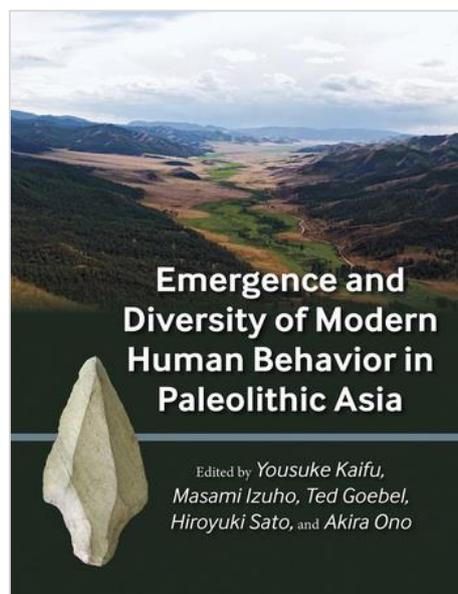

Book review: Emergence and Diversity of Modern Human Behavior in Paleolithic Asia

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Emergence and Diversity of Modern Human Behavior in Paleolithic Asia

edited by Yousuke Kaifu, Masami Izuho, Ted Goebel, Hiroyuki Sato, and Akira Ono

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<http://www.tamupress.com/product/Emergence-and-Diversity-of-Modern-Human-Behavior-i,8194.aspx>

This text represents a monumental undertaking in scope and breadth of topical coverage and geographic extent and the editorship and authors have done a tremendous service in its production. The title is an appropriate thumbnail sketch of what this volume presents to the reader. The crux of this book addresses and brings to question the variables that researchers have used and continue to use to identify “modern human behavior” in the prehistoric record. Discussions of what constituted modern human behavior at the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition across Africa and Western Europe have relied largely on trait lists and how these

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are combined in the archaeological record. The combined papers in the present volume all suggest that, although such trait lists are an appropriate approach to identifying modern human behavior, trying to apply them *in toto* to parts of Asia beyond Europe and Africa is not feasible. The editors have organized this book comprising 38 chapters into eight parts: (I) a general introductory section, (II) South Asia, (III) Southeast Asia, (IV) Wallacea and Australia, (V) East Asian mainland and Taiwan, (VI) the Japanese Archipelago, (VII) Siberia and Mongolia, and (VIII) Summary and Conclusions. Sections II through VII consist of multiple shorter chapters on specific geographically related areas and topics. Some of the chapters are topic or evidence specific and others use available multiple lines of evidence to address the material evidence of “modern human behavior”. Datasets include skeletal biology and fossil evidence, genetic or genomic or MtDNA studies, lithic assemblages, faunal remains, preserved organic material, geoarchaeology and geomorphology, symbolic or parietal art, seafaring technology and a host of others. There is definitely something in this book for every researcher interested in this time period and region.

The remainder of this review focuses on the lithic evidence presented toward discussions of “modern human behavior” in Asia. Lithic evidence employed to ascertain such behavior throughout this book includes blade and microblade technology, standardized artifact forms, increased toolkit diversity, rapid temporal changes in artifact form, increased suggestion of elements of style, and large-scale procurement and transport of lithic raw materials. Variable quality and types of available stone raw materials across Asia is considered one of the more significant variables influencing technology as one moves from west to east, particularly into Southern and Southeast Asia (Chapters 8-13). There is also a documented disappearance of microblade and microlith technologies and an overall simplification of stone technology associated with the initial peopling of Southeast Asia and into Australia (Chapters 14-16). This differs significantly from Central Asia that has yielded lithic assemblages much like the Upper Paleolithic technologies in west, central and eastern Europe (Chapters 1-2, 6-7). Similar technological diversity is apparent among the earliest Upper Paleolithic assemblages in Japan and Korea dated to ca. 35-38 ka BP (Chapters 21, 25-26, 29). Transitioning northwest into Siberia and Mongolia, the lithic technology contains a documented change from characteristic Middle Paleolithic assemblages to early Upper Paleolithic assemblages dominated by blades.

The lithic and other multiple lines of evidence presented by the chapter authors and book editors provides strong support for multiple simultaneous dispersals of anatomically modern humans across much of Eurasia by 50 ka BP. Evidence also suggests that there were two principal routes of dispersal north and south of the Himalayas into eastern Asia. Chronometric age determinations of archaeological material across southern and eastern Asia tend to confirm this pattern of expansion. Much of the diversity in lithic assemblages across central, southern, and eastern Asia can be posited to reflect local and regional differences in environment, climate, prey, available raw materials and changes in subsistence and mobility. Taken alone, the lithic technology is geographically sporadic in its utility to address some aspects of modern human behavior provided by trait lists developed by researchers. This book points out the crux of modern human behavior and the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition included the concepts of innovation, creativity, and flexibility to meet changing conditions as hominids moved into new regions (Chapter 15). It is a most welcome addition to the “transition” and “modern behavior” prehistory literature and is relevant to archaeologists and prehistorians with very diverse geographic interests.