

Best Kept Secret, Jomon Heritage of Contemporary Japan

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The current heritage of Japan has been changed by a number of factors, one of the most important being the transfer of focus from the emperor to the people. After World War II, Japan underwent several re-evaluations or interruptions caused by the occupying power (i.e., the United States), one of which was the reassessment of its sense of belonging and identity via the use of archaeological heritage.

The invention of new heritage took place,¹ and we can see an interruption to previous heritage narratives. These narratives had been linked to the legacy of the Meiji period and the emperor – partly related to the embodiment of the state – and to the Kofun period (AD 250-710), which reflected the creation of statehood with keyhole-shaped tombs that dominated the landscape.

As Kaner has suggested, “Direct links are often drawn between archaeology /Jomon peoples and the images of traditional life that are actively propounded by a government ideology of *furusato*: stimulating feelings for one’s native place in an increasingly displaced, rootless society. These images render the discoveries of archaeology comprehensible to the public who are encouraged to view the people of the past as their ancestors: there is a direct connection between contemporary ‘salary man’ and his stone-age forebear.”² This is well illustrated by the song “Furusato” (“old home” or “hometown”) with its strong emotional and nostalgic links to the countryside. Despite it being a children’s song created in 1914, it took on a new status as a national song performed during the closing ceremony of the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano.

Where the mountains are green,
my old country home,
Where the waters are clear, my old
country home.
Back in the mountains I knew as a child
Fish filled the rivers and rabbits ran wild
Memories, I carry these wherever
I may roam
I hear it calling me, my country home
Mother and Fathers, how I miss you now
How are my friends I lost touch with
somehow?
When the rain falls or the wind blows
I feel so alone
I hear it calling me, my country home
I've got this dream and it keeps me away
When it comes true I'm going back there
someday
Crystal waters, mighty mountains blue
as emerald stone
I hear it calling me, my country home.³

The countryside is where people and their ancestors are. Inventing tradition is meant to anchor the nation to the archaeological landscape, which serves as “witness” /testimony of belonging to this land and its ancestors: it is a landscape of the common countryside that belongs to all. The Jomon period is signified by museums often located on the outskirts of towns or in the countryside; they do not differ from other buildings.

The Jomon period spans from c. 14,000-300 BCE. The prehistoric inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago made a wide range of material objects, remarkable for fisher-hunter-gatherers. Their ceramic creations, which include figurines as well as pottery vessels for food preparation and consumption, are of particular interest given their sophistication and variety.



Fig. 1 (above): Use of Jomon figurine from Sannai Maruyama by a local bar to convey COVID-19 restrictions to the customers, Aomori, Japan (Photo by Simon Kaner).

For many, this summer is the first year since 2019 that travel to Japan has been possible, and my visit coincided with the period of the August *obon* holiday, when many families got together after three long years of the pandemic. In July 2021, 17 Jomon sites, including stone circles located in the north of Japan, were inscribed on the list of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. As a heritage professional and archaeologist, I decided to visit them. As in previous years when I followed the Shinano River Jomon Heritage Trail, the Jomon sites were somewhat hidden for the foraging tourist. In contrast to the well-known historical sites in Kyoto, Tokyo, or Nara – where the English-based leaflets and brochures inform tourists of the historical, cultural, and often artistic importance of those locations – the Jomon sites are Japan-focused.

This is not, I suggest, due to any lack of contribution of worldwide impact by Jomon

peoples, such as technologies still used today. For example, we know that the first examples of lacquer use are from Jomon sites, and the first containers made of clay were created by the inhabitants of the area around the Sea of Japan / East Sea, also including China and the Russian Far East. Jomon cuisine, rituals, and continuity of occupation of particular locations have no equivalent among historical or contemporary foraging communities.

Jomon belongs to the Japanese people. Their material culture and associated archaeological narrative is now part of a grassroots heritage consciousness. The creativity of curators, educators, artists, and musicians who take part in the modern Jomon festivals across this region is inspired, and Jomon images are also part of the most popular genre of literature, manga. As foreigners, though, we do not easily see or hear it: Jomon remains one of Japan’s the best kept secrets.

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Notes

- Habu, J. & Fawcett, C. 2008. ‘Science or Narratives? Multiple Interpretations of the Sannai Maruyama Site, Japan’, in Habu, J., Fawcett, C., & Matsunaga, J.M. (eds.) *Evaluating Multiple Narratives*. New York, NY: Springer, pp. 91-117; Mizoguchi, K. 2013. *The Archaeology of Japan: From the Earliest Rice Farming Villages to the Rise of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaner, S. 1996. ‘Beyond ethnicity and emergence in Japanese Archaeology’, in Denoon, D., Hudson, M., McCormack, G., & Morris-Suzuki, T. (eds.) *Multicultural Japan: Palaeolithic to Postmodern (Contemporary Japanese Society)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.46-59.
- The song was translated into English by Greg Irwin and this was published in the album called “Japan’s Best Loved Songs of the Season” in 1998.

The Tangible Validation, Preservation, and Promotion of South Korea’s Oral Tradition Pansori in the Gochang Pansori Museum

Minjae Zoh

Pansori combines two Korean words: *Pan*, meaning “a place where people gather”; and *sori*, literally meaning “sound.” Essentially, *Pansori* is a passed-down oral tradition of epic stories and songs that were (and are) sung by a singer to the accompaniment of a drum, and along with the audience, who would provide the reaction. Thus, a triple act was formed, making every performance intimate and unique. The origin of *Pansori* is difficult to pinpoint by exact date and location, but the common understanding is that it began around the end of the 17th century through to the 19th century – during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) – around southwest Korea.

There was no “script” for *Pansori* recitals; they were very much impromptu performances. Stories were passed down by word of mouth until, eventually, they were recorded into literary compositions by a man named Shin Jae Hyo (1812-1884), who was a theorist and patron of the oral tradition. Shin Jae Hyo’s house in Gochang (in the North Jeolla Province) was used to teach and train *Pansori* singers. These very grounds, where Shin is known to have recorded and taught *Pansori*, are the present site of the Gochang *Pansori* Museum today. The annex where *Pansori* singers studied and trained became renovated and open to the public as part of the museum.

The Gochang *Pansori* Museum opened in 2001 to preserve and promote *Pansori*. The museum claims that its aim is to “collect, preserve, research, study, display,



Fig. 1 (left): A display of Shin Jae Hyo’s books and possessions in the Gochang Pansori Museum (Photo by Minjae Zoh, 2013).

Fig. 2 (right): The final display in the Gochang Pansori Museum (Photo by Minjae Zoh, 2013).

and analyse tangible and intangible cultural items related to *Pansori* in order to educate the general public and to provide people with opportunities to appreciate *Pansori*.¹ At the core of the museum – in terms of its tangible evidence or validation of *Pansori* – are the twelve books of Shin Jae Hyo that can be seen as the first steps taken towards the tangible-isation of the intangible tradition, and also Shin Jae Hyo’s house that was an important physical location for *Pansori* trainees and singers. The museum, moreover, houses over 1000 artifacts related to *Pansori*, including personal possessions of Shin Jae Hyo as well as *Pansori*-related objects owned by renowned *Pansori* singers such as Kim So Hee.

The Gochang *Pansori* Museum has used various methods not only to validate and preserve the oral tradition, but also to pay respect to the patrons of *Pansori* and to educate the public about it. Walking in,

there is a huge board with a map, and numerous buttons are attached to specific locations within the map. Visitors are encouraged to press the button which holds recordings of *Pansori* recitals from different parts of Korea. Through this, visitors are able to hear the different dialects and styles of *Pansori*, depending on the region in which it was practiced. This display merges the tangible (buttons) and the intangible (audio). A large section of the museum is dedicated to the history of *Pansori*, and visitors are able to learn about the *Pansori* singers during the Joseon dynasty as well as how the oral tradition was preserved leading up to, during, and following the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) in Korea. This was when the Japanese tried to “Japanise” Korea, meaning that there were intentional efforts to erase anything that was intrinsically Korean. The history room at the Gochang *Pansori* Museum portrays, through tangible records and images, how the Korean oral tradition was preserved and passed down amid times of threat to Korean culture. Small 3D artworks have also been used to depict scenes from *Pansori* recitals back in the Joseon dynasty for visitors to imagine what a *Pansori*

performance would have been like. The more interactive parts of the museum are the audio booths containing recordings of *Pansori* recitals and also the volume-check room where visitors can shout into the microphone to check how loud they can shout. This is a reference to “*teukum*” training that *Pansori* singers had to undertake in order to pierce through the sound of the marketplace back in the 18th century.

Central to the museum are the preserved 12 books of Shin Jae Hyo. Five of these books became registered and designated as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008 by UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. As visitors head towards the exit, there is a wall with photographs of *Pansori* singers throughout the years. A few points are communicated through this display. The first is that this oral tradition has been passed down from one singer to the next, and these photographs put a face to the intangible process. The second is that intentional blank frames have been put up to stress that *Pansori* is a living oral tradition; that the oral tradition goes on.

The Gochang *Pansori* Museum can be used to understand how the tangible has an important role in validating, preserving, and promoting intangible heritage, and vice versa. In many respects, seeing the books of Shin Jae Hyo, exploring the countless artifacts related to *Pansori*, and stepping on the grounds that were used to train *Pansori* singers in the past provide tangible evidence of the intangible tradition.

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Notes

- [https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1_1.jsp?cid=1602363](https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=1602363)