

Archaeology, Tourism, and Japanese Historical Consciousness

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Introduction: Archaeology, Tourism, and Historical Consciousness

In Japan, archaeology and history are inextricably linked. During the latter half of the twentieth century and into the present century, archaeology has been one way for Japanese citizens to form an image of themselves.¹ This historical consciousness has developed in dialogue with the education system, the mass media and the tourist industry.

This paper examines Japanese historical consciousness and archaeological tourism. It begins with a discussion of internal Japanese tourism and Japanese identity. An overview of the role Japanese archaeological research has played in creating a framework for understanding the origins of the Japanese people's history follows. Finally, the paper shows how two archaeological tourist sites, Asuka Mura 明日香村 and Sannai Maruyama 三内丸山, contribute to the public's understanding of the Japanese past.

Japanese Tourism, Archaeology and National Identity

Over the past several decades, tourism has emerged as an important global phenomenon.² As people around the world have become more closely integrated economically, tourist sites have not become thematically homogenized. Instead they have become spaces where national and local identities are forged. As Meethan notes, “[W]hile tourism is globalized in terms of the movement of people and capital, it is also leading to the reassertion of more localized forms of culture, and the emergence of new ‘hybrid’ forms created for both domestic purposes as much as tourist consumption.”³

In various regions, archaeological sites present messages about the past to tourists.⁴ Archaeological sites and information create and sustain national identities and, in some cases, uphold nationalist political agendas.⁵ Japanese archaeological sites are no exception. From the heritage village of Asuka Mura, to the explanation meetings (*genchi setsumeikai* 現地説明会) held every year at thousands of local excavations throughout Japan, archaeological sites provide international and domestic tourists with stories about the Japanese people's past and a chance to view, or even touch, ancient artifacts and features.⁶

Japanese tourism continues to be primarily domestic despite an increase, over the past forty years, of overseas tourist travel by Japanese citizens.⁷ Scholars such as Ivy and Robertson⁸ have shown links between the Japanese government's efforts to revitalize the economies of rural areas, attempts by tourist operators to create new markets for their products and the construction of notions of local and national Japanese identity. Nostalgia for an imagined past represented by the *furusato* ふるさと (故郷) or ‘old home/village’ culture of “traditional” Japan is a key theme of Japanese domestic tourism.⁹ Graburn¹⁰ points out that, since the late

1980s, the Japanese government has ideologically disconnected the notion of *furusato* from its previous close relationship with the countryside and small-town Japan and has urged Japanese people to find *furusato* in the close sentimental attachments they form within their own urban and suburban communities.¹¹ Nevertheless, the core meaning of *furusato* is still derived from images of the physical setting, social structure and cultural features of traditional, village Japan.¹² The use of the term *furusato* to describe Japanese archaeological sites encourages tourists to make a link between these sites and the origins of the Japanese.

Overview of the Politics and Practice of Prewar and Postwar Japanese Archaeology

Postwar Japanese archaeology is best understood within the context of prewar ultra-nationalist ideology. Prewar Japanese nationalist ideology was based on the premise that the Japanese emperor was a sacred being descended from the gods. Japanese school children were taught allegiance to the emperor, an embodied god and symbolic father of all Japanese national subjects. This imperial ideology was also propagated through state and quasi-state institutions.¹³ It provided the ideological justification for Japanese imperial expansion into Asia and entry into World War II.

Prewar nationalist ideology assumed that the *Kojiki* 古事記 (712 CE) and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720 CE) explained the origins of the imperial line, the Japanese state and the Japanese people. From the 1890s on, archaeologists limited their investigations of Japan's prehistoric remains (for example, those of the Jōmon period (c.10,000-300 BCE)) to detailed descriptions and typological classification of artifacts making no attempt to tie these archaeological sites and artifacts to the groups of people who could have made them.¹⁴

Japanese history and Japanese archaeological history underwent a dramatic change of direction in 1945 with the beginning of the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers occupation. During the confusion of the first few postwar years, little archaeological work was carried out. By 1948, however, Volume 1 of *Nihon kōkogaku nenpō* 日本考古学年報 (*Archaeologia Japonica: The Annual Report of the Japanese Archaeologists Association*), reported 109 excavations. Most of these small-scale research efforts were conducted either by professional, university-based archaeologists assisted by students in school archaeology clubs or by amateur archaeologists, many of whom were history teachers or civil servants. These archaeologists, like many of their compatriots in the post-war period, felt they had a mission; to rewrite the history of Japan unsullied by the myths of prewar nationalist ideology.¹⁵

This goal of rewriting Japanese history was linked to two other premises that still underlie Japanese archaeological work. The first of these is that Japanese ancient history should be based on the excavation and analysis of empirical evidence using scientific methods. This premise was first articulated during the 1947–1950 excavation of the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE) Toro 登呂 site. At Toro, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from several universities worked cooperatively using systematic excavation and analysis of material remains. News of the Toro excavation was widely disseminated through local and national newspapers. Toro made the public aware of archaeology, buried cultural properties and the value of the scientific study of the Japanese past.¹⁶

The second premise was articulated by postwar Marxist scholars who argued that the role of archaeologists and archaeology was to work with the Japanese people to create

a non-elitist history. Scholars working within this tradition argued that historical knowledge should be produced by the common Japanese people. The excavation of the Tsukinowa burial mound (*Tsukinowa kofun* 月の輪古墳) by archaeologists from Okayama University and about 10,000 local people is one of the best examples of the archaeological expression of the “people’s history movement” (“*kokuminteki rekishigaku undō*” (国民的歴史運動). The archaeologists directing the excavation believed that history could be studied democratically by involving people from as many social backgrounds as possible.¹⁷ At Tsukinowa, the new concept of empirically-based archaeological research was tied to the idea that archaeological remains are a reservoir of information about the Japanese people’s history. In short, “early postwar Japanese archaeology focused on the excavation, description, and analysis of material remains as a way of creating Japanese history, free from imperial nationalist ideology.”¹⁸

By the late 1950s, growing economic prosperity had resulted in escalating rates of land development and, consequently, archaeological site destruction in Japan. Archaeologists and historians worried that public and private developers were destroying the evidence they needed to understand scientifically the Japanese people’s early history. Many archaeologists opposed the Liberal Democratic Party government’s policy of capitalist development at any cost saying that archaeological sites should be protected and preserved. Although some Marxist scholars argued that all archaeological sites should be preserved, most archaeologists took the pragmatic position that land development and site destruction were inevitable. Consequently, through the 1960s, archaeologists excavated some of the sites threatened with destruction while pressuring the government to protect those sites they deemed especially important.¹⁹

The structure of archaeological research and the position of archaeology in Japanese society changed toward the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Reacting to pressure from students, archaeologists and members of the public concerned with the increasing number of archaeological sites being destroyed, the Japanese government provided more funding for archaeological work. Administrators and archaeologists from the Bunkachō 文化庁 (Agency for Cultural Affairs), formed in 1968, developed a new administrative archaeological system at the national, prefectural and municipal levels.²⁰ With this system in place, archaeologists continued excavating sites, analysing information derived from these excavations and writing descriptive site reports. Given the large number of sites threatened with destruction each year, however, they had little time to explicitly develop theoretical frameworks to understand and explain the significance of the data they produced. This explanatory void was filled by other voices including the media and the tourist industry, both of which began to present and interpret archaeological information for the non-specialist public.

How have these sites been discussed and explained by the mass media and tourist industry? The interpretation of Japanese archaeological sites is largely dependant on the material culture found at each location. Nevertheless, broad themes have been used to frame questions concerning sites from a range of prehistoric and historic periods and geographical locations in Japan. The most important of these themes is that of the origins of the Japanese people, culture and nation-state.

The concept of *nihonjinron* 日本人論 explains the relationship between Japanese archaeology, ethnicity and nationalism²¹. *Nihonjinron* is a discourse produced by Japanese and foreign intellectual and business elites since the 1970s. The central premise of *nihonjinron*

is that the Japanese people and culture are unique and form a homogeneous linguistic, cultural and racial group situated within the Japanese nation. *Nihonjinron* has been praised as a means for Japanese people to form a positive image of themselves²² (Yoshino 1992). It has been criticized as a subtle new form of Japanese nationalism that both masks the true class, racial and cultural heterogeneity of Japanese society and deemphasizes social and class conflict in Japan in favour of group harmony.²³ Over the past forty years, the interpretation of archaeological results and materials for the general public has often been couched in terms of the broad theme of Japanese origin. These interpretations sometimes reflect ideas found in *nihonjinron* about Japanese ethnic homogeneity and uniqueness. In the following section, I will discuss how the archaeological sites of Asuka Mura and Sannai Maruyama are presented to tourists and how each teaches the public about Japanese origins.

The Archaeological Sites

Asuka Mura

The development by the Japanese government of a national park and special preservation area in Asuka Mura, Nara prefecture, is an example of how archaeological tourism informs the Japanese people's understanding of their own national identity. The name *Asuka* 飛鳥 (明日香) is presently used by the village of Asuka Mura located at the southern end of the Nara basin. This name also denotes a locale where numerous archaeological sites dating from the Asuka period (538 or 552 until 710) are found. During the approximately 160 years of the Asuka period, this region was the administrative centre of the nascent Japanese state and home to the leading Japanese clans, including the Imperial family. Asuka contains the remains of many important archaeological sites, including seventeen palace sites, many temples and a number of sixth and seventh century tombs. One of the most famous of these is Takamatsuzuka 高松塚, a burial mound that brought Asuka and Japanese archaeology into the public eye in 1972. It was in this year that archaeologists discovered spectacular painted frescos on the interior walls of this tomb's burial chamber. Takamatsuzuka linked the leading families of Asuka to continental kingdoms. Many tourists visited Takamatsuzuka during the 1970s and the site remains a popular tourist destination. Tourists also visit three other national park sites in the area including Iwaido 祝戸, Amakashi no Oka 甘檜丘, and the Ishibutai 石舞台 tomb, as well as the Asuka National Historical Museum.

Asuka has been spiritually and historically important to some Japanese since the Meiji period, when scholars first reassessed the eighth century *Man'yōshū* 万葉集. Readings of the *Man'yōshū* encouraged interpretations of Asuka as 'the hometown of the Japanese heart' (*Nihon no kokoro no furusato* 日本の心のふるさと). Throughout the prewar and wartime years, Asuka, continued to be seen as the home of the ancient Japanese nation and Japanese spirit.²⁴ During the 1950s the 'Theory of Asuka as the Japanese hometown' (*Asuka furusato ron* 飛鳥ふるさと論) was revived.²⁵ By the late 1980s, Asuka was a well-known tourist site. Tourist operators and the Japanese government encouraged visitors to go there to learn about the origins of Japan and enjoy the traditional Japanese landscape.

As an internal tourist destination for Japanese and foreign visitors, Asuka provides information about the Japanese past and, in doing so, creates specific messages about the Japanese present. The site is an excellent example of how a new sense of Japanese identity, one

based not in imperialist ideology but on the notion of Japanese homogeneity and uniqueness, has become an important way of thinking about the Japanese past and present. This has occurred despite attempts by Japanese archaeologists to create a history for the Japanese people using only empirical evidence.

Sannai Maruyama

Sannai Maruyama is an Early to Middle Jōmon period site (3500-2000 BC) located in Aomori prefecture in northern Honshu. The site is remarkable because of its complexity and large size—it contains “over 700 hundred pit dwellings, approximately twenty long houses, about 100 remains of raised-floor buildings, approximately 250 adult grave pits and 800 burial jars for infants and children, several large middens and mounds containing garbage”²⁶ and has produced tens of thousands of boxes of artifacts. Newspapers, magazines and the television brought news of the site to the attention of the Japanese public in 1994, soon after excavations began. By July 1997, more than one million tourists had visited Sannai Maruyama,²⁷ and several academic and semi-academic conferences had been held to discuss the site and its significance. In response to pressure by archaeologists, elected officials of Aomori prefecture and the public, the site was designated a National Historical Site (*kuni shitei iseki* 国指定遺跡) in March 1997.

During late 1990s, the Japanese public’s fascination with Sannai Maruyama continued unabated. As tourists flocked to the site, the Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Information Association (Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Hasshin no kai 三内丸山縄文発信の会), an organization made up of community supporters of the site, began publishing the Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Files (Sannai Maruyama Jōmon File 三内丸山縄文ファイル, SMJF).²⁸ These monthly bulletins described recent finds and reported on discussions between intellectuals and experts about Sannai Maruyama and its significance for understanding Japanese, Asian and world history. While the SMJF bulletins were not aimed specifically at tourists, they provide insights into the kinds of information archaeologists managing the site presented to the public since most of what these bulletins report are the results of public symposia. A review of the SMJF from Volume 1, published in October 1995, until Volume 36, published in October 1998, reveals that their presentation of the site during this time focused on several themes.

One important theme presented in the SMJF bulletins was the high degree of social complexity found at Sannai Maruyama, particularly in terms of social organization, settlement and the economy. For example, Dr. Koyama Shuzo of the National Museum of Ethnology and Mr. Okada Yasuhiro, an archaeologist working for the Sannai Maruyama Preservation Office reflect on whether Sannai Maruyama should be considered a “city” where people consumed food and other items produced elsewhere, rather than a “village” where production was local.²⁹ They also discuss the restoration of the buildings of the site and point out that the large surface size of many of the structural remains necessitates a rethinking of Jōmon Period architecture as consisting of only small, dark “hovels.”³⁰

The subsistence base of the people living at Sannai Maruyama was a second important theme. Of particular interest are suggestions that people using the site might have been tending plants, particularly chestnut trees and millet, in addition to foraging for food.³¹ Plant tending is important because it touches on the question of how plants were domesticated

and the beginning of agriculture in Japan. Since rice cultivation and the social system that is thought to be linked to it are considered central aspects of Japanese identity, the Japanese public and archaeologists have generally considered the Yayoi Period, when rice was first cultivated in Japan, to be the time when the Japanese people originated.³² By unhinging the beginning of plant domestication from rice cultivation, Sannai Maruyama allows the Japanese public to imagine a Jōmon Period origin for the Japanese people and culture.

A third theme explored in the SMJF bulletins is links between contemporary Japanese populations and the people who lived at Sannai Maruyama during the Jōmon Period. This discussion follows several lines. The first of these is a consideration of the biological relationship between the skeletal remains from Sannai Maruyama and regionally defined groups of people living in Japan today—i.e., “ethnic” Japanese from the eastern and western parts of the archipelago, the Ainu and inhabitants of present-day Okinawa.³³ The second is the relationship between the culture of the people who lived at Sannai Maruyama and today’s Japanese. Implicit in this discussion is curiosity about the origins of various cultural elements of modern Japan. One of the ways the connection between the Jōmon and modern Japan is made is through the use of ethnographic analogy. For example, the Onbashira 御柱 Festival held in Suwa district, Nagano prefecture, is discussed in detail. During this festival, participants ritually fell, transport and raise a fir tree (taken from Mt. Yatsugatake) at the Kamisha 上社 Shrine. The Onbashira Festival is used to explain the function of the large chestnut trunk remains discovered in a series of six enormous pits at Sannai Maruyama.³⁴

Finally, many of the SMJF bulletins speculate about Jōmon spiritual beliefs. Since worldviews and beliefs are impossible to “see” archaeologically, these discussions use imaginative speculation and the use of ethnographic analogy from contemporary Japan—for example, the Onbashira Festival mentioned above—or elsewhere. When discussing the six large pits found at the site Dr. Umesao Tadao 梅棹忠夫, Special Advisor, National Museum of Ethnology (Kokuritsu Minzokugaku Hakubutsu-kan 国立民族学博物館) states that:

I compared Jōmon with other civilizations including Andes civilization in my mind. . . . As I watched Sannai Maruyama Relics in comparison to Andes civilization, I felt it’s easier to consider a shrine the house remains with the six columns of 1 meter in diameter. They had a shrine in the center of Sannai Maruyama. They placed a god on it. . . . But today I thought it should be like Izumo Shrine deity.”³⁵

Two years later Dr. Umesao visited Sannai Maruyama again. An observer of his visit noted that: “[s]tanding in front of the six pillar structure he expressed even greater conviction . . . that it was a shrine.”³⁶ Dr. Umesao was reacting to a structure made of six enormous chestnut tree pillars erected by archaeologists at Sannai Maruyama. Following a global search, these chestnut tree trunks were imported from near the Black Sea in Russia. After fumigation, they were transported to Sannai Maruyama where “in a ceremony prior to the restoration, about a hundred men and women dressed in Jōmon style dragged the logs over rollers, just as the people of the time probably did.”³⁷ The structure that was subsequently built has been used by some people as a place of worship at the New Year.³⁸ Of course archaeologists can only speculate about the appearance of the original structure which originally stood on the site of the nearby six pits.

Sannai Maruyama is significant for archaeologists and the public because of information it provides about the complexity of Jōmon Period society and culture. In addition, Sannai Maruyama was one of the first pre-state Japanese archaeological sites to interest large numbers of non-archaeologists. Prior to the development of a broad public interest in Sannai Maruyama, the general public thought the origins of Japanese culture was closely associated with beginning of rice cultivation and social stratification found during the Yayoi or Kofun periods. Japanese state origins had been traced to seventh and eighth century sites like Asuka Mura. Sannai Maruyama changed this understanding of Japanese origins and consequently of Japanese identity. The suggestion by some public intellectuals that there is “a direct link between the Jōmon culture of Sannai Maruyama and contemporary Japanese culture” and that “the ‘spirit of the Jōmon culture’ (*Jōmon no seishin* 縄文の精神) can be found in modern Japanese culture, particularly in the Tohoku region” reiterates the idea of Japanese past and present cultural homogeneity.³⁹ However, in contrast to this conservative reading, other archaeologists and archaeological interpreters have suggested that Sannai Maruyama may represent Japanese prehistoric and contemporary cultural diversity⁴⁰ (Habu and Fawcett 1999: 592).

Conclusion

Domestic tourism offers Japan citizens an opportunity to escape the pressures of the everyday world of work. A visit to an archaeological site encourages some of these tourists to think about Japanese history and prehistory and the origins of the Japanese people, culture and nation. In this paper I have begun a discussion of how archaeological tourism influences Japanese historical consciousness. I have pointed out that, as postwar Japanese archaeologists rebuilt their discipline, they did so with the goal of writing a non-imperial history for the Japanese people using physical remains from archaeological sites. Over the past thirty years, archaeologists have developed an extensive system of administrative archaeology through which they have excavated sites throughout Japan. Archaeologists have also educated the public about the Japanese past. Increasingly, this public education has been conducted through tourism as seen at both Asuka Mura and Sannai Maruyama. At both of these sites, tourists are explicitly and implicitly encouraged to think about what it means to be Japanese. In attempting to answer this question, archaeologists, tourist operators, bureaucrats and others are questioning what it means to be Japanese in the early twenty-first century.

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NOTES

¹ See Edwards 1991, Edwards 1996, Fawcett 1995, Fawcett 1996, Ikawa-Smith 1995, Habu and Fawcett 1999, Kaner 1996.

² See MacCannell 1976, Meethan 2001, Smith 1989, Urry 1990

³ See Meethan 2001, p. 115.

⁴ See Handler and Gable 1997, Robb 1998

⁵ See Kohl and Fawcett 1995.

- ⁶ See Fawcett 1990.
- ⁷ See Graburn 1995, p. 48.
- ⁸ See Ivy 1995, Robertson 1988 and Robertson 1991.
- ⁹ See Creighton 1995, Graburn 1995, Graburn 1998, Ivy 1995, Robertson 1991
- ¹⁰ Graburn 1998, p. 207 cites Robertson 1991.
- ¹¹ Rae has documented tourists' and travel agents' use of the term *furusato* to refer to overseas destinations such as Green Gables House in Prince Edward Island, Canada and Top Hill Farm in the United Kingdom. He argues that some young Japanese deal with a sense of alienation and loss of tradition in their homeland by searching for *furusato* in specific international settings. See Rae 2000 for discussion of how these international tourist sites come to signify *furusato* for some Japanese tourists.
- ¹² See Robertson 1988.
- ¹³ See Gluck 1985.
- ¹⁴ See Fawcett 1995, pp. 232-233.
- ¹⁵ See Fawcett 1990 and Fawcett 1995.
- ¹⁶ See Edwards 1991, Fawcett 1990 and Fawcett 1995.
- ¹⁷ See Yoshida 1984, p. 45.
- ¹⁸ See Fawcett 1995, p. 236.
- ¹⁹ See Fawcett 1995, p. 238.
- ²⁰ See Fawcett 1990 for a detailed history of Japanese administrative archaeology.
- ²¹ See Fawcett 1990 and Habu and Fawcett 1999.
- ²² See Yoshino 1992.
- ²³ See Befu 1984, Befu 1993 and Mouer and Sugimoto 1986.
- ²⁴ See Fawcett 1990, p. 151.
- ²⁵ See Fawcett 1990, p. 152.
- ²⁶ See Habu and Fawcett 1999, p. 588.
- ²⁷ See Habu and Fawcett 1999, p. 590.
- ²⁸ The Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Files are published in Japanese and English translation. For the purposes of this paper, I have used the English translations by the Sannai-Maruyama Jōmon Information Association (SMJIA) (Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Hasshin no kai 三内丸山縄文発信の会). The publication name was originally translated as Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Era File and the group's name was translated as Sannai Maruyama Jōmon Era Information Transmission Association. These translations were changed. This paper uses the latest translations.
- ²⁹ See SMJIA 1995a.
- ³⁰ See SMJIA 1995b.
- ³¹ See SMJIA 1996a
- ³² See Ohnuki-Tierney 1993.
- ³³ See Hanihara 1997
- ³⁴ See Miyasaka 1996a.
- ³⁵ See SMJIA 1995c, p. 5.
- ³⁶ See SMJIA 1998, p. 1.
- ³⁷ See SMJIA 1996b, p. 4.
- ³⁸ See SMJIA 1997, p. 1.
- ³⁹ See Habu and Fawcett 1999, p. 591.
- ⁴⁰ See Habu and Fawcett 1999, p. 592.