

Book Review by Junko HABU

Prehistoric Japan: New Perspectives on Insular East Asia

By Imamura, Keiji

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Keiji Imamura's "Prehistoric Japan: New Perspectives on Insular East Asia" is the first English synthesis of prehistoric Japanese archaeology written by a Japanese archaeologist. As such, this book can be read not only as an up-to-date overview of Japanese prehistory, but also as a reflection of current theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by Japanese archaeologists. As indicated in the preface, the original manuscript of the book was prepared as a series of lecture notes when the author visited the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, in 1993. The structure of the book is chronological, starting with the Palaeolithic period and ending with the protohistoric Kofun period. However, many chapters contain sections describing the history of Japanese archaeology, thus allowing readers to understand the contexts of various archaeological debates. While some of these sections may seem misplaced, especially for readers who are unfamiliar with Japanese archaeology, these sections nevertheless provide useful background information which is not available in other English sources on Japanese archaeology.

Although this book was written as an introductory textbook on Japanese prehistory, its primary strength lies in the description of Imamura's own research on the Jomon period. As an example of prehistoric hunter-gatherer culture with sophisticated technology, large settlements, and various kinds of ceremonial features, the Jomon culture (ca. 10,000-300 B.C.) of the Japanese archipelago has attracted the attention not only of archaeologists working on East Asia, but also of a wide range of archaeologists whose primary research foci are on other prehistoric and/or hunter-gatherer cultures. Examples of Imamura's original research presented in the book include his analyses of Jomon trap pits, changes in the numbers of excavated Jomon pit-dwellings in the western Kanto and Chubu Highland districts, and differences in the regional distribution of sites associated with storage pits and those with chipped stone axes. Each of these studies deals with regional and temporal variability in various aspects of the Jomon culture. Imamura's analyses clearly indicate that the examination of such variability is critical to our understanding of Jomon cultural complexity as a whole. His analyses also demonstrate the potential research value of the enormous body of Jomon data available in Japan. For example, the rich and varied data base can be used to analyze regional settlement patterns in great detail. Because of the rapid increase in the number of rescue excavations in the country since the 1980s, Imamura was able to conduct an extremely interesting analysis of site distribution patterns based on archival research of CRM site reports. While his work was

primarily focused on central Japan, one can see that similar types of analyses could easily be conducted with data from other parts of the Japanese Islands.

Imamura's discussion of demographic changes through the Jomon period is a particularly interesting original contribution presented in the book. Based on his analyses of changes in the number of excavated pit-dwellings from each Jomon Period sub-phase, he suggests that, during the Middle Jomon period in the western Kanto and Chubu Highlands, an extremely rapid population increase occurred (Chapters 8 and 12). According to his estimates, populations in these districts increased by as much as 50 to 150 times within 600 to 700 years (p. 156). These population increases ended in the latter half of the Middle Jomon period and were followed by a dramatic population decline at the end of Middle Jomon. Imamura's discussion on Jomon demography is further developed in his critique of Hanihara's (1987) large-scale migration theory. Using Koyama's (1978, 1984) Jomon population estimates as the basis for his simulation, Hanihara points out that the population in the Japanese archipelago seems to have increased from approximately 76,000 at the beginning of the Yayoi period to 5.4 million in the early Historical period. This implies a population increase of 70 times over a thousand years, at an average annual growth rate of 0.427. By comparing this figure with annual population growth rates of other agricultural societies, Hanihara suggested that the dramatic population increase during the Yayoi period can be explained only by a large-scale migration from continental Asia. On the other hand, Imamura argues that the rapid population growth could have been achieved without large-scale migration, since, according to his own analyses, a similarly rapid population increase occurred during the Middle Jomon period.

I believe that Imamura's work is a significant contribution to Jomon demography since it suggests that Jomon population may have fluctuated more rapidly and extensively than archaeologists have previously assumed. As Imamura indicates, population estimates for each Jomon period sub-phase based on typological chronologies of pottery can reveal short-term changes in Jomon population with finer gradation than Koyama's population estimates. However, the question of whether the population in the Kanto and Chubu districts in fact increased 50 to 150 times over 600 to 700 years still remains controversial. This is because, as Imamura himself admits (p. 157), there are several other factors which may have affected the total numbers of pit-dwellings on which his population estimates are based. Probably more important is Imamura's statement that 70 percent of all excavated pit-dwellings in the Chubu and Kanto districts belong to the Middle Jomon period, and 50 percent of all excavated pit-dwellings in these districts belong to the latter half of Middle Jomon (p. 93). In the past, the Middle Jomon culture in central Japan has often been regarded as representative of the Jomon culture. What Imamura's analyses indicate is that the prosperity of Middle Jomon in central Japan may have been anomalous through the long history of the Jomon period.

Compared to the thorough and stimulative discussions on the Jomon period, chapters dealing with the following Yayoi and Kofun periods are much more descriptive. Nevertheless, the book is successful in outlining major controversies and discoveries in archaeological studies of these later periods. Chapter 15, which is entitled "Two late prehistories in the north and south", deals with prehistoric archaeology of Hokkaido and Okinawa. Until recently, archaeology of these two regions was underrepresented in textbooks of Japanese prehistory. While this chapter is relatively short, it succinctly presents chronological frameworks and previous results of Okinawa and Hokkaido archaeology.

To summarize, Imamura's book is extremely informative and useful, both for students who have no previous knowledge of Japanese prehistory, and for researchers who are interested in Japanese or East Asian archaeology. From the perspective of North American archaeology, I wish the book would have incorporated more theoretical and methodological approaches of North American and European archaeology. Of the 376 references cited, only 17 are written in English or other European languages. It is noteworthy that, according to Imamura's (1997) reply to a book review written by Matsui (1997), the scarcity of English references was intentional. In Imamura's (1997: 78) opinion, previous English publications on Japanese archaeology have focused too much on the works of a limited number of researchers whose studies were published in English. Accordingly, he stresses the importance of providing English readers with a balanced view of recent Japanese archaeology using Japanese sources extensively. While his concerns are legitimate, one may still feel that the importance of the extremely rich contents of this book can be fully appreciated only when the archaeological data from Japan are compared with those from other parts of the world, and when the implications of these studies are discussed in relation to theoretical debates in world archaeology.

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