

13: JAPAN'S DELAYED TRANSITION INTO EARLY CIVILIZATION¹

a. What aspects of Jomon culture do or don't look Japanese; how does this evidence fit into the controversy over Jomon origins? Why did it take so much longer for Jomon to evolve into a full neolithic stage than either Korea or China required?

b. What aspects of Yayoi culture appear to have been imported; what aspects seem to have developed within Japan? Was it likely a matter of genes or transmission of culture to the Jomon natives? What are the likely (and unlikely) sources of cultural imports? Indicate the stages of Yayoi's evolution into an early civilization and then to the edge of high civilization.

A. The Jomon Epoch

1. Jomon culture's uniqueness

a. beginnings

Japan only begins to become interesting to the historian with the long extended transition into the Neolithic stage of the Proto-Jomon period, beginning roughly 14,500 BC (up from 10,000 BC until 1999.² This transition finally was completed during the Yayoi period, starting c. 500 BC.

There are some signs of earlier hominids, even of *Homo erectus* in Lower Paleolithic Japanese sites, but none of this creature's bones—just some of his tools have survived. Early *Homo sapiens* left some bones, datable to around 30,000 BC, as well as stone tools. Pottery and house foundations appear with the Proto-Jomon stage.

Jomon culture is unusual in that it was partly sedentary right from the beginning. Though Proto-Jomon people likely did not yet farm, they soon developed systematic inland and coastal repertoires of hunter-gatherer techniques. In fact Jomon seems to have been one of the earliest pottery-making cultures on the planet for which we have evidence. (For a time recently China's middle Yangzi valley held the record, with a 12,000 BC pot; the new discovery gives Jomon the record again.)

Jomon continued to evolve in cultural and to a lesser degree in technological complexity right into the first millennium BC, lasting some 13,000 years at a "Mesolithic" level, somewhere between the Upper Paleolithic and Beginning Neolithic stages.

b. development: limited agriculture

Until recently prehistorians thought that Jomon did not practice full-blown agriculture until very nearly the end of their development, during the 1st millennium BC. Recently discovered evidence now suggests that by mid-Jomon times (c. 5,000 BC) certain perennial plants and fruit trees and even millet may have been cultivated in the interior. Coastal Jomon groups may have continued to gather various mollusks and fish.

Rice has been found in a far northeastern Honshu Jomon site dating to c. 800 BC. Millet shows up c. 5,000 BC in the same region. We do not know if rice was used earlier closer to the Korean peninsula, from which rice cultivation would likely have spread.

Most Jomon seem to have remained essentially pre-agricultural, particularly on the coast. Even those Jomon interior subcultures that knew about agriculture had little need to practice it. Lots of nuts and berries from bushes and trees (perhaps cultivated) in the interior and mollusks and salmon on the coast made for better meals than millet mush.

c. physical & linguistic relationship to modern Japanese

Another question that arises is the relationship of Jomon man to the modern Japanese. The Japanese have always tended to think they have lived in Japan since the creation of the world. If the Jomon turn out to be their ancestors, that belief would be confirmed, at least rhetorically.

Some linguistic evidence suggests that the Japanese, at the deepest roots of their

language, speak what was once a Malay-Polynesian language. The way vowels pair off in polysyllabic words in modern Japanese resembles the Malay-Polynesian pattern. Some modern Japanese words for pre-agricultural objects and activities—names of fish, natural features, etc.—also look as though they may have Malay-Polynesian roots.

The paleolinguists tell us that vowel relationships and basic vocabulary are so fundamental that they must have been in place for well over 3,000 years. That would mean they already existed at least during the last stage of Jomon culture. Just how far back before then these linguistic traits go the paleolinguists cannot tell us. But given the seeming continuity of Jomon culture, these traits likely go back still earlier to the early or even Proto-Jomon stage.

Nevertheless, language scholars usually classify modern Japanese as a member of the Altaic family of languages. Altaic features do not, however, appear to have entered the Japanese language until 2,000 to 2,500 years ago. Agricultural terms are all Altaic, and we know from archaeology that agriculture was not extensively or intensively practiced in Japan until after c.400 BC.

The grosser features of modern Japanese grammar—the way the sentences are put together—resemble the way these matters are handled in such other Altaic languages as Korean, Mongolian, or Turkish. The paleolinguists estimate it would have taken several thousand years for Altaic features to swamp the Malay-Polynesian grammar so completely as to leave the mere vestiges that now survive.

Therefore, the Japanese seem to have become speakers of Altaic, but perhaps only starting after around 400 BC. The archaeologists tell us that this was about the time when the transition into the Full Neolithic Yayoi culture stage got visibly under way.

If we turn from tongues to bones and teeth, we can reach similar conclusions. We are well supplied with Jomon period bones. The coastal branches of the Jomon peoples mostly lived off fish, mussels and clams. They dumped the bones and shells from these creatures in big midden heaps next to their villages. Happily for archaeology, they also habitually dug their graves in these midden heaps. The alkalinity of the shells in their garbage neutralized the acidity of Japan's volcanic soil.

¹ 1st draft, 10/94; 6th rev., 9/99. By Edward Kaplan.

² *The Economist* (Apr 24, 1999), 79. This would put Jomon's beginnings back toward the last few millennia of the ice age rather than start it just after the ice age ended, when living in northern Japan would have been easier. If Proto-Jomon culture could handle the late ice age, we should all steel ourselves to Jomon's beginning being pushed back by future archaeologists still earlier.

As a consequence, the bones of their dead have kept well.

This is not true for the later Yayoi and historical stage burials. These later agricultural people did not have midden heaps of shells, and so had to bury their dead directly in the volcanic soil, where bones rotted away within a few centuries. Hence less evidence for the physical anthropologist is available for more recent times than for the much earlier Jomon stage.

Jomon bones, particularly the teeth, do not look as they came from people who were Mongoloidal in physical ethnic type. There are virtually no shovel-shaped incisor teeth in the many Jomon skulls that have been excavated, whereas ninety percent of Mongoloidals have such incisors. Nor are there any of the enamel beading patterns on the molars characteristic of the beading patterns on Mongoloidal molars, including those of Yayoi men.

Non-Japanese physical anthropologists have tended to argue that the Jomon may have been one of the variant forms of the mixed Polynesian ethnic type of Zone C, perhaps a subtype once more common elsewhere in that region, but preserved only in Japan as the waters rose over the continental shelf elsewhere in the zone.

d. The new DNA evidence

Significant recent DNA evidence suggests the Jomon were after all a variant of the Mongoloidal pattern. Michael Hammer studied variations in the Y chromosome among modern Asian people, including the Japanese, the Ainu (or “hairy” Ainu, who now are restricted to northern Japan but used to be more widely distributed and may be, as Hammer assumes, modern descendants of the prehistoric Jomon), the Okinawans, Koreans, various Southeast Asian and Siberian populations.

The Y chromosome changes only via mutations, not via recombination. DNA from modern Japanese, certain Siberian and Inner Asian peoples and Ainu has a peculiarity (haplotype) labeled YAP that is not matched on any Southeast Asian (including Taiwan) or Korean DNA so far tested. Another haplotype, IJ, is found among Koreans and some Japanese, but disproportionately among Japanese living in northern Kyushu and western Honshu.

If you assume the modern Ainu descend from the Jomon, the YAP evidence suggests that the Jomon came from Siberia, and spread down the Japanese islands to Okinawa. Much later, a small number

of IJ haplotype-bearing people migrated to southern Japan from Korea but did not spread their DNA much beyond northern Kyushu and southern Honshu, though the culture they brought into southern Japan fairly quickly transformed the culture of the genetically Jomon majority into a Late Neolithic and then Early Iron Age one as far north as the Kanto plain. This contradicts the tooth and linguistic evidence for Southeast Asian origins for the Jomon.³

If this DNA evidence holds up as more samples, including actual Jomon and Yayoi DNA are examined, the Jomon gene pool must have at least held its own against the Yayoi arriving from Korea during the first millennium BC. Jomon people may have survived by adopting the Yayoi culture.

The modern Ainu, or “hairy” Ainu, a small number of whom survive in northern Japan, perhaps might also have to be considered surviving Jomon men. The physical anthropologists have done blood protein typing on the Ainu. Their blood patterns overlap so closely with those of modern Japanese in general that there is little difference between them. Though this could be the result of intermarriage between Ainu and Japanese since ancient times, the DNA evidence suggests a genetic link.

The language of the Ainu may also be related to Japanese. The two languages share many apparent cognate words. For example, the word for *anima* or spirit in Japanese is *kami*. In Ainu it is *kamui*. However, that too might be the result of Ainu borrowing Japanese words or vice versa.

Physically, both the modern Japanese and the Ainu are rather more hairy than Mongoloidals elsewhere in East Asia. We do not know how hairy the ancient Jomon were. Both Ainu and Japanese (and Jomon) also tend to be beakier—i.e. their noses stick out further—than is the case among Mongoloidals elsewhere.

Cultural links among these three peoples can be surmised even without the

new DNA evidence that seemingly links them. Like the Japanese and Jomon the Ainu worship the sun (but also the moon) as well as bears (which were also important totem animals in ancient Korea). The modern Ainu eat bear-meat in religious ceremonies.

The modern Ainu tattoo themselves. We do not know if the Jomon did, since no Jomon skin is extant. We know from late ancient Chinese eyewitness accounts that the Yayoi were heavily tattooed. They might have adopted this practice from their Jomon predecessors.

e. Jomon culture's stylistic links to the modern Japanese

Jomon did some things that the modern Japanese still do, once you make allowance for the differences in technological sophistication between Jomon's Upper Paleolithic to Early Neolithic and Japan's Late Neolithic to Mid Industrial times.

Like modern Japanese the coastal Jomon ate lots of seafood. They cooked their food and warmed their little round semi-subterranean houses with *hibachis*—ones made out of pottery rather than cast iron (which modern Japanese also sell to Americans as tabletop charcoal broilers).

There is evidence that Jomon people worshipped the sun. Certain arrangements of stones in some of their villages seem oriented toward the sun's position at the solstices. It could be, therefore, that Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess spoken of in post-Jomon myths, was originally a Jomon deity.

According to one of the later Japanese Sun Goddess myths, a fight broke out between Amaterasu and her half-brother, Susano-o. In retaliation, Susano-o broke down the dikes around his half-sister's rice fields and drove her off in tears to hide in a cave. Finally, we are told, priests and other deities enticed her out of the cave by performing a lewd dance. As punishment, wicked Susano-o was banished to Korea.

At one level this is no doubt a myth designed to explain a solar eclipse, but there may be additional meaning to be squeezed out of it.

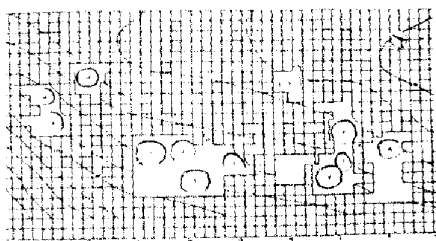
Perhaps the myth is reversing the direction of causation of some actual historical episode. Maybe Susano-o originally came from Korea as a god worshipped by the migrants from Korea who created the Yayoi culture in Japan. There is, in fact, a phallic god in Korea whose

³ Hammer's work and reactions to it are summarized in John Travis, “Jomon Genes: Using DNA, Researchers Probe the Genetic Origins of Modern Japanese,” *Science News*, 151.7 (February 15, 1997), 106-107, in Dennis Normile, “Genetic Clues Revise View of Japanese Roots,” *Science*, v. 283 (March 5, 1999), 1426-1427, and at a popular level, Jared Diamond, “Japanese Roots,” *Discover* (June 1998). Diamond won a Pulitzer for his lucid synthesis of world history, technological history and economic geography, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (NY: Norton, 1997).

name sounds close to Susano-o. This myth may well, therefore, reflect the proto-historic period rivalry between the native Jomon symbolized by Amaterasu, and the immigrant Yayoi people, represented by Susano-o.

The Jomon apparently practiced ritualized forms of cleanliness in ways reminiscent of later Japanese. We can surmise this from the layout of their villages, which were composed of small, round, semi-subterranean houses clustered together. A few of the foundations for such houses are, however, outside the perimeter of the village. Anthropologists surmise that these must have been houses of parturition and menstruation. Women, when shedding blood in these mysterious ways, were believed by many early cultures to have too much power for less magically powerful people—men—to be able to contend with them. It was necessary to isolate the women from others at such times.

The Japanese still have that sort of attitude toward female genital blood, and they still take baths in what outsiders tend to see as a ritualized, almost obsessive fashion. They now give modern sanitary reasons for doing so, but they still, as before, bathe more often, particularly when under stress, than do other Asians. When a politician gets caught with his hand in the till, he goes home and takes a long hot bath before facing the jackals of the press. This could well be a carryover of a practice going back to Jomon times.

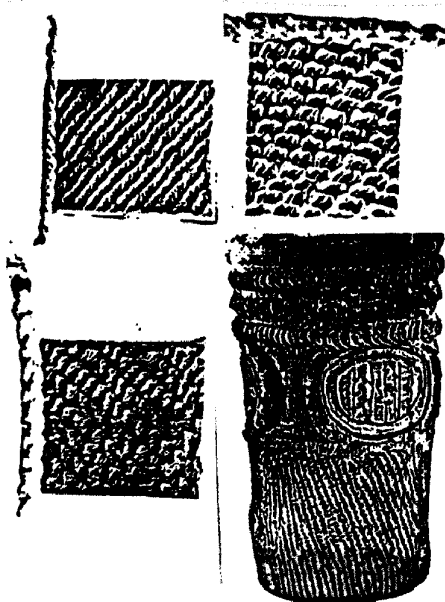


A Middle Jomon settlement plan. (Everett Chard, *Northeast Asia in Prehistory*, p. 133.)

Still, when all is said and done, Jomon culture strikes the modern observer as highly idiosyncratic, even after we make allowance for the early stage of its material development.

The culture's name, Jomon means "rope marked." Jomon pottery bears patterns of ropes and mats impressed on the soft clay before firing. In both material and technological style, it shows some continuity with later pottery, except that by Yayoi times pottery was made on

wheels rather than by smoothing out looped coils of clay as the Jomon did.



Examples of impressions made by rolling various kinds of twisted cords onto clay. (Chard, p. 141.)

Cultural style is something else again. Late Jomon pottery was often highly sculptural. Over time it became ever more baroque in its decoration. This suggests that its makers led rather interesting spiritual lives, but ones rather different from later Japanese, who used more austere patterns on their pottery.



Late Jomon figurine. (Chard, p. 141.)

3. The stability of some Mesolithic cultures

The big remaining question about the

Jomon is why, after apparently having developed pottery earlier than anyone else in the world (c. BC 14,500), they did not finish the job by rapidly and fully adopting agriculture, and cross over to the Full Neolithic by c. 5-6,000 BC at the latest.

Instead they did not do these things to any significant extent until well after 1,000 BC, some 5,000 years after the Chinese and 2,000 years after the Koreans. Even then, they only did so after the Yayoi began to cross over to the islands from the peninsula carrying with them a Full Neolithic and Early Iron age culture.

It is not that the Jomon did not make much cultural progress in other respects. The elaboration of their ceremonial pottery attests to this. And yet, even though some of them possessed agriculture, it does not seem to have spread very widely. Nor did they link their isolated villages into networks of villages coordinated by hereditary chieftains. This first visible step toward state-building did not occur until after c. 200 BC, during Yayoi times.

The archeologists have invented various labels for such a sedentary, pottery-using but non-agricultural society. They label such cultures either Early Neolithic or Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age).

Some anthropologists surmise that certain Mesolithic cultures may well have been doing so well without agriculture that they did not need to use it much even if they knew about it. Why make such a transition if you do not have to? Mesolithic man settled near the mouth of the right kind of river can lead the good life catching salmon, digging up clams, and harvesting the tasty grubs and roots, nuts and fruits that grow spontaneously a bit further upstream. In a land enjoying a mild climate, like post-ice age Japan, constitutes a very pleasant life.

To keep on enjoying such a good life, all a group has to do is stabilize its fertility rate. Such customs as long-extended nursing of children, religious taboos against frequent sexual intercourse, etc., that keep people from becoming too numerous per acre to be supported by food gathering, may create no need to give up smoked salmon to accept the burden of an inferior full Neolithic diet dominated by millet mush.

Complex relationships with the spiritual world and elaborate iconography to symbolize such relationships might be needed by Mesolithic man to enforce such

taboos. Hence the elaborate pottery figures of Jomon or the totem poles of the Pacific Northwest Indians and the Early Neolithic cultures of New Guinea.

Even when Late Neolithic people began to grow larger quantities of more palatable grains like rice to supplement millet, they usually had to give this good food up to their social-political superiors, the proprietors of the first proto-states, whose appearance seems to be linked to the later part of the Full Neolithic.

Some charismatic figure is able to persuade people of the truth of a new and larger vision of Heaven only when some crisis of pre-civilization arrives for a people: either when population has grown too large, or when more developed neighbors begin to put military pressure on them, and they have to move more deeply into the Neolithic stage to begin state-building. This in turn requires more people, some of whom (the rulers) have to be supported by others. Hence the need to emphasize agriculture more than before.



A Middle Jomon period interior. (*Image and Life: 50,000 Years of Japanese Prehistory*, UBC Museum of Anthropology, 1978).

The Lummi and Haida and Kwakiutl of the Pacific Northwest lived for several thousand years at a stage of development similar to Jomon man, and had a more or less pleasant time doing so.

We have no significant evidence that Jomon population densities had reached a crucial level until the latest stage, when they were already being influenced by Yayoi coming over from Korea.

The presumption follows that external pressure must have been the proximate cause of the change. That presumption also has empirical support. On the basis of what is known about life nearby in peninsular Northeast Asia, it is no coincidence

that it was after 400 BC when the Yayoi Full Neolithic stage began to appear within insular Northeast Asian culture. If there is any truth to the Japanese state-founding myths, charismatic leaders organized the first local states then.

B. The Yayoi Period

1. Physical and material novelties

The Yayoi stage apparently began as a consequence of a drift of people from the continent. This was a time when wave after wave of pressure from still further north, ultimately from China, was pushing ever more groups of people ever further south on the Korean peninsula.

By 500 BC, Chinese iron weapons were entering subzone A3. By 200 BC, Chinese invaders were taking over part of northernmost Korea (the southeastern part of what Westerners call Manchuria), and forcing some proto-Korean peoples south even faster.

It is plausible that some of these people or people on whom they impinged were eventually pushed across the narrow waters of the Straits of Tsushima to southwestern Japan.

Change on the Japanese islands indeed finally began to accelerate midway through the 1st millennium BC, about when such pressures from the north of the peninsula should be expected to have arrived in its southerly parts.

The change from Jomon to Yayoi was, compared to what had come before, fairly quick and even dramatically sudden. Between the 10th and 5th centuries BC there was already a late Jomon stage which looks as though it was finally turning fully and widely agricultural.

By the 4th century BC the archaeological record of the bones and indirect genetic record suggests two other changes: First, a new gene pool bearing the IJ haplotype begins moving onto northern Kyushu, the island closest to Korea. In addition to the new trait on the Y chromosome, Mongoloid shovel-shaped incisor teeth and appropriately beaded molars appear in the smaller number of surviving skeletons in Yayoi graves, and the skulls containing these teeth are more round-headed than before. Second, Jomon skeletons in some locations become younger and show signs of

disease, possibly diseases that came in with migrants from the peninsula.

Changes in skull shape, but not the tooth evidence, could be explained by changes in diet. Shift to a grain diet may make people more roundheaded for reasons physical anthropologists have not yet fully explained.

The words for rice, millet, plow and hoe likely entered the Japanese language then, and these are Altaic rather than Malay-Polynesian words. There is also archaeological evidence for at least natural wetlands rice agriculture (i.e. planting rice in natural swamps), and of wheel-made pottery arriving then.

2. Evolving socio-political organization

By the 1st century BC, sites in Kyushu and southwestern Honshu begin to yield bronze mirrors imported from contemporary Han Dynasty China. These were buried in the larger than average graves of chieftains. Each chieftain seems to have coordinated the affairs of a number of villages.

Iron and bronze swords also appear in these chieftains' graves, and late Yayoi habitation sites yield ever larger numbers of locally made iron tools intended for everyday purposes.

What, you might ask, happened to the Japanese Bronze Age? After a measly two centuries of a Late Neolithic, the inhabitants of the islands seem to have suddenly jumped into the Early Iron Age.

Apparently, people borrowing the traits of civilization from already civilized neighbors will not go to the trouble and expense of having a Bronze Age, if the people from whom they are stealing their ideas and (and part of their gene pool) are already well into the Early Iron Age. They can, as the saying goes, jump onto the moving train of progress.

Another object commonly found in mid to late Yayoi period chieftains' graves is a bear claw shaped "jewel" called a *magatama*. Something very similar, also carved from fine grained stone (resembling jade rather than a precious stone like diamond or ruby) was also buried in the graves of South Korean chiefs or kinglets at that time.

The evidence seems conclusive that at least the beginnings of the shift to the Yayoi archaeological stage was effected by Mongoloid ethnic type people from

the Korean peninsula. (Some Japanese prefer to believe these migrants came from the lower Yangzi, but this contradicts the linguistic evidence for a Korean connection.) These people brought irrigated rice agriculture and an Early Iron Age technology with them when they crossed the Straits of Tsushima.

The obvious next question is, what happened to the Jomon?

3. Yayoi origins & the Yayoi-Jomon relationship

Yayoi habitation sites show evidence for the beginning of a shift from Jomon round semi-subterranean huts (resembling those of Yangshao stage Neolithic China) to huts plus longhouses on stilts (resembling the structures of the Zone C Qingliangang and the offshoot of the two, the Longshanoid stage in China). Similar longhouses are still found in such other parts of Zone C as Southeast Asia.

Larger scale versions of such buildings are also found at the shrines to the Sun Goddess located at Ise on Honshu for the last c. 2,000 years. The priests rebuild the Ise Shrine buildings every twenty years. For reasons of ritual piety scrupulous care is taken to retain every detail of the original. Hence we can be reasonably confident that the Ise buildings have preserved one of the building styles—that of the storehouse—of mid to late Yayoi and early Tumulus period Japan.

Since rough equivalents of that style are found elsewhere in Zone C, this may be evidence that Ise was originally the shrine of a Zone C people. Since Ise is dedicated to Amaterasu, and Amaterasu may be a carryover from Jomon religion, it is a plausible surmise that the Yayoi preserved elements from both the old Zone C Jomon religion and a characteristic building style of Zone C.

Admittedly, this runs against the new DNA evidence. Perhaps, however, the Jomon picked up Southeast Asian traits as they drifted south down the chain of Japanese islands.

There were, however, too many novelties introduced during Yayoi for the transition from Jomon to Yayoi to be explained predominantly in terms of evolution from the old Jomon *culture*.

The ethnic type and cultural evidence points preponderantly toward new people drifting over from the mainland as the occasion for the shift from Jomon to

Yayoi culture. The above evidence pointing to at least some continuity with the preceding Jomon period can, however, easily be reconciled with the appearance of new genes in northern Kyushu and southern Honshu.

The bearers of these new genes must have carried a more advanced culture in their hands and minds: These Mongoloidals speaking an Altaic language would have carried over to the islands with them a Late Neolithic commoners' material and ideational culture underlying what was already becoming an Early Iron Age ruling class material culture.

These newcomers could have come either from the southwestern or southern coast of the Korean peninsula, or just possibly from somewhere further south along the China coast.

Korea is a much more likely point of origin for the Yayoi than China. It is not likely that they came from as far south as the mouth of the Yangzi at the bottom of subzone C1, as some recent Japanese scholars have proposed. Even scholars, if they are Japanese, do not fancy having Korean ancestors. (Remember, Korea was a Japanese colony from 1909 to 1945, and imported Korean labors still do the kinds of dirty jobs in Japan that we reserve for migrant laborers from Latin America.)

The ostensibly good reason these scholars give for proposing the mouth of the Yangzi as the source of the Yayoi culture is that East Asia's irrigated rice agriculture seems to have originated there. By the 5th or 4th century BC, however, irrigated rice had already long since spread all the way down the Korean peninsula. Hence the ancestors of the Yayoi could have brought it from there to Japan.

There would not have had to be many people drifting over from southern Korea to swamp the Jomon culture and even its gene pool in the region where the Yayoi culture first landed. By analogy, it did not take an enormous migration of whites coming to Bellingham in the 1850s to swamp the Lummi Indian gene pool in the region between Bellingham and Blaine.

This is likely similar to what happened during the transition into the Yayoi stage in Japan. Only a modest number of Mongoloid people migrated from the Korean peninsula. Because they had agriculture, their customs encouraged them to reproduce themselves at a much higher rate than did the Jomon.

Some probably intermarried with the

Jomon and incorporated their gene pool and some key elements from their culture into the Yayoi culture. They spread all the way up to near modern Tokyo⁴ within a few centuries, carrying all before them culturally, but becoming decreasingly capable of swamping the Jomon gene pool as they went. This might account for central and northern Japan and the even more remote Okinawa, retaining the YAP haplotype long before brought from eastern Siberia to northern Japan.

Almost from the beginning the Yayoi newcomers also created ever larger networks of communities—i.e. small or embryonic states. The rulers of these proto-states enjoyed superior access to more wealth than anyone in the Jomon culture ever had. Hence Jomon joined the new culture while retaining its genetic identity.

C. Yayoi's Transition Into Early Civilization and Beyond

1. The Wa "confederacy"

In well under 500 years in Japan, the Yayoi immigrants went from practicing only the earliest forms of agriculture to becoming an iron-using early civilization. This is clear from certain graves dating to mid Yayoi times, right around the turn of the Christian era, or shortly before. These graves clearly belong to the Yayoi culture, but they are sufficiently larger and more richly appointed than the previous average as to suggest chieftains' burials.

The transition into early civilization was under way. These chieftains must have been running at least modestly wealthy local states to have accumulated the kinds and quantities of goods displayed in their graves and to have the capability to mobilize enough labor to build the new type of grave.

We have another source of evidence on these first political manifestations of Yayoi culture. We have written accounts from Chinese eyewitnesses for late Yayoi. It is too bad no literate outside observers were around to observe the comparable Chinese Longshanoid Late Neolithic stage

⁴ The archaeological name "Yayoi" is the name of a neighborhood just north of Tokyo University's campus where the Yayoi culture was first dug up. In fact, however, this site yielded a relatively late version of the Yayoi culture. Still, it was an easy commute for the Todai archaeologists excavating it.

10-15 centuries earlier.

Han Dynasty diplomats visited southern Korea and southwestern Japan in about 50 AD. These diplomats recorded their observations of the natives, thereby becoming East Asia's first anthropologists as well. Upon their return, they filed their reports, which were copied into the *History of the Latter Han Dynasty*. That work has come down to us.

These Han diplomats discussed what they called a "Wa confederacy" of loosely linked statelets organizing culturally similar people on both sides of the straits of Tsushima. These people probably called themselves by a name which the Chinese pronounced as "Wa" (*wo* in modern Chinese), meaning "little slave" or "dwarf-slave."

Remember, these Chinese diplomats were reconnoitering the fringes of China's Korean colony, so they were also good (or bad) imperialists. Naturally, they picked a character with the pronunciation *wa* which had a defamatory meaning to keep these "natives" in their place.

To their ruling class Chinese readers and the non-readers they influenced, then and since, the Japanese have remained the "dwarf-slave people of the Eastern Seas." The more advanced Koreans did no better at the hands of Chinese imperialist bigots. They were "monkeys wearing hats."

The rulers of these Wa local states, insular and peninsular, were loosely related to each other. They sailed in small boats to visit and sometimes to fight with each other. The Han diplomats assumed they formed something like a confederacy, but this may have been a mistaken inference from the family links of the rulers and the cultural traits shared by these local states.

The Wa shared similar and rather obscure (from a Han Chinese perspective) practices: A later Chinese account, from the 3rd century AD, states that some of the Wa on the north shore of the Inland Sea had a "Queen" named Himiko. Recent archaeological findings seem to confirm this. A people being ruled by a female was akin to a dirty joke to Chinese Confucians.

The Wa also seem to have had male chieftains. Some modern anthropologists suggest that these "queens" were actually just priestesses of the Wa fertility religion, and (as in some American Indian tribes) the actual rulers or warlords may have been brothers or uncles of these queens.

The Wa covered themselves with tattoos, just as the modern Ainu (and as pseudo-traditional-minded contemporary Japanese *Yakuza* gangsters) do. The Chinese diplomats thought that tattooing was even more disgusting. After all, Confucius had said it was improper to defile so much as one square inch of one's skin, since even that was a gift from one's father and mother. The Wa, who sometimes tattooed themselves from their necks to their belly buttons, must have seemed scandalously unfilial to the Chinese diplomats.

Not only that, the diplomats tell us, to ensure the safety of a traveling chieftain, one person from his community would abstain from bathing and live in a house apart from the rest of the community during the time the chieftain was gone. He would only be permitted to take a ritualized bath when the chief finally returned safely from his journey. The Chinese saw that as both disgusting and superstitious.

Still, for all its biases, this 1st century AD Chinese account is congruent with the archeological evidence. Bronze mirrors dug up by modern archeologists from mid-Yayoi chieftains' graves could well have been brought by such diplomats or have arrived via gift exchange networks stretching up the Korean peninsula toward the Chinese Lolang colony.

That such networks could have existed is suggested by analogous ceremonial trading institutions among the North American Indians during the 18th and early 19th centuries. For example, when Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Northwest, they found that steel knife blades had preceded them there by centuries, having been transmitted along trade or gift exchange routes linking Indian tribes all across North America.

The Chinese diplomats' narrative is also congruent with the mythic historical accounts written down much later, during the 7th and 8th centuries, soon after Japan had evolved into a first stage high civilization.

Emperor Jimmu, the grandson of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, is supposed by these histories to have been the first human ruler on earth, with his state located at Yamato. The myths are ambiguous on Yamato's location. They place it either in the Kansai Plain, the area from Kyoto down to Osaka in south central Honshu, or some place on Kyushu.

The early histories arbitrarily date Jimmu to somewhere between 1,000 and

600 BC. This was because, under Buddhist influence, they wanted to make Japan's first emperor a contemporary of the historical Buddha, dated to the beginning of the second *kalpa* (one of the three long historical eras into which Buddhists divide Earthly history).

Some modern scholars have attempted to redate Jimmu on the basis of other internal evidence in the myth histories. This sort of exercise becomes a kind of game played by Japanese antiquarian scholarship. The antiquarians try to see how much genuine-seeming history they can squeeze out of the myths, much as English antiquarians like to look to literary as well as archaeological evidence for the historicity of aspects of the myths of Arthur and Camelot.

For what it is worth, by squinting the right way at the texts, some of the Japanese scholars think they can redate Jimmu to around 50 BC. This would make him one of the chieftains of the mid-Yayoi period, when local states began to grow.

2. The Early Tumulus Period

It is clear from the richness of their tomb furniture that some chieftains were by late Yayoi times ruling over more than just a few neighboring villages. Just a little later, by the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, these local states were getting so big that their chiefs could afford even bigger tombs.

Though not as big as they were to get after 300, so conspicuously larger were tombs becoming by 200-300 AD that the archeologists call this evolutionary outcome of the Yayoi stage by a new name, the Early Tumulus period.

The first century of the Tumulus period nevertheless seems to share many traits with the late Yayoi, and some scholars plausibly extend the Yayoi right up to the end of the 3rd century AD.

The tombs have earth heaped onto them to form artificial hills, one or two stories tall, and covering something equivalent to a small city block or less—about the size of some of the smaller Ohio or Kentucky Indian mounds. These chieftains' tombs are surrounded by half-buried "spirit fences" composed of hollow baked clay pipes, now called *haniwa*, set vertically into the ground.

One can imagine the late Yayoi chieftains and their engineers slowly evolving these new tombs on the basis of indigen-

ous resources as the local states grew larger and brought in more tribute to finance such projects. One need not postulate some radical intrusion from outside the islands to account for this new stage of development.

We cannot be so confident about indigenous development for the subsequent period, particularly from the latter years of the 4th century.

3. The Late Tumulus Period

a. Egami's horserider hypothesis

During the 4th and 5th centuries, something sufficiently different from the late Yayoi/Early Tumulus state appeared and inaugurated what the archeologists call the Late Tumulus period.

The earth piled atop the tombs begins to cover an area the size of a football field and to reach a height of two or three stories and more. The spirit fence's clay pipes begin to evolve into statues. At first just the top halves of these *haniwa* take on the forms of men, with their bottoms still being hollow baked clay pipes, but eventually at least representations of ruling class members and their horses become hollow statues from top to bottom, legs included.

Some of these very large tombs have been opened during this century, usually by accident or after floods or other natural disasters required salvage work. Otherwise, entering them has traditionally been taboo, since they were associated with the names of mythic age emperors.

To the surprise of practically everyone except for a few Korean archaeologists, the internal furnishings of these Late Tumulus tombs closely resemble the contents of southern Korean tombs of the same period.

The Chinese Wei Dynasty, founded by the Xianbei peoples of Zone A during the late 4th century, was in contact with some of the builders of these large Japanese tumuli. The account in their state history describes something quite different from the old Wa Confederacy. By the early 5th century the Chinese accounts describe a "Yamato" state engaged in the conquest of dozens of local states in its neighborhood.

This Wei account also seems to suggest that Yamato might have been located in Kyushu rather than in south central Honshu near Kyoto, where the Japanese myth histories mostly put it. Explaining

this puzzle has preoccupied Japanese historians and antiquarians for generations.

Finally, in the late 1940s, not long after the last World War, a Tokyo University Mongol studies scholar named Egami Namio came up with a hypothesis to reconcile the archeological with the written source data.

Professor Egami surmised that early in the 4th century AD a new bunch of tough southerly Korean horse-riding aristocratic warriors got into boats with their horses, and sailed to Kyushu. There they conquered the local insular states of the Wa peoples (whose ancestors had been drifting over from Korea for the past eight or more centuries) and set up their own territorial state. This was Yamato. It later, surmised Egami and other scholars, moved its capital from northern Kyushu to Honshu.

Though the ground rules of the American Occupation kept him from being lynched by patriotic emperor-worshippers, Mr. Egami's theory fell upon stony ground in late 1940s Japan.

The Japanese had just lost their Korean empire. Most still could not accept some Mongolist telling them that their supposedly sacred state (which General MacArthur would no longer let them think of as sacred anyway) was founded by the ancestors of the same fellows upon whose heads they had been sitting for the preceding half century. The Japanese ignored Egami's "horserider hypothesis."

Over the last half century Egami has continued to report additional evidence in favor of his thesis. A series of books and articles by him and a few disciples has further elaborated the story of the horse riders. This evidence (including one tomb excavated as recently as 1988) has tilted more and more his way.

b. Ledyard's version of the horserider hypothesis

The latest version of the horserider thesis has come from Professor Gari Ledyard, an historian of ancient Korea teaching at Columbia University. In a 1976 article in the first issue of *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Ledyard tied the horse riders to Puyo, the proto-Korean state which crystallized out in southern Manchuria while Lolang was losing its Chinese connection. Puyo, you may recall from the preceding chapter, was eventually overrun by Koguryo, after which many members of its ruling aristocracy

fled south.

Ledyard notes that there are more similarities between the modern North Korean dialects and modern Japanese than between modern South Korean dialects and modern Japanese. The North Korean dialects are presumably more nearly related to the old Puyo spoken language than are the dialects spoken in areas corresponding to ancient Silla and Paekche in the south.

Ledyard also shows parallels between Korean and Japanese sources. The names and careers of the kings of the statelets of the Kaya League founded in the Naktong Valley by refugee aristocrats from Puyo in the 3rd and 4th centuries as described in early Korean chronicles resemble the names and careers of early Japanese emperors given in the Japanese myth histories. These parallels suggest that the two sets of names were actually slightly different labels for the same people.

Also on the basis of hints in the Korean chronicles and Japanese myth histories, Ledyard surmises that after the horse riders conquered the states of Kyushu, they intermarried with the local Wa aristocrats. After another generation or two, their Wa in-laws rebelled and overthrew the horserider kings, and then migrated from Kyushu across the Straits of Shimonoseki and then along the northern shore of the Inland Sea to the Yamato (i.e. Kansai) Plain in southcentral Honshu to escape retaliation from the still powerful horserider military.

That would explain more completely than Egami did why the Japanese early histories seem to insist that Yamato was located in Honshu, while the Chinese sources sometimes place it in Kyushu.

Korean aristocrats, both from the horserider conquest generation and later migrants, continued to play an important role in Japanese culture and politics for several more centuries. (The 1988 excavation was of the graves of Korean aristocrats who lived in the Kansai Plain.) Most alarming, of course, the Japanese royal family would (if the horserider hypothesis is correct in some form), still be at least partly Korean in ancestry.

Egami is still alive. He published a new book in 1986, in which he further elaborates on and claims victory for the "horserider" hypothesis. The Japanese now pay somewhat more attention to it, and seem to have gotten over the worst of the embarrassment it once caused. In

1991, the new Heisei Emperor proclaimed Professor Egami a “national treasure” on national television. Koreans are highly pleased by the whole idea of their ancestors having provided Japan with its imperial family.

c. Japanese skeptics

Most Japanese archaeologists (and some foreigners) have, however, remained skeptical of the horserider thesis. They note that while the tumuli did indeed grow larger during the 4th century, their tomb furniture changed more slowly.

In 1983, the American scholar Walter Edwards suggested (also in a *Journal of Japanese Studies* article) that regular

exchange of marriage partners across the Straits supplemented by internal coups involving relatives from the peninsula as well as Wa aristocrats would cover the evidence without postulating an invasion by horse-riding aliens.

This invasion, if invasion it was, may have accelerated the islands' evolution toward high civilization, but it did not in itself complete that evolution. The break between Early and Late Tumulus periods was not as sharp as the one the first coming of the Wa peoples made between the late Jomon and early Yayoi stages some 6 to 8 centuries previously.

The hypothetical horse riders were, after all, something like second cousins to

the Wa aristocrats long since resident on both sides of the Straits. The Wa and Jomon belonged to different cultures.

Nevertheless, the horse riders/ inlaws seem to have kicked up the speed of evolution. Not only did royal tombs immediately become much bigger and soon much richer, but within two centuries, once Buddhism provided the appropriately complex vision of Heaven for it, a uniquely Japanese high civilization was able to crystallize out and begin indigenizing in Japan both Buddhism and the Sino-Korean culture that carried it to Japan.

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