

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ARCHAEOLOGY AND SOCIETY

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Archaeology as practised in Japan differs from archaeology in the West. These differences exist despite the early influence of Western scholars on the discipline -- Japanese archaeology as a scientific endeavour began with American Edward Morse's 1877 Omori shell mound excavation -- and the continued influence on Japanese thought of archaeologists who studied abroad during both the pre-war and post-war periods. Since Morse's research, the discipline has developed with only sporadic influence from Western archaeology. This gap between Japanese and Western archaeology has been an obstacle to the integration of Japanese archaeology into international research.

Recently, more Japanese archaeologists have become interested in Western archaeology. Nevertheless, differences between Western and Japanese archaeology continue to exist. What are the main differences between Western and Japanese archaeology? What keeps Japanese archaeology isolated from archaeology in other countries despite the increased amount of information entering the country from abroad? Thinking about these questions will be important not only for Western archaeologists who are interested in Japanese archaeology, but also for Japanese archaeologists who have to choose their orientation for future research.

The objectives of this paper, therefore, are to illustrate the differences between Japanese and Western archaeology, and to discuss current trends in Japanese archaeology when compared with archaeology in the West. The first section discusses the history of Japanese archaeology in relation to political changes in Japanese society. It provides the necessary background for examining distinguishing characteristics of contemporary Japanese archaeology. Some notable influences of Western archaeology on Japanese archaeology are outlined in the first section. The second section discusses recent Western influences on Japanese archaeology. The third compares characteristics of contemporary Japanese and Western archaeology and tries to explain observed differences.

History of Japanese Archaeology

The history of Japanese archaeology can be divided into four stages. The first stage, beginning with the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and lasting through the Taisho Period (1912-1925), was the time when the base of Japanese archaeology was laid. The second stage began in the late 1920's and ended with World War Two. This was when Japanese society was consumed by ultra-nationalism and archaeologists concentrated on chronology and the detailed description of artifacts in an attempt to avoid the discipline's political implications. During the third stage, which began in 1945 and lasted into the 1960's, Japanese archaeologists were no longer weighed down by overt political restrictions. They were thus able to develop theoretical approaches

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derived from historical materialism and settlement archaeology. The final stage began in the 1970's and continues today. Its distinguishing features are large-scale rescue projects resulting in vast amounts of data which must be catalogued and described, the use of sophisticated technology, and the acceptance of an ideologically neutral orientation to archaeological research and reporting.

According to Ikawa-Smith (1982), Japanese archaeology can be viewed in terms of interaction between two different traditions. One is an historical and antiquarian approach, which originated with the collection of antiquities during the Edo or Tokugawa Period (1603-1888), and was "reaffirmed as an academic discipline around the turn of the century by historians affiliated with the Imperial Museum" (Ikawa-Smith 1982, 296-297). The other tradition is more closely related to biology and other natural sciences. It was stimulated by the work of Morse, and has retained strong ties with zoology and physical anthropology. Both of these currents had occasional contact with Western archaeology throughout the Meiji and Taisho Periods.

One of the first contacts Japan had with Western archaeology was when Morse, a specialist in zoology, visited Japan in 1877 to collect specimens of brachiopods. Originally, he planned to stay in Japan for only three months but, having been asked to teach zoology at the University of Tokyo, he stayed for two years. The day after his arrival in Japan, Morse saw the Omori shell mound from the window of a train. Three months later he excavated the site. The excavation report Shell Mounds of Omori, published in 1879, was the first Japanese archaeological report written in a scientific style (Isono 1987).

Although Morse was a Darwinist (in fact, he was the first scholar systematically to introduce Darwinism to Japan [Isono 1987]), his evolutionary perspective had little direct influence on later Japanese archaeological studies. All of his Japanese students specialised in zoology, and none became archaeologists. It is interesting that the evolutionary point of view is absent in the work of Shogoro Tsuboi (1863-1913), whose main interest was the racial groupings of Stone Age people in Japan. Evolutionary ideas were also markedly absent in the work of Tsuboi's followers (Ikawa-Smith 1982). Tsuboi studied in England from 1892 to 1894. He returned to Japan to become the first Professor of Anthropology at the University of Tokyo. He was the founder of the Anthropological Society of Tokyo in 1877 (precursor of the today's Anthropological Society of Nippon), and established the scientific foundation of Japanese archaeology. Lack of the evolutionary perspective in the studies of Tsuboi and his associates corresponds to the fact that evolutionism was quite unpopular in the culture-historical archaeology of Europe during the 1880s and 1890s.

The Western influence on archaeology was very strong throughout the Meiji and Taisho Periods, although contacts were sporadic rather than continuous. Archaeologists and anthropologists, such as Yoshikiyo Koganei (1859-1944), Kenji Kiyono (1885-1950), and Kashiwa Oyama (1889-1969), to name just a few, studied abroad and brought Western

perspectives back to Japan. Kosaku Hamada, a professor at Kyoto University who studied archaeology in England from 1914 to 1916 under W. M. Flinders Petrie, introduced the methodological framework of British archaeology to Japanese archaeology (Hamada 1922). He also translated the work of Oscar Montelius (1932) into Japanese. The culture-historical orientation of Japanese archaeology was established by Hamada and his followers. It is worth noting that this culture-historical tradition still dominates archaeological studies at Kyoto University and the western part of Japan, while the natural scientific tradition, which originated with the work of Tsuboi, is more strongly followed in Tokyo and the eastern part of Japan.

From the late 1920's to the end of World War Two, ultra-nationalist thought dictated the social and political situation in Japan. Little information was available from outside the country. This was particularly true through the late 1930's and early 1940's. At the same time, the government realised that the archaeological interpretations of prehistoric artifacts contradicted official explanations about the formation of the Japanese state. The official history, as it was taught in schools, regarded the imperial family as descendants of the gods. Legends were mixed with historical fact and 660 BC was given as the date when the Japanese nation was established by the first emperor. For the Japanese leaders in the pre-war years, the existence of primitive prehistoric cultures, thousands of years old, was completely unacceptable. Consequently the historical study of prehistoric Japan was repressed. Many archaeological papers written at this time were descriptive and politically neutral studies focusing on typology rather than explanations of Japanese history. It was during this stage that Sugao Yamanouchi (1902-1970) provided the basis of the detailed pottery chronology for the Jomon Period (12,000-2,300 BP) which is still used in a modified version today (Yamanouchi 1937). Japanese archaeological interpretation was thus constrained until the end of the Second World War.

Defeat in World War Two resulted in Japan becoming a democratic nation. One consequence of this political re-orientation was a drastic change in the country's social environment. Archaeology as it was used in history textbooks played an important role by symbolising this re-orientation within the context of the educational system (Habu and Fawcett 1986). In keeping with the democratic ideology of the times, archaeologists began a serious effort to share archaeological information with the general public and to involve interested individuals in excavation work. In addition, Marxist interpretation became common during the late 1940's and 1950's. Seiichi Wajima (1909-1971), who had been interested in the Marxist perspective as a means of historical interpretation before and during World War Two (Wajima 1936), applied the theory of historical materialism to Japanese archaeological data (Wajima 1948, 1958, 1962). He thus provided a theoretical basis for the interpretation of social change in prehistoric Japan. Wajima's work on the Minamibori shell mound (1958) has long been regarded as one of the basic studies in Japanese prehistoric settlement archaeology. His followers, furthermore, have retained a strong interest in

historical materialism.

It was during this stage that some European archaeological studies, in particular several books by Childe, were translated into Japanese (Childe 1951, 1954, 1958, 1964, 1969). Although these books presented only one aspect of European archaeology and their theoretical background was not fully understood by their readers in Japan, they did provide Japanese archaeologists with a new perspective on archaeological research. The interpretative framework presented by Childe continues to be an influential paradigm among some archaeologists to this day.

After the early 1950's, with the advent of the Cold War and pressure by the United States government on Japan to join in a long-term military alliance, the Japanese government became increasingly anti-communist. Throughout the next several decades Japanese politics and Japanese society in general became more conservative. By the 1970's, the Marxist perspective within the social sciences had become quite unpopular. In archaeology, enthusiasm towards Marxism, a school of thought which had provided archaeologists with a theoretical framework for their research, diminished. Unfortunately, no other framework was adopted in its place.

Contemporary Japanese archaeology is characterised by the accumulation of vast quantities of data and the refinement of typological chronologies. Thick site reports documenting a complete inventory of features, representative artifacts, and the results of scientific analyses, such as radio-carbon dates and floral and faunal species identification, are continuously published. The purpose of these documents is usually to describe and illustrate excavation results, not to synthesise the material into a broader theoretical framework. From Palaeolithic stone tools to recent Edo Period ceramics, artifacts are classified according to their stylistic features, and arranged in relative chronological order. In the studies of the Jomon Period, each of Yamanouchi's original pottery types is further divided into sub-types, and detailed chronological changes are suggested.

Another characteristic of contemporary archaeology in Japan is the prevalence of large-scale rescue excavations funded mainly by the national and provincial governments or large firms. Rapid economic development has resulted in the construction of many new buildings and roads in Japan. Since most of these are situated in the non-mountainous areas in which prehistoric people also made their homes, tens of thousands of sites have been destroyed.

In Japan archaeological sites are protected by the Law for the Protection and Conservation of Cultural Property. Before destroying a site, the private or public developer has a responsibility to pay for its excavation. The national government and large companies consider construction projects essential for further economic development and more efficient business. Developers, furthermore, realise that to construct new buildings quickly they must provide large amounts of money to finance rescue projects and the publication of excavation reports on

these sites. Prefectural and municipal governments, or archaeological research centres supported by various levels of government, have hired archaeologists to perform these excavations. Archaeologists working on such salvage projects form the largest sector of the archaeological community in contemporary Japan. From 1970 to 1985, their numbers have increased from 121 to 2,972 (Inada 1986, 17). The result of these trends has been the systematisation of excavation and research methods and more efficient excavation within limited time periods.

Rescue excavations have received broad public support, especially since the 1970's. In Japan, one commonly hears the term 'archaeological boom' used to describe large-scale interest in archaeology by non-professionals. One consequence of this interest is that new archaeological discoveries are frequently reported by the mass media. The scale of the reporting and the obvious awareness of archaeological work by the general public show the importance of the discipline in Japanese society. They also explain why such a large number of rescue excavations are carried out in spite of their tremendous cost.

The third characteristic of contemporary Japanese archaeology is its ideologically neutral orientation. Most Japanese archaeologists believe that the interpretation of archaeological results should be scientifically objective and dislike becoming involved in political issues. Archaeologists who write about the political side of archaeology, or who are involved in site conservation movements, are often labelled 'unscientific' archaeologists. This trend contrasts with the situation during the late 1940's and 1950's, when archaeology played an important role in denying the emperor worship ideology which had dominated Japanese thought prior to and during World War Two.

'Western-Influenced' Archaeology in Contemporary Japanese Archaeology

In the previous section, I described briefly the history and important characteristics of Japanese archaeology. However, I refrained from mentioning the influence of Western archaeology on contemporary Japanese work since I thought that such a discussion would not help to clarify the differences between the discipline as it is practised in Japan and the West. Contemporary Japanese archaeology is not of course completely isolated from Western archaeology. The result of high levels of economic growth since the 1960's has been the rapid westernisation of many aspects of Japanese life and the incorporation of a large amount of information from abroad into Japanese thinking and behaviour. These influences have also been felt in the field of archaeology. Many recent works by Western archaeologists are currently being read in Japan and some aspects of Western archaeology, such as ecological archaeology, the use of computers and statistical techniques, systematic sampling, and various methodological approaches which integrate the physical and biological sciences into archaeological research, have begun to be adopted by some Japanese archaeologists. These types of archaeology are distinguished from 'traditional' Japanese archaeology by their close relationship to scientific disciplines such as physical anthropology, zoology, botany, geology, and chemistry. Jomon studies by Akazawa

(1980, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1986, 1987), Akazawa and Maeyama (1986), Koike (1979, 1986a, 1986b), Koyama (1978), and Suzuki (1981, 1986) are a few examples.

Significantly, these attempts involve only a small minority of Japanese archaeologists (Anazawa 1988). Furthermore, when 'Western influenced' Japanese archaeology is compared with European and American archaeology, it becomes obvious that the introduction of Western archaeology into Japan has been only partial. 'Western influenced' Japanese archaeology has been affected primarily by 'scientific' archaeology and generally has a relatively practical orientation, while European and American archaeology tend to concentrate on the discussion of theory. Increasing scepticism and doubt shown by Western archaeologists about the possibility of attaining 'objectivity' in archaeological interpretation is virtually absent in Japan, where only a few people (e.g. Tsude 1986) are interested in such issues. In other words, the isolation of the Japanese archaeological community from that of the West is highly selective. Archaeologists working in Japan will accept techniques which they consider unrelated to questions of ideology, but they are closed to discussions which focus on ideological issues. This is related to the general lack of concern for theoretical and ideological arguments which is characteristic of contemporary Japanese archaeology as discussed in the previous section.

It can be argued that linguistic difference is the main factor preventing Japanese archaeologists from understanding Western archaeology. Japanese differs significantly from all Western languages. This makes the exchange of ideas difficult, since only a few Japanese archaeologists can read the voluminous non-Japanese archaeological literature quickly and correctly. Many archaeology students studying in Japanese universities today know the names of such Western archaeologists as Lewis R. Binford, Colin Renfrew, Kent V. Flannery, David L. Clarke and Ian Hodder. However, the works of these scholars are often understood through the brief summaries of others, rather than by reading complete, original texts. Consequently, the understanding of Western archaeology in Japan is limited and often simplistic. On the other hand, the strong influence of Western theories and methods on archaeologists and anthropologists of the Meiji and Taisho periods shows that linguistic differences need not be a crucial barrier to understanding Western archaeology in Japan. I believe that the main barrier between Japanese and Western archaeology lies not in problems of language but in the orientation of Japanese archaeology itself.

Contemporary Japanese Archaeology and Society

To summarise, contemporary archaeology in Japan is characterised by detailed descriptions of excavation results and a strong emphasis on typological chronology, lack of the theoretical discussion, and reliance on scientific objectivity. Interaction with contemporary Western archaeology is limited. Furthermore, Western archaeology has little influence on the more traditional aspects of Japanese archaeology. Many Japanese archaeologists believe that a detailed typological chronology

is the basis of all archaeological studies, and that by accumulating data they will automatically be able to reveal the past.

It is in these empirical and inductive aspects that Japanese archaeology differs significantly from the theoretically oriented archaeology commonly found in the West. Vast amounts of excavation results, precise temporal control based on typological chronology, and high technology scientific analyses have produced large quantities of high quality raw data many of which are available in published site reports. Such detailed description of raw data is rarely found in Western archaeological reports. This is one of the strengths of Japanese archaeology. However, the lack of theoretical frameworks on which to base interpretations using these data is the weakest point in contemporary Japanese archaeology.

Japanese archaeology is often criticised by Western archaeologists because of its over emphasis on pottery chronology and overly detailed description. These specific traits are frequently ascribed to the discipline's historical orientation (e.g. Edwards 1988) and to severe political restrictions during the 1930's and early 1940's (e.g. Ikawa-Smith 1982). These arguments are persuasive and valid for the periods involved. Nevertheless, they do not explain why such trends are particularly noticeable again after the 1970's.

The recent conservatism of Japanese society seems to have affected the orientation of archaeological research, and has constrained the possibility of effective archaeological studies. In many ways, contemporary Japanese archaeology resembles the work done immediately prior to and during World War Two. A strong emphasis on pottery chronology, the stress on detailed description, and little discussion of theoretical issues are reminiscent of archaeology from the late 1920's to 1945. Unlike research done during the war, archaeology today is not restricted by being under direct government control. However, most Japanese archaeologists are unwilling to conduct research that differs from the work of other archaeologists or to challenge established procedure. Consequently, chronological work and precise description of materials are preferred to theoretical arguments.

National and prefectural funding of rescue excavations seems to have a profound influence on the orientation of Japanese archaeology today. As Patterson (1984) points out, control of funding is the most effective way of influencing scientific studies in democratic societies. This control is not necessarily consciously planned; nevertheless, it is often more effective than direct restrictions. In the Japanese case, archaeologists have benefited from extensive funding at the expense of rapid site destruction. This situation has resulted in efficient excavation and data accumulation becoming the primary tasks of archaeological research. Theoretical innovations and ideological discussions arouse little interest, since these studies do not contribute to the practical purposes mentioned above. They might even interfere with the government's goals.

Lack of theoretical discussion is also closely related to the lack of contact with Western archaeology. Most theoretical and methodological frameworks in Japanese archaeology, such as cultural evolutionism, historical materialism, diffusionism, typology, and stratigraphy, were originally borrowed from Western archaeology or other Western sciences during the pre-war years. Isolated from recent theoretical discussions of Western archaeology, they have gradually been transformed into distinctive Japanese versions. As time passes, they lose their original meanings and become concepts which are no longer comprehensible to Western archaeologists.

In this paper, I do not want to suggest that Japanese archaeology is inferior to Western archaeology and that Japanese archaeologists should accept the Western framework without criticism. Both schools of archaeology have their advantages and disadvantages and the gap should be understood as one of difference rather than of inferiority and superiority. However, as this paper shows, the history of Japanese archaeology is also the history of interaction between Japan and the West. Without close interaction with archaeology in other countries, the perspective of Japanese archaeology will remain narrow and limited. Recent theoretical discussions in the Western archaeological literature will provide new perspectives for Japanese archaeologists, if these discussions are properly introduced into Japan.

Concluding Remarks

The isolation of Japanese archaeology from world archaeology will not change in the near future. Most Japanese archaeologists are busy working on rescue excavations and have no time to acquire new information from abroad or to consider theoretical issues. Recently, the urgent necessity of conducting rescue excavations has penetrated even the campuses of many universities, where university professors have felt obliged to do salvage work. The problem of rescue excavation plagues not only cultural resource management archaeologists, but also those university archaeologists who should be at the forefront of archaeological thinking and innovation.

The end result of these circumstances is that archaeologists are inevitably involved in political issues whether they want to be or not. Since the financial backing for the accumulation of archaeological data has been a spin-off of Japanese high economic growth, archaeologists have accepted inevitable rapid site destruction. Sadly, if the present circumstances continue, in the near future there may be no sites left to excavate in Japan.

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