Recent studies on various aspects of the Jomon period have suggested new perspectives. Many have also indicated that the late Jomon society reached a certain degree of complexity. However, most of such studies have focused on Eastern Japan (areas eastward from the Kanto region), paying little attention to Central and Western Japan (areas westward from the Chubu region). Therefore, this paper examines the social dynamics and complexity of Central Japan by using the distribution and consumption of the local specialties of the region as indicators of social complexity.

In Central Japan, the local specialties of each sub-region (e.g., the Tokai sub-region) were traded and consumed locally within the region. Meanwhile, the local specialties of the region, such as obsidian and jadeite, were widely distributed around the Japanese Archipelago. From a modern economic perspective, it is presumed that such prominent products established the social dominance of the region in commerce and trade. There is also evidence implying that products traded and consumed locally within the region, such as large polished stone axes and small stone rods, seem to have enabled their production centers (presumably, the Hokuriku sub-region and the Hida sub-region in Gifu Prefecture) to dominate the commerce of the region and attach unique significance to them. On the other hand, the products distributed beyond regional boundaries, such as obsidian and jadeite, were consumed mainly in the Tohoku and Kanto regions as many have been excavated from these areas. Although they were the staples of the Chubu region, they are likely to have been traded under the control of other regions.

Thus, the distribution and consumption patterns of local specialties increased in complexity and variety in Central Japan in the late Jomon period, behind which the society itself presumably reached a certain degree of complexity. However, the local specialties of the region are likely to have been integrated into the distribution networks/systems established by the Tohoku and Kanto regions. Seemingly, society was not as complex in the Chubu region as it was in the regions that had established their dominance in trade. Otherwise, it is presumed that in Central Japan, society was developing, not independently but dependently or passively, and had not reached the level of complexity in the late Jomon period.

Key words: Late Jomon period, Central Japan, local specialty, distribution, social complexity