Japan). The basic factor for coexistence between different cultural groups in the context of early agricultural society in Japan.