A COMPANION TO JAPANESE HISTORY

Edited by

William M. Tsutsui
A Companion to Japanese History
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A COMPANION TO JAPANESE HISTORY

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Although Japan has a long and rich history, Western efforts to comprehend, chronicle, and analyze that history are a relatively recent development. The first attempts by Europeans and Americans to explore Japanese history after the “opening” of the nation in the 1850s were the uncoordinated efforts of gentlemen amateurs, non-professionals once described by John Whitney Hall as a “coterie of interested foreign residents of Tokyo.”  

With the exception of Sir George Sansom, whose 1931 survey *Japan: A Short Cultural History* may have been the most important English-language work in the field prior to World War II, “the bulk of Western work on Japanese history was derivative or episodic in nature,” “primarily diplomatic or antiquarian in orientation.” In the United States and Britain, the academic study of Japan was slow to develop before the war: American colleges and universities, for instance, offered a total of only twenty-one courses dealing with Japan (covering topics from religion to art to literature) in 1930 and, even a decade later, only a handful of institutions provided instruction in Japanese language and history. World War II, however, catalyzed a significant international expansion of scholarly attention to Japan; as the “natural result of the popular boom of interest in Japan stimulated by the war and its aftermath and by the increased opportunities which Westerners had to come in contact with the Japanese people,” the professional practice of Japanese history developed steadily. In the 1950s and 1960s, monographic works in English on Japan’s past began to appear in considerable numbers for the first time and, by 1970, one survey counted 408 Japan specialists (in all fields) in the United States. This growth only accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting both Japan’s ascent to economic “great power” status and the diffusion of area studies in American universities. By 1995, a Japan Foundation report counted over 1,500 Japanese studies experts on faculties in the United States and the proliferation of scholarly books, articles, edited collections, and translations proceeded apace, with even selective bibliographies of English-language sources in Japanese history running to many hundreds of pages. Although as recently ago as the 1960s, a researcher could comfortably stay abreast of all publications on Japan in English, by the 1980s one could realistically aspire only to maintain familiarity with the literature in one’s specific discipline and, by the turn of the new millennium, the pace of scholarly
productivity had risen to the point that even keeping up with the output in some subfields (like modern social history) was becoming a challenge.

For most of the twentieth century, at least up through the 1960s, the mainstream of historical scholarship in Japan was resolutely (and often crabbedly) Marxian in orientation. Obsessed with teasing the pathologies from a Japanese past seemingly replete with oppression, militarism, and inequity, historians in Japan, "weighed down by the memory of the war and the pessimistic assessment of their Marxist methodology, continued to focus on Japan’s backwardness, on the persistence of feudal hangovers, and on an essentially negative assessment of Japan's modern experience."6 Such an approach never proved terribly appealing in North America or Britain, although the eclectic Marxian scholarship of the mid-century Canadian historian E. H. Norman, resuscitated in the 1970s by John Dower, was an important exception.7 Instead, rejecting Marxian lamentation, the first generations of postwar Western – and particularly American – historians of Japan embraced the more optimistic perspective of "modernization theory" to structure their narratives. These scholars figured "the rise of modern Japan" as an edifying success story, an almost textbook case of the inevitable triumph of rationality, democracy, and capitalism, a trajectory interrupted in the Japanese example only by a "temporary" and "aberrant" prewar turn to authoritarianism and expansionism. The history written in this vein substituted a modernizing teleology – "a steadily upward course toward a more open and democratic society"8 – for a Marxian one, as "modernization theory represented an anti-Marxist and highly ethnocentric theoretical model, in which it was presumed that all non-communist countries would and should become increasingly similar to the advanced nations of Europe and the United States as they 'modernized' along capitalist lines."9 Thus, the assumed endpoint of Japan's historic "upward course" was becoming "just like us," tracing a step-by-step process of convergence toward the modern ideal of all-American economic, political, and social freedom.

For the better part of four decades after World War II, modernization theory was unquestionably the orthodoxy of American historical studies of Japan. Historians working in this paradigm produced an extensive and valuable literature; as Martin Collcutt has noted, "This institutional, predominantly 'top-down' view was important in establishing a basic framework of postwar scholarship, in deepening our understanding of the ... political and social structure, and in defining much of the research terrain and terms of debate."10 But discontent with the modernization approach began brewing in the 1970s, first among left-leaning scholars who were not satisfied with the unexamined narrative of success, harmony, and "progress" delineated by postwar historians. A younger generation questioned the received wisdom of unproblematized "common sense" history and the notion that modernization theory was somehow less rigid, less political, and "less value laden" than other models of historical analysis.11 Modernization historiography was criticized as "paternalistic condescension" born of postwar Western "hubris,"12 and increasing numbers of skeptical scholars found themselves unable to reconcile celebratory accounts of "the rise of modern Japan" with clear evidence for pervasive conflict, frequent protest, a diversity of social experiences, and substantial divergence from an "American" path of development throughout Japanese history.
Although modernization theory continues to cast a long shadow over the study of Japanese history in the West, and especially in the United States, the historical literature in English has become much more diverse in terms of approach, subject matter, and audience since the 1980s. Interdisciplinary cross-pollination, debates in critical theory, and methodological developments have had a significant impact on recent research in the field. Indeed, the scholarship on Japan has participated in all of the major trends in historiography over the past twenty-five years, from the “new” cultural history, to the “linguistic turn” and postmodernism, to rational choice theory, to the current surge of interest in transnational history and the study of race and ethnicity. Many observers (and practitioners) have seen this diversification as “constructive and illuminating,” deepening our understanding through an appreciation of the complexity and particularity of the Japanese experience, bringing much needed richness, dynamism, and intellectual vitality to the field. Others, however, have found recent developments “undermining and inimical.”

Traditionalists have bemoaned the new scholarship for the frequent opacity of its theory-heavy idiom, the alleged superficiality of its empirical research, and its ever greater specialization, with “broad studies on the general features of [Japanese] society . . . replaced or obscured by deeper but narrower studies.” With the increasing diversity of the study of Japanese history has come (perhaps inevitably) a certain fragmentation, the apparent manifestation of what John Whit-tier Treat has called a “centrifugally disintegrating profession,” what Mary Elizabeth Berry described as a “collapse of paradigmatic analysis,” and what John Whitney Hall once self-righteously decried as “a morass of relativity.”

Despite such handwringing, Helen Hardacre has made the compelling argument that fragmentation and the loss of the ideological and methodological consensus actually reflects the maturation of Japanese history as a scholarly field in the West: “Japanese studies’ increasing specialization within the disciplines in United States universities is a mark of its increasing sophistication and acceptance, even as specialization and professionalization make it unlikely that a single perspective could emerge to capture the attention of the whole field again.” And, in fact, just about the only thing that is certain among the ongoing debates in Japanese history is that “no over-arching, unifying perspective [has yet] arisen to replace the modernization framework,” or soon seems likely to. As John Dower nicely summarized it,

What, in conclusion, can we say about the overall impression of Japan that emerges from the recent English-language scholarly literature? We can say, perhaps, that we have gained immeasurably in detail but lost any real sense of organizing principle; that we no longer have a clear conception of the structures of power, but rather are confronted by a world of fragmentation and multiple causality; and that greater emphasis is now placed on the ways in which Japan diverges from so-called Western patterns of thought and behavior than on its convergence. . . . No one, however, can any longer point to a dominant paradigm governing Western perceptions of Japan.

But, for all the dynamism, creativity, and intellectual variety apparent among historians of Japan today, Japanese history cannot honestly be judged a “paradigm
generating” field, a theoretically or methodologically innovative part of the larger discipline of history. Andrew Gordon has rightly noted that some individual works in Japanese studies have exerted wider disciplinary influence (notably Chalmers Johnson’s *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* and its model of the “developmental state”) and, at the turn of the twenty-first century, two exceptional works of Japanese history did win back-to-back Pulitzer Prizes and attract wide readerships in the profession and among the general public. Yet the field has the longstanding reputation of being derivative rather than innovative, the fault perhaps of the fact that, for much of the postwar period, Japan was steadfastly judged by scholars to be the exception not the rule, an exotic outlying case divorced from the mainstreams of world history. Generations of Japan experts embraced this view as well, holding up Japanese history as so distinctive (what Andrew Gordon called “uniquely unique”) as to be essentially incommensurable with the histories of Europe, the United States, or the rest of the world. As Helen Hardacre explained it,

In examinations of modernization around the globe, Japan specialists could enjoy the role of “spoiler” in theoretical discussions, usually able to show that “Japan doesn’t fit.” From the standpoint of the disciplines, Japan was an interesting, odd “case,” the source of endless puzzles, but rarely was it recognized as providing conceptual or theoretical innovation in its own right.

Only relatively recently have Western scholars begun actively to conceive of Japan as part of the greater flow of world history, as a site for exploring global phenomena like modernization, imperialism, and environmental change, rather than as an inscrutable enigma, an eternal latecomer, or a culturally exceptional odd nation out. If this trend continues, and if the field remains as lively and contentious as it has over the past quarter-century, then Japanese history may yet prove a trend-setting “paradigm generator” for the discipline.

Over the years, several notable projects have provided “state of the field” surveys of Japanese history as written in the United States and Western Europe. Prior to the 1960s, such syntheses were largely unnecessary due to the small volume of English-language scholarship available. Between 1960 and 1968, however, a series of six international symposia on “the problems of modernization in Japan” was organized by a group of prominent researchers (led by the historian John Whitney Hall) and funded by the Ford Foundation. Six volumes of essays from the meetings, which aspired to being “both representative of current scholarship on Japan and comprehensive in their coverage of one of the most fascinating stories of national development in recent history,” were published by Princeton University Press. These collections, which covered only the Tokugawa period onwards and which included an eclectic blend of work from the social sciences and the humanities, “set the debate in Japanese studies through the 1960s and early 1970s.” Landmarks in the application of modernization theory to Japanese history and contemporary affairs, the volumes defined the postwar Western orthodoxy of historical scholarship on Japan.

In 1970, planning began on *The Cambridge History of Japan*, an immense six-volume series which aimed “to put before the English-reading audience as complete a
record of Japanese history as possible.” Published between 1988 and 1999, the Cambridge History volumes were anachronisms from the moment they appeared, “caught in a time warp,” as John Dower described them. Resolutely chronological in organization, conservative in thematic coverage (with an emphasis on tried-and-true categories of political, economic, and social history), and only slightly adventurous in terms of periodization (devoting separate volumes to the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, rather than utilizing the standard chronological watersheds of 1868 and 1945), The Cambridge History of Japan was a monumental compendium of traditional historiographical concerns. Very much an intellectual and methodological descendant of the earlier Princeton University Press series (and, not coincidentally, also co-organized by John Whitney Hall), the Cambridge History was squarely in the hoary modernization paradigm and excluded mention of most of the critical new approaches to Japanese history that were already transforming the contours of the field by the 1980s.

Helen Hardacre’s 1998 edited collection, The Postwar Developments of Japanese Studies in the United States, is the latest attempt to survey the English-language historiography on Japan. A short and selective overview, Hardacre’s volume – the product of the twenty-fifth anniversary symposium at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University – is an uneasy mixture of challenging essays on the leading edge of scholarship and more conservative pieces (running the gamut from tame to downright reactionary) that decry the intellectual diversification of the field over the past quarter-century. Such fractured perspectives may reflect the decline which H. D. Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi detect in “state of the field” overviews in the recent past:

Humanities scholars over the past several decades have shown a marked loss of interest in the general survey and bibliography of studies in a given field. Once an obligatory reference for all scholars, young or old, such listing and ranking of antecedent scholarly achievements are not infrequently attempted, and seldom respected in most branches of the humanities. The bibliography is after all the mapping and chronology of a discourse. It is difficult to compile at a moment like ours where the required central authority for evaluation has largely vanished from the arena of scholarship. This difficulty may reflect the general skepticism regarding authority, or the recent cultural turn toward poststructuralism, or the simple acceptance of diversity and fracture within disciplinary practice. . . . And yet a total absence of attempts to sort out, interrelate, and map out ideas and analyses could result in a loss of critical scholarship, coherent reference, and articulate knowledge.

This Companion to Japanese History aims to meet just this need for “critical scholarship, coherent reference, and articulate knowledge.” It provides a concise summary of the current state of English-language scholarship in the field, balancing coverage of “traditional” themes and approaches with an attentiveness to current trends and emerging perspectives. Reflecting the profoundly interdisciplinary nature of the humanities and the social sciences at the start of the new millennium, the authors of the thirty chapters presented here include not just historians but anthropologists, literature specialists, political scientists, and sociologists as well. These scholars have brought to this collection not only great expertise in the various aspects of Japan’s historical experience, but also a diverse and representative range of contemporary theoretical and methodological approaches. What’s more, highlighting
the global diffusion (and institutionalization) of the study of Japanese history, the contributors to this volume are as varied geographically as they are intellectually, with scholars currently working in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, Canada, and New Zealand all represented here.

Approximately two-thirds of this *Companion to Japanese History* is devoted to a chronological survey, while the remaining one-third examines thematic issues that cut across the established chronological boundaries. In keeping with the current interests of scholars, students, and general readers in the West (and reflecting the relative volume of historical research published in English), Japan’s modern history receives somewhat more attention than its premodern history in the chronological sections here. It should also be noted that the periodization used to structure this volume is entirely conventional. This choice should not be taken as an unreflective endorsement of the tried-and-true chronological divisions of Japanese history; scholars have long debated (and will continue to contest) the specifics and standards of periodization, the utility of politically freighted terms like “medieval” and “early modern,” and questions of continuity and change across supposed historical watersheds like 1868 and 1945. But since the periodization of Japanese history widely accepted since World War II has very much come to shape the literature in the field (as well as the research specializations of scholars within it), it has been adopted for the basic framework of the chronological survey here.

Part I covers Japanese history prior to 1600, with chapters on Japan’s earliest history (from ethnic origins and the findings of archaeology through the Nara period), the Heian period, and medieval Japan. Part II examines early modern Japan from the unification of the sixteenth century through the Tokugawa shogunate. Individual chapters focus on political, social and economic, intellectual, and cultural developments. Part III treats the period from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 through the end of World War II, with seven chapters devoted both to broad areas of change (political development, social and economic trends, intellectual and cultural history, and international relations) and to specific subperiods and topics (the Restoration and the early Meiji period, the Japanese empire, and the so-called Fifteen-Year War). Part IV synthesizes the scholarship on postwar Japan, drawing on social science research as well as the growing historical literature on the period. Separate chapters address the Allied occupation, politics, economic transformations, society and culture, and Japan’s place in the postwar world system.

The eleven chapters in Part V focus on thematic concerns and alternative histories, with a particular emphasis on approaches and issues which have emerged over the past quarter-century and will shape the future development of scholarship in the field. These chapters are carefully defined in topical focus but sweeping in chronological breadth, allowing the authors to explore long-term patterns of continuity, rupture, evolution, and innovation. The thematic chapters also foreground the new scholarly concerns, conceptual categories, and methodological innovations that have reshaped the writing of Japanese history since the decline of the modernization theory orthodoxy in the 1980s. Thus, themes often ignored in sources like *The Cambridge History of Japan* – women, sexuality, and gender; popular culture; regional and local history; individual, class, and national identity; Japan’s place in Asia; environmental history – are developed here at length and in depth. The themes addressed, while broadly representative of established and emerging directions in the field, are inevitably
incomplete and selective. Even in a book of this length, not all deserving areas of historical inquiry could be considered fully: coverage of military, urban, and educational history, to name but a few, might easily have been added to the thematic chapters had space permitted; the histories of Japanese religion and of high culture (literature, the visual arts, architecture) are subjects so rich and well studied as to be worthy of their own “state of the field” survey volumes. As Peter Duus once pithily put it, “time is short, history long, and such truncation inevitable.”

In fact, just as this volume cannot aspire to thematic comprehensiveness, it likewise cannot for a moment pretend to be encyclopedic in its coverage of the facts, figures, debates, and discourses of the full sweep of Japanese history and historiography. Readers might find some areas here less well developed than may be expected (such as the political history of the Yamato and Nara periods, or the workings of “Taishō democracy”) and some familiar historical landmarks, heroes, and legends (the stories of the “three unifiers,” the making of the Manchurian Incident, the writing of the 1946 constitution) either casually mentioned or missed altogether. One of the editors of The Cambridge History of Japan captured the dilemma – and the unavoidable compromise – nicely in stating that “it seemed wiser to plan the volume as a discursive guide to . . . Japan than as a complete Baedeker with each site and vista along the way properly noted and catalogued.” But, that caveat aside, one will find in this Companion to Japanese History not only a broad, rich, and up-to-date survey of the English-language literature, but also discussions of most of the “great debates” in Japanese history (from the roots of the Meiji Restoration to the question of Japanese “fascism”), concise introductions to topics of heightening scholarly interest (from the origins of the Japanese people to the culture of Japanese colonialism), remarkable insights on unexpected subjects (from the politics of dam-building to the rise of volunteerism in the 1990s), and some well-informed (and occasionally provocative) speculation on the direction of future scholarship in the field.

Needless to say, just as the Princeton University Press series on the modernization of Japan seems a relic of the 1960s and a cold war mindset, and The Cambridge History of Japan a monument to a conservative orthodoxy already well in decline by the 1980s, so this Companion to Japanese History will one day (hopefully some decades down the road) be seen as an intellectual artifact of a specific time and place, a memento of the turn of the twenty-first century in a diverse and fragmented scholarly landscape. Such an observation should not diminish the value of this volume (or similar efforts at survey and synthesis) so much as affirm the constantly changing nature of historical inquiry and the continuing vitality of the study of Japanese history in the English-speaking world. This volume is, in the end, but a snapshot of a historiographical discourse in endless flux, growth, and creative contestation.

A Note on Japanese Names

Throughout this volume, Japanese names are rendered in accordance with Japanese custom, the family name preceding the given name. The names of Japanese authors of English-language works are cited with the given name first. As is standard practice, macrons have been omitted in well-known Japanese place names (Tōkyō, Ōsaka, Kyōto, Köbe).
NOTES

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1 Hall, *Japanese History*, p. 4.
2 Ibid., p. 5.
14 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
21 Dower’s *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction. Bix’s *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* won the following year in the same category.
23 Hardacre, “Introduction,” p. x. Even in 1977, John Whitney Hall observed that “Since World War II Japanese specialists have, as private scholars, crashed the elite levels of higher education, but we have yet to establish the value of the subjects we control to the basic concerns of the disciplines we find ourselves [in]” (quoted in Janssens and Gordon, “A Short History of the Joint Committee on Japanese Studies,” p. 8).

24 Several works in English have surveyed research on Japan in other parts of the world; see, for example, King, The Development of Japanese Studies in Southeast Asia, and Kilby, Russian Studies of Japan. Useful works on the writing of Japan’s history by Japanese scholars include Mehl, History and the State in Nineteenth-Century Japan; Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan; Brownlee, Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600–1945; Brownlee, ed., History in the Service of the Japanese Nation. The tradition of writing monumental multi-author, multi-volume overviews of Japanese history is well established in Japan; representative collections include Iwanami köza, Nihon rekishi, 26 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1975–7), and Iwanami köza, Nihon tsuishi, 21 vols., 4 suppl. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993–6).


30 For an interesting discussion of the rationale for this focus on the more recent past, see Totman, A History of Japan, pp. 6–8.


32 Ibid., p. xvii.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


PART I

Japan before 1600
Map 1  The Traditional provinces of Japan
Japan has one of the oldest and most active traditions of archaeological research in the world. This chapter uses evidence from archaeology and related fields to provide a thematic overview of the history of the Japanese islands from the first human settlement through to the Nara period of the eighth century AD. It must be stressed that given the frantic pace of archaeological excavation in Japan today, many of the conclusions presented here may soon be changed by new discoveries. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to summarize the main themes and areas of debate in ancient Japan rather than to attempt an exhaustive discussion of specific aspects of the archaeological record.

**Periodization**

The Palaeolithic period starts with the first human occupation of Japan, which was perhaps as late as 35,000 years ago. The Palaeolithic was followed by the Jōmon period, which most archaeologists begin with the first appearance of pottery around 16,500 years ago. The Jōmon is usually divided into six subphases termed Incipient, Initial, Early, Middle, Late, and Final; a seventh phase, the Epi-Jōmon, is found only in Hokkaidō. Considering the very long duration of the Jōmon period and the ecological diversity of the Japanese archipelago, it is not surprising that there is great cultural variation within the Jōmon tradition. Rather than a single “Jōmon culture” it is more appropriate to speak of plural Jōmon cultures, but specialists continue to debate how we should classify the Jōmon phenomenon. Jōmon populations from Kyushū expanded south into the Ryūkyūs from about 7,000 years ago, developing there into a quite different culture that is termed “Early Shellmound” by Okinawan archaeologists. Jōmon sites are found as far north as Rebun Island, but Sakhalin appears to have been outside the area of regular Jōmon settlement.

The arrival of full-scale agriculture in Japan around 400 BC marks the beginning of the Yayoi period. ¹ The following Kofun period then commences with the construction of large, keyhole-shaped burial mounds around AD 300 – or perhaps half a century earlier if one assumes that the “great mound … more than a hundred paces in diameter” in which, according to the *Wei zhi*, Queen Himiko was buried shortly after 247 was a keyhole-shaped tomb.² Although large tomb mounds were no
longer built by the late seventh century, archaeologically the Kofun period is usually continued through to the beginning of the Nara period (710–94), thus overlapping with the Asuka era (552–710). The Yayoi and Kofun cultures did not spread to the Ryūkyūs or Hokkaidō. In the central and northern Ryūkyūs, a poorly understood Late Shellmound phase began about 300 BC and continued until the beginning of the Gusuku period in the twelfth century. In Hokkaidō, the Epi-Jōmon (c.100 BC–AD 650) was followed by the Satsumon (c.650–1200) and Ainu periods (c.1200–1868). The coastlines of northern and eastern Hokkaidō also saw an incursion by the people of the Okhotsk culture (c.550–1200).

History of Research

Archaeology and anthropology were introduced into Japan from Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century, but both of these fields built upon native traditions of historical inquiry. In the Tokugawa period, both “national learning” (kokugaku) and Neo-Confucian scholars developed a strong interest in the earliest history of Japan. Despite differences in philosophical outlook – which mainly revolved around the influence of China on ancient Japan – both schools relied primarily on the semi-mythological texts of the eighth century, the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki. It was not until after American biologist Edward Morse (1838–1925) dug at Ōmori in Tokyo in 1877 that a concept of an archaeological record outside written texts gradually began to develop in Japan.

Japanese archaeology developed in the European tradition of “archaeology as history” rather than in the American tradition of “archaeology as anthropology.” Archaeology in Japan can also be classified as “national archaeology,” which is defined by Bruce Trigger as a “culture-historical approach, with [an] emphasis on the prehistory of specific peoples.” In the postwar era, Japan has developed one of the most active traditions of archaeological research anywhere in the world. After the defeat of fascism in 1945, archaeology came to be seen as a way of reconstructing the history of ordinary Japanese people rather than that of the emperor and aristocracy. Economic growth associated with the so-called “Construction State” also led to a phenomenal increase in salvage archaeology from the 1960s. The amount of archaeological information that has been recovered from Japan over the past forty years is unparalleled – but so also is the ensuing destruction of archaeological resources.

Humans and the Environment

Changes in the physical, chemical, and biological environment form the background to the human settlement and history of Japan. Japan is a rugged, mountainous land with significant climatic and biotic diversity from north to south. Although for much of its earlier geological history the Japanese landmass was not an island chain, Japan is now a series of islands that form the eastern edge of north Eurasia. Land bridges with Korea developed at least twice during the Middle Pleistocene but there was no such land bridge in the Late Pleistocene, even at the coldest stage of the last glacial
maximum (LGM) about 18,000 years ago. The main islands of Honshū, Kyūshū, and Shikoku were connected in the Late Pleistocene, with the Inland Sea forming a large plain. Hokkaidō was separated from Honshū by the Tsugaru Strait, though connected in the north to Sakhalin and the Asian mainland. The current form of the Japanese archipelago began to take shape after 15,000 years ago.9

During the LGM, mean annual temperatures were 7–8°C colder than present and the vegetation of Japan was very different to that of today.10 Tundra and shrub tundra was found across much of Hokkaidō and a boreal coniferous forest extended through northern Honshū into the highlands of western Japan. Temperate conifers and mixed broadleaf trees were distributed in coastal areas of the Kantō and in western Japan. Warm broadleaf evergreen forest was found only in a refugium at the southernmost tip of Kyūshū.

Climatic warming after the LGM was followed by a sudden return to very cold conditions during the Younger Dryas, a global climatic stage that is dated to about 13,000 to 11,600 years ago on Greenland ice core data. The precise effects of the Younger Dryas in East Asia remain poorly understood, but it has been argued that the rapid changes in stone tools and other cultural traits in the Incipient Jōmon are due to this stage of climatic instability.11 Following the Younger Dryas, the climate gradually became warmer, reaching a peak in the “Holocene Optimum” around 7,000–6,000 years ago when sea levels were some two to six meters higher than present.

In addition to climatic change, the prehistory of Japan cannot be considered without reference to the frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that affected the archipelago. The two largest volcanic eruptions in Japanese prehistory were those of the Aira and Kikai calderas, both in southern Kyūshū and dated to about 22,000 and 7,300 years ago, respectively. The Kikai eruption and associated earthquakes and tsunami was probably so devastating that Kyūshū was abandoned by Jōmon populations for several centuries.12

**Population History**

The earliest human fossils from Japan belong to a juvenile from Yamashita-chō Cave, Okinawa dating to about 32,000 years ago and the question of who was the first human to settle the archipelago remains controversial.13 The first Paleolithic site in Japan was dug in 1949 at Iwajuku, Gunma prefecture. Later research has identified some 5,000 Paleolithic sites in Japan but all secure dates are later than 35,000 years ago. A series of proposed Early Paleolithic sites dug in the 1960s and 1970s remains controversial.14 Other work centered on Miyagi prefecture in the late 1970s to late 1990s reported a number of Early Paleolithic localities dating back as early as 600,000 years ago, but all of these sites were later found to have been faked by amateur archaeologist Fujimura Shin’ichi.15

Southeast Asia and southern China were settled by *Homo erectus* from soon after two million years ago. In north China, the famous “Peking Man” site of Zhoukoudian near Beijing dates to after 460,000 years ago, but *Homo erectus* tools dated earlier than 730,000 years have been found in the Nihewan Basin in Hebei.16 *Homo erectus* adapted to many different environments in Asia and it is not clear why Japan was apparently not settled prior to the appearance of modern humans. However,
the sudden expansion of sites in Japan after 35,000 years ago is consistent with the worldwide trend toward the occupation of new, previously uninhabited environments after the appearance of *Homo sapiens*.

At the end of the Pleistocene, it is likely that new groups reached Japan bringing microblades and other technologies. With so few human skeletal remains dating to the Paleolithic and the first half of the Jōmon, however, it is unclear to what extent the peoples of the Jōmon tradition derived from Paleolithic ancestors in Japan or else represented a new population influx at the Paleolithic–Jōmon transition. Much clearer evidence for immigration comes in the Yayoi period when continental migrants brought farming into the Japanese islands. A range of biological data has been used to argue that the modern Japanese derive primarily from these Yayoi era immigrants and their descendants, though some admixture with native Jōmon populations certainly occurred in many areas.17 This Yayoi immigration model does not necessarily require a huge number of initial migrants: if population growth was high amongst the Yayoi farmers then their numbers would have rapidly increased at the expense of Jōmon hunter-gatherers.18 Archaeological evidence suggests the source of these agricultural immigrants was the Korean peninsula, but the scarcity of skeletal remains from this period in Korea has precluded extensive comparisons of human biological remains.

It seems most likely that the agricultural immigrants of the Yayoi period also brought the Japanese language from the Korean peninsula. In the past, Japanese was often seen as forming part of an Altaic language family, but recently many linguists have come to see the structural similarities between the “Altaic” languages as due to areal diffusion.19 Certainly, the archaeological record offers no support for the speculative models of Altaic expansions proposed by some linguists.20 Most linguists and archaeologists also continue to be highly skeptical about proposed links between Japanese and the Austronesian and Austroasiatic families of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.21 Japonic – the Japanese language family that contains Japanese, Ryūkyūan, and their various historical dialects – appears to be related most closely to Old Koguryo and thus its roots can be initially placed on the Korean peninsula; attempts to determine the earlier roots of Japonic at present remain controversial.22

As noted, Jōmon populations from Kyūshū expanded south into the Ryūkyūs as far as Okinawa Island. However, the southern Ryūkyūs (Miyako to Yonaguni) were not settled from Japan at this stage. The prehistory of these Sakishima Islands is characterized by an early ceramic Shimotabaru phase that probably began in the second millennium BC. This was followed, after an apparent hiatus, by an aceramic culture with shell adzes that perhaps began in the late first millennium BC.23 The precise origin of both of these cultures is unknown but is possibly to be found in the Philippines or neighboring areas of island Southeast Asia. After 1300, the Sakishima Islands were gradually incorporated into the Chūzan kingdom of Okinawa Island.24

From the early days of Japanese anthropology it had been assumed that the Ainu of Hokkaidō and the Okinawans of the Ryūkyū Islands derive primarily from Jōmon ancestors rather than the mainland Yayoi Japanese.25 Work over the last decade or so, however, has shown that the modern Okinawans are biologically much closer to the Japanese than to the Ainu or prehistoric Jōmon people.26 These recent results suggest significant gene flow into the Ryūkyūs from Japan by at least the Gusuku period, although there is little archaeological evidence for such immigration and the historical