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Reflections on Ethnographic Methods Training at an Archaeological Field School: A Case Study from Rebun International Field School in Japan

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Abstract: In this paper we will investigate the introduction of ethnographic research and methods to the excavation and field school operated at the Hamanaka 2 site on Rebun, Japan. Through this case study, we explore the relationship between the interpretive frameworks, research methods, and the field training. We discuss the outcomes of introducing an ethnographic component to an archaeological field school, including some of the challenges that have arisen during this process. In response to this, we also provide a series of suggestions for further development and research concerning this model of training. While the process of including ethnography within the field school is ongoing, we hope that this paper will add to the growing literature on ethnography as a tools for archaeologists within Japan and prompt additional research on archaeological training in Japan in the future.

Keywords: ethnography, archaeology, field school, archaeological training, ethnographic methods, Hokkaido, Japan

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Introduction

This paper explores the integration of ethnographic methods to a tertiary level field school on Rebun Island in northern Japan. We discuss the relationship between archaeology and ethnography in order to situate its developments within a global context as well as within Japan. From there, we briefly discuss the nature of archaeological training within Japan as both an overview and a means of contextualizing the field school on Rebun. An introduction to the history of the projects involved in the excavation provides the theoretical underpinnings for the training and the major shift in the projects that led to the inclusion of ethnographic research, which in turn was combined with the field school. Finally, we present the evolving pedagogy and explore its outcomes and challenges.

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Archaeology and Ethnography

Ethnographic methods are an evolving set of tools utilized by archaeologists around the world for interpreting the past as well as understanding the production and consumption of the past in a contemporary social context. The relationship between archaeology and anthropology in the West, especially in the United States, was integral to the development of an ethnographic method to answer archaeological research questions, specifically through the use of analogies between past and present contexts (Nicholas and Davis 2001). Ethnoarchaeology emerged as a subdiscipline in the 1950s and 1960s. It found purchase within the spread of processual archaeology and went through a period of critical assessment through the post-processual shift. More recently, ethnography has been engaged as a methodology for the reflexive and self-critical turn in archaeology and the development of public archaeology, community archaeology, and indigenous archaeology. Unlike ethnoarchaeology, archaeological ethnography draws on range of methods to explore the social context of archaeology (Zarger and Pluckhahn 2013). While ethnoarchaeology and archaeological ethnography are different methodologies and have separate goals, they share the aim of integrating ethnographic methods into an interpretive framework.

The developments presented above occurred within the sphere of Anglo-American archaeology, and are not reflective of archaeology in Japan. As Habu and Fawcett discuss, Japanese archaeology has a history of distinct practices and interpretive frameworks, as well as approaches to global archaeology (Habu and Fawcett 2008). Moreover, within Japan the discipline does not share ties to anthropology, but is often associated with history (Hudson 2005). Concurrently, in the 1960's, archaeology in Japan was characterized by the development of postwar cultural nationalism, the introduction of Marxist archaeology, and the burgeoning bureaucratization of the practice (Fawcett and Habu 1990, 1999, Edwards, 1991, 2005, Okamura 2011). Western academia on ethnoarchaeology in Japanese was first published in the mid to late 1980's shortly followed by early ethnographic research by Japanese scholars. There has been a steady stream of Japanese ethnoarchaeological work conducted by a relatively small subset of researchers since this time- a majority of which was conducted in southeast Asia and Taiwan with a focus on pottery production (Hirakawa 2017, Nobayashi 2000, Takayama 1986).

While reflexivity and self-critical debate was previously limited to the Paleolithic Hoax, Western-trained academics, and Western academics in Japan (Hudson 2005, Barnes and Okita 1999, Mizoguchi 1997, Harunari 2003), the last decade has seen growth interest in the social context of archaeology in Japan (Okamura 2011, Yasuda and Ertl 2016, Zorzin 2013). These developments also overlap with the recognition and adaptation of public archaeology, community archaeology, and indigenous archaeology (Okamura and Matsuda 2011, Okada 2014, Kato 2009). However, archaeological ethnography has not been accepted or developed across these practices as an integral methodological approach.

Archaeological Training in Japan

Field schools are a practical yet non-uniform model of training through which students can learn archaeological theory and methods. While the objectives of the excavation or project and the training aims inform their unique design, field schools consistently incorporate experiential learning and are situated in participatory learning environments (Brooks 2008). The skills and knowledge gained are intended in part to aid students wishing to develop archaeological careers and, as such, the nature of the

archaeological vocations in a given country holds some influence over the pedagogical approaches employed (Myum 2012). Moreover, their archaeological contexts add to their variability.

Archaeological fields schools have been utilized to teach practical excavation techniques, but they have also facilitated learning of ethnographic methods. There are several recent examples of projects incorporating public outreach and collaborative activities as part of their research objects as well as within their pedagogical approaches (Atalay 2012, May et. al 2018, Young 2012). While there are exceptions, many of these field schools are operated to address the colonial legacy of the discipline and work directly with descendant communities. These opportunities provide a subset of skills, techniques, and ethical consideration for students to learn and for the organizers to impart. While the effectiveness of this training is still under debate (Zarger and Pluckhahn 2013), the discussion can benefit from the contribution of research from outside of Anglo-American archaeology.

As of the writing of this paper, there are no in depth studies of the archaeological training methods within Japan either in Japanese or English. As an overview, Hudson describes the study of archaeology as a practical apprenticeship without directly commenting on field work (Hudson 2005). Basic resources for further study include an annual list of archaeological lectures at tertiary schools throughout Japan produced by the Japanese Archaeological Association. This list includes practical training courses (*jisshu* 実習). The term *jisshu* is not limited to archaeology, but can be used to refer to practical or vocational training. In some cases, *jisshu* are required in order to receive a license. The Hokkaido University annual course syllabus provides course objectives and goals of two "Archaeology Field Seminar" (*kōkogaku tokubestu jisshu* 考古学特別実習), which sheds some light on the structure of these offerings. The *jisshu* place emphasis on learning practical skills and techniques at academic excavations, but there is also mention of exploring interpretive frameworks at the sites as well. This cursory study is not sufficient for understanding the nuances of archaeological training at tertiary schools in Japan, but they provide a general understanding and considerations for future studies.

On the other hand, the transliteration of field school (*fyi-rudosukuru* フィールドスクール) is usually reserved for archaeological training abroad. This distinguishes field schools as foreign and non-essential courses for those wishing to practice archaeology in Japan, although they are useful for a student pursuing a career in academia or abroad. Additionally, there are field schools offered within Japan promoted and operated in English for students studying abroad or through an Anglo-American university with ties to a Japanese counterpart. This distinction between *jisshu* and field school situates the field school on Rebun within the wider context of archaeological training in Japan.

The Project

As discussed in the previous section, field schools are shaped by the projects with which they are associated. The introduction of the ethnographic component to the Rebun international Field School (RiFS) is the result of major changes to the structure of the project overseeing it. This section will introduce earlier iterations of the project and field school on Rebun, which integrated public archaeology-based research objectives[1] from the outset. While ethnography was not part of the methodology of this

1 Over the course of the first five years, the project oversaw the establishment of a series of community-oriented events including: an educational outreach for K-12 students, an Open Site Day, a pop-up exhibition, and an Ainu youth outreach

research, early collaborations with the community would eventually lead to its inclusion as the project shifted into a new phase. The ethnographic research introduced after this shift is indicative of new interpretative frameworks, research objectives, and staff, which in turn manifests in the training offered through the field school.

Beginning in 2011, the excavation at Hamanaka 2 site[2] on Rebun was jointly run by the Baikal Archaeology Project (BAP)[3], an international team of scholars operated out of the archaeology department at the University of Alberta, and the Advanced Core Research Centre for the History of Human Ecology in the North (ARCHHEN), a project composed of yet another international network of researchers operated by the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies (CAIS) at Hokkaido University. Both projects shared the same objectives of exploring prehistoric hunter-gatherer lifeways in the northern Hemisphere and offering training and research opportunities for students (BAP 2019). Concurrently, ARCHHEN also undertook research on indigenous cultural properties in this region (Core to Core: ARCHHEN 2018) and the public outreach initiatives (Okada 2014).

The current international field school is a component of the International Research Networks for Indigenous Studies and Cultural Diversity (IRIS) operated by the CAIS. IRIS could be considered a successor of ARCHHEN, although it is by no means a clone. It is a five year project aimed at investigating "what drives and sustains past and present cultural diversity in global human society, with a central focus on the role of indigenous cultural traditions, and on indigenous historical and cultural heritage" (Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies 2018). In a similar vein, IRIS's primary objectives for the excavation at the Hamanaka 2 site are to elucidate the formation process of Ainu culture in Hokkaido as well as develop collaborative approaches to Indigenous cultural heritage. Where inclusive approaches to archaeology were once considered auxiliary, they have now taken a primary role within the project. Ethnographic research was introduced and conducted within this shift in framework.

Ethnographic Research on Rebun Island

Co-author Shiaki Kondo started his ethnographic fieldwork in August 2016. The organizer of ARCHHEN, Prof. Hirofumi Kato, invited Kondo to join the project in order to record Rebun's recent history as part of the ongoing process of the site formation. Kondo, who has research experiences in Interior Alaska and mainland Japan, decided to investigate natural resource utilization and migration within Rebun. In 2016, he joined the program as a guest researcher affiliated with the CAIS and ARCHHEN. Since 2017, he has participated as one of the instructors of the field school, providing ethnographic training to students as well as conducting ethnographic research himself (Kondo, 2019).

That same year the primary author, Amanda Gomes, conducted a series of interviews with members of the local community who regularly interacted with the archaeological team in order to assess their views on local archaeological heritage and the potential impact of the public outreach initiatives that had occurred

program (Okada et. al 2014).

2 The Hamanaka 2 site is located centrally along the north facing Funadomari Bay and a part of a larger site complex that stretches across the sand dune after which it is named. The site was identified during the construction of a national highway around the coast of Rebun. Academic excavations of the sand dune have been conducted since 1991 (Gomes 2016).

3 Formerly the Baikal Hokkaido Archaeology Project.

since 2013 as a part of her master's dissertation. While the goal of establishing a relationship with the community had been pursued over the years, the nature of that relationship was presented primarily through team members' observations. The ethnographic research attempted to provide a more holistic view of the project's efforts, although the scope of the research was hindered by limitations in time and resources. Participants offered a variety of feedback and suggestions for improving collaborations and communication (Gomes 2016). This research creates an opportunity for future evaluation and the development of more ethical community-based practices, which could be enfolded into the field school.

The International Field School

Introduction

In name alone, the RIFS has established itself as offering training outside the scope of *jisshu* in Japan. Its earlier iteration as a component of BAP from 2013-2015 aligned it closely with Western training methods[4]. While influences from that period remain, the following two years were used to redefine the project and in doing so the field school. It was during this period that the ethnographic field research discussed in the previous section was first conducted. However, ethnographic methods training was not yet integrated into the field school. The current international field school on Rebun Island is offered through the Hokkaido Summer Institute[5]. The community-based and ethnographic research objectives shifted from auxiliary and voluntary activities for students to providing key learning goals within the field school. Additionally, the field school also seeks to facilitate dialogue regarding issues on indigenous cultural heritage. It invites scholars from within the network to participate in the project and provide presentations on their respective research[6]. What follows is a presentation of the ethnographic training methods component of the field school introduced in 2018 and 2019.

In 2018 the field school ran for 20 days with 21 students from Japan, China, South Korea, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. The students were split into three groups, which rotated between the excavation, lab work, and a third component introducing Public Archaeology and Indigenous Archaeology, Ethnography, and Historical Landscape studies. Each of these components were taught by Japanese researchers affiliated with IRIS. The field school was offered again in 2019 and it ran for 21 days with 18 students from Japan, China, Taiwan, Australia, Italy, and the United States. However, this year two groups rotated between excavation and lab work, with Ethnography, Historical Landscape studies, and Museum studies components offered during the latter rotation. Issues with the schedules of participating researchers impacted the field school's ability to offer the same structure as 2018.

4 The course was offered, organized, and accredited by McEwan University in 2013 and the University of Alberta from 2014 to 2015. It focused primarily on practical archaeological training. Students were allowed to participate voluntarily in activities relating to the public archaeology initiatives, although they were not considered compulsory.

5 The Hokkaido Summer Institute is a program providing English courses for Japanese and international students focusing on subjects that take advantage of the university's research and the regions resources, at Hokkaido University and operated by the CAIS and IRIS.

6 In 2019, Joe Watkins (USA), Carl-Gösta Ojala (Sweden), and Chen Maa-ling (Taiwan) gave presentations on topics related to Indigenous archaeology and heritage, covering ethnographic and community-based methodology.

Ethnographic Training Methods

The aim of the ethnographic training module is to familiarize the students with essential skills and processes of ethnography. In 2018 and 2019, Kondo provided the field school students with an introduction to his work in Alaska and Rebun as well as his methodologies at a workshop held at the CAIS prior to departing for Rebun. After initiating group rotations on site, students were organized into groups of 3 or 4 individuals to discuss topics of investigation. The student groups were composed of Japanese-speaking Hokkaido University (HU) students and international students (most of whom do not speak Japanese). The topics selected by the groups included fishing practices, sea mammal hunting, small-scale agriculture, local spiritual beliefs and taboos, and tourism development. Once their topics were selected, the groups developed a series of questions under Kondo's supervision.

The training module mainly consists of two practical activities: (1) participation in local fishing activities (participant observation) and (2) ethnographic interviews with elders and community members. When the weather and timing were suitable, the students participated in various fishing-related activities including picking fish from gillnets (Figure 1), checking the growth of cultured Kombu seaweed (Figure 2), and learning how to mend gillnets. The project's community-based counterparts for this activity are a local fishing family and Rebun Banya, a local governmental initiative to stimulate population growth. They are ongoing participants in Kondo's ethnographic research and worked closely with him to identify and oversee the participatory activities. Students also learned to conduct ethnographic interviews.

Figure 1 (upper left): Students learning to pick out the fish from gillnets (August 2018)
Figure 2 (upper right): A local fisherman showing the students his Kombu (August 2018)
Figure 3 (lower left): HU student interviewing a local vendor (August 2018)
Figure 4 (lower right): In-class presentation (August 2019)

In most cases, Kondo, who is in charge of ethnographic training module, arranged appointments with his local contacts for interviews. Due to language barriers, HU students served as lead interviewers and translators (Figure 3), assisted by Japanese-speaking researchers and graduate students. In 2018, the student groups conducted 14 interview sessions in two weeks. Interviewees include local elders, fishermen, priests of local Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, business owners, and local government workers. After each interview, students compared their field notes and clarified the interviewees' responses with the other participants. At the end of field school season, each group made an in-class presentation to share what they learned with other participants (Figure 4).

Museum Planning Activities

Before the start of the 2019 field school, the local Board of Education offered the project use of a decommissioned elementary school neighboring the site. The project decided that a museum would be established within it and, during the field school, students interested in the presentation of the excavation and its research to the public would participate in a practical museum studies component. The museum planning activity inadvertently provided feedback for both the field school and the ethnographic methods training. When discussing individual interests in the activity, there was a positive response from the students regarding their contributions to the ethnographic fieldwork. In fact, students elected to enfold this component into the museum design by focusing on people and stories rather than just the artifacts. After creating an object list that reflected the chronology of the site, the students approached their fellow classmates to collect their thoughts, feelings, and experiences associated with a specific artifact and the excavation. During informal interviews with students, many of them expressed that the ethnographic methods training was the most impactful part of their field school experience. Improved methods of collecting feedback from participants would provide a more nuanced assessment of field school experiences.

Reflection

The international field school is rather unique course for students from within as well as outside of Japan to gain experience in skills, techniques, and frameworks associated with archaeology and cultural anthropology. The introduction of ethnographic training methods distinguishes this field school from its prior incarnations. Students are able to situate the site with the local historical context and interact with members of the community. For instance, during the 2019 season, the participants visited a local Buddhist temple for an interview. The priest's father was known to have had collected archaeological artifacts found by himself and the local community prior to enactment of the Cultural Property Protection Act in 1950[7]. While much of the community did not see value in these artifacts, the priest's father was responsible for the care of several artifacts now considered by specialists to be of archaeological importance[8 9]. Through this interview, students learned about the social functions of Buddhist

7 Under this Act individuals retained ownership of artifacts discovered prior to 1950.

8 According to the priest, it was common for children to find artifacts in the nearby sand dunes where they went to play. While many children would toss the artifacts away, some would bring them to the temple.

9 The temple's collection includes an artifact designated as a Hokkaido Prefectural Cultural Property.

temples[10], which include the ongoing safe-keeping of archaeological artifacts.

There were various challenges to integrating the ethnographic training into the field school. We found that scheduling conflicts created the biggest challenges. The timing of the field school and its daily schedule conflict with local schedules. In some cases, the schedule conflicts are unavoidable. For example, August is the most suitable month to hold the excavation for Japanese and international participants. Summer vacation in Japan is held during August and part of September, while it is held from late May and August at North American universities. However, the local fishermen are not only busy during the month of August, but fishing-related activities are paused in mid-August for about a week for the *Obon* holiday season. Moreover, the local elders and community members are busier than usual as they have to get ready to welcome their relatives returning home from different parts of Japan as is customary.

Furthermore, we found that the operational hours for the field school (9 am to 5 pm) did not always align with some of the fishermen's daily and seasonal routines. Local fishermen usually wake up before sunrise to begin certain tasks such as harvesting wild kombu seaweed and sea urchin. One of the participatory activities, picking the fish from gillnet, is one of the final tasks in the fishermen's morning routine in summer. All of these considerations do not affect the archaeological excavation, but they are important factors to consider when conducting ethnographic research. The team members and students were required to be flexible with scheduling interviews.

We recognize that there are ways to expand the ethnographic training in order to support the project's research objectives. First, the ethnographic component of the field school and the project has the potential to explore the social context of archaeology in Japan, as we discovered through the interviews with the Buddhist priest. As the project seeks to engage the local community and indigenous Ainu communities[11], they can develop ethnographic training methods as a means of exploring how to ethically engage these communities (Castañeda 2008). In doing so, the local community would not only be subjects of research, but could participate in the creation of more collaborative and ethical research. The surveys conducted in 2016 demonstrates that such work is feasible, although there is a need for the development of localized approaches rather than following dominant global frameworks.

Finally, a strong yet flexible framework for the ethnographic training activities of the field school would provide a clear set of learning outcomes to establish students' expectations. It would also add to the sustainability of the training by creating concrete aims that could be shared and understood by the team members. The addition of feedback within these developments is crucial for assessing and adapting the ethnographic training methods. Both the framework and the feedback could contribute to future research on the field school as well as archaeological training in Japan. While the RIFS has created a model of instruction that is markedly different from *jisshu*, the project has the potential to challenge the standards of training within Japan.

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10 Some Buddhist temples in northeastern Rebun used to host school children from western Rebun communities. At that time, it was difficult to commute to school from there.

11 As previously mentioned, the project had hosted a Ainu youth outreach programme. It has also worked closely with Ainu artist Koji Yuki. Professor Hirofumi Kato has organized an exhibit of his artwork in a local hotel, the Corinthian. Additionally, Koji Yuki has given presentations to the students and in 2019 he held a ritual at the site.

Conclusion

In this article, we explored the introduction of ethnographic field methods as a result of shifts in the research objectives, specifically those associated with developing local approaches to community-based and indigenous heritage. Rather than following dominant trends in Anglo-American archaeology, the project has been developing its own approaches while supporting a global dialogue regarding these issues. The ethnographic research and training is one way in which the project has distinguished itself from other archaeological training programs in Japan. The ethnographic training has not only introduced students to methods and framework associated with the research, but it has created the opportunity for them to interact with the local community. The ethnographic component has faced some challenges, although we have identified methods for addressing these in the future. The impact and the potential of this training still require further research, which could be included within the objectives of the project and elements of field school.

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