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# Revelations in Japanese Archaeology

Paleolithic Come-back,  
Island Interactions,  
Classical Writings

Edited by

Barbara Seyock, Gina L. Barnes,  
and Fumiko Ikawa-Smith

Access Archaeology





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**REVELATIONS IN JAPANESE ARCHAEOLOGY:  
PALEOLITHIC COME-BACK, ISLAND INTERACTIONS, CLASSICAL WRITINGS**

Preface

*Barbara SEYOCK and Gina L. BARNES*

**Revelations**

This volume brings to international attention several developments in Japanese archaeology, the most prominent of which are new dates and evidence for an early Paleolithic that pre-dates the 30,000 BP marker-tephra of Aira-Tanzawa, and the growing recognition of inter-island / island-mainland interactions in socio-economic development.

Part I deals with the Paleolithic problem in Japan, which dates to the year 2000—when an amateur archaeologist, FUJIMURA Hiroshi, was caught on video by the Mainichi Newspaper salting sites with Jōmon artifacts inserted under tephra of increasing ages, dating back to 600,000 BP. It took Japanese archaeology 15 years to recover from this fraud, with new excavations revealing Early Paleolithic site materials untouched by FUJIMURA that indicate the possible reality of early occupation of Japan by hominins that used a non-Mousterian Early Paleolithic stone tool technology. These results are introduced by Fumiko IKAWA-SMITH, who recounts the history of Paleolithic studies in Japan and the efforts to overcome the setback perpetrated by FUJIMURA.

Part II deals with the Protohistoric period which ranges from agricultural beginnings to early state formation. The chapters here are unique in their focus on peripheral and border regions, illustrating especially how islands can be instrumental stepping-stones in cultural transmission and transformation. The technologies and goods that pass through these intermediaries are often of seminal function in socio-political development. At issue particularly are the introduction of wet-rice agriculture into Japan, the introduction of metal technologies, and metal products such as iron goods and bronze mirrors.

Part III looks back to the beginning of Japanese archaeology in the late 19th century, when the Meiji Government of the newly restored imperial regime invited foreign scholars and advisors to share their expertise with Japan. Edward S. MORSE was a zoologist from New England who was invited to teach at Tōkyō Imperial University. Though not the first foreigner to acknowledge the archaeological remains in Japan, he was instrumental in the development of the field there, being the first person to identify cord-marked (*jōmon*) pottery based on his knowledge of northeast American and Danish prehistoric ceramics. MOOS presented two of MORSE's writings with annotations to enhance understanding of their role in the developing specialism of archaeology.

### **Contributions from the *Bulletin of the Society for East Asian Archaeology* (BSEAA)**

The chapters herein are drawn from the BSEAA, an online journal comprised mainly of papers presented at successive Society conferences. The Bulletin was published in three issues: in 2007, 2008, and 2016, and is embedded in the Society for East Asian Archaeology (SEAA) website [seaa-web.org]. BSEAA recruited authors and articles primarily from the major SEAA conferences, but it was still open to contributions from other experts in the field of archaeological research in East Asia and adjacent regions.

The fate of many self-initiated publication projects is that they end up in a holding pattern due lack of time and staff. We are therefore particularly pleased to be able to present a selection of the newly edited, partially revised articles from BSEAA on major topics in East Asian archaeology in a now coherent volume. Those that have not been revised for this volume are understood to be still valid characterizations of their topics. In addition, two contributions from the panel on Paleolithic Archaeology in Japan (SEAA 6 Conference, Ulaanbaatar 2014) that were not originally published in BSEAA are now available in written form. Two smaller contributions to BSEAA, on the other hand—a book review and the summary of a panel—are not included here as they were too outdated to fit into this edition. For all original articles and further photographs, we would like to refer you to the Society's website [<https://seaa-web.org/publications/bseaa>].

This volume does not follow the original order of publication. We have rearranged the articles according to content and chronological context. We make no claim to comprehensively cover Japanese or even East Asian archaeology in its entirety. Large areas of current research are not reflected in this collection, for example regarding the broad research field of early ceramic cultures of Jōmon period Japan or the archaeology of historical times, which deserve greater attention. Such perspectives are reserved for future efforts in further publication projects of the Society for East Asian Archaeology.

In the bibliography, we provide the references in both the common romanized transcription (Pinyin for Chinese, revised Hepburn for Japanese, and Revised Romanization 2000 for Korean) as well as the original script. These designations are also used in the text to indicate pronunciations in different languages using the same Chinese characters. Both are intended to facilitate access to the literature, be it via online media or local research institutions. Since most of our articles deal with archaeological topics related to Japan, we have chosen American English as our standard here to conform to the publishing style in Japanese research.

This publication involves all three people who originally contributed significantly to the success of the Bulletin: Gina BARNES, who provided the inspiring model for the Bulletin with her “EAANouncements” (1990 to 1998), the newsletter of her East Asian Archaeology Network (EAAN) which in 1996 became the Society for East Asian Archaeology; Barbara SEYOCK, the initiator and editor of the BSEAA, and Fumiko IKAWA-SMITH, to whom we owe the creation of the third BSEAA issue in 2016. The articles for this volume were first under the editorship of Seyock, and the illustrations fell under the remit of SEYOCK and Michael MOOS. IKAWA-SMITH dealt with problems in the Paleolithic section, and we would like particularly to thank for her crucial involvement in communicating with authors of those chapters. BARNES provided the English-language review and proof-reading for all texts, and reformatted the volume, inserting the figures and adjusting them where necessary.

We thank all authors who willingly allowed their work to be published in this volume and who were patient and cooperative through a long two years of editing.

## Abbreviations:

- languages are indicated by C. = Chinese, K. = Korean, J. = Japanese
- in the references, N.p. = no publisher; n.d. = no date
  
- AMS = radiocarbon dating by Accelerator Mass Spectrometry
- BP = before present (with 'present' being 1952 for radiocarbon dating)
- cal. = calibrated radiocarbon dates, uncal. = radiocarbon dates not calibrated
- cm = centimeters
- Ga = billion years ago
- ka = thousand years ago
- m = meters
- Ma = million years ago
- mDNA = mitochondrial DNA, also mtDNA
- MIS = Marine Isotope Stages
- OSL = Optically Stimulated Luminescence dating

## Style points:

- American punctuation and spelling is used throughout except for the term 'archaeology'
- when standing alone, capitalized Peninsula refers to the Korean Peninsula

**REVELATIONS IN JAPANESE ARCHAEOLOGY:  
PALEOLITHIC COME-BACK, ISLAND INTERACTIONS, CLASSICAL WRITINGS**  
Contributions from the  
*Bulletin of the Society for East Asian Archaeology*

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## Part I

# THE EARLY PALAEOOLITHIC IN JAPAN

## CHAPTER 1

### STARTING OVER AGAIN: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*Fumiko IKAWA-SMITH* 井川史子

*This introduction recounts the problems of assessing whether Japan had an “Early Paleolithic”, i.e., prior to ca. 40,000 years ago. Between the 1970s and 2000, dates for Paleolithic sites in Japan had progressively been pushed back to ca. 600,000 years ago. Then the “Paleolithic Hoax” A.K.A the “FUJIMURA Scandal” occurred in November 2000, throwing the field into disarray as amateur archaeologist FUJIMURA Shin’ichi was caught salting sites with Jōmon-period bifacially flaked artifacts inserted under intact volcanic tephra layers dating earlier in the Pleistocene. Since then Paleolithic archaeologists have endeavored to reassess old excavations and carry out new ones to determine how early the archipelago was occupied by humans. The collection here generally argues for possible early dates, but these do not go uncontested by others. These papers form one step in the long process of establishing certainty about the process of the human occupation of the Japanese Islands.*

**Keywords:** Early Paleolithic controversy, lithics, Palaeolithic hoax

#### **Paleolithic Research in Japan: in the Beginning**

During the Pleistocene, when the sea level was lowered due to glaciation, the Japanese archipelago was often connected with the Asian continent, and presence of fossil animals suggests that hominins, who were present at least by one million years ago in northeast Asia, could very well have reached the archipelago as well. There always have been enthusiasts searching for indications of such presence, as I noted before (IKAWA-SMITH 1978), but it was not until 1949 when the solid evidence turned up, and the pursuit of Paleolithic remains became the subject of serious academic inquiry.

It began with the recovery of stone artifacts from road-side exposure of Pleistocene formations at Iwajuku (Figure 1.1-4), about 90 km north of Tōkyō, in 1946 by AIZAWA Tadahiro, a young amateur, who was making a living by peddling foodstuff from door to door. After failing to convince a series of professional archaeologists of the authenticity of his finds, he finally found receptive ears with a team of archaeologists of Meiji University, who undertook to investigate. The 1949 excavation of the Iwajuku Site by the Meiji University team recovered lithic assemblages from two levels (SUGIHARA 1956). Once it was established that Pleistocene formations do contain artifacts, Paleolithic sites were discovered and investigated in a rapid succession. Nearly 100 sites were identified within 10 years since the Iwajuku excavation, and now over 74 years later, there are more than 10,500 known Paleolithic sites in the archipelago.

#### **Search for Earlier Paleolithic Remains**

Two of the stone tools recovered from the lower layer of the Iwajuku Site were bifacially flaked oval axes. These were first described as “hand-axes”, with the implication that they may be comparable to Lower Paleolithic specimens elsewhere. With the progress of the Paleolithic research, Quaternary geology of the archipelago became better understood, and it became quite clear that the Iwajuku “hand-axes” came from a stratum which could not be older than 30,000 BP.

In fact, the overwhelming majority of Paleolithic assemblages recovered so far were contained in Late Pleistocene formations, dating to what is now known as Oxygen Isotope Stage 2 (or MIS2) (29,000 to 14,000 years ago).

Nevertheless, the search for the oldest evidence of human occupation of the archipelago continued through the 1950s and 60s. The small number of assemblages that were thought to represent such evidence could be divided into three groups, and each met with skepticism. One of the groups, such as Gongenyama I assemblage (Figure 1.1: 2), also recovered by AIZAWA in a locality not far from Iwajuku, consisted of hand-axes and flakes detached from prepared cores (MARINGER 1956). There was no question about their artifactual status, but one could not be certain of its “Early Paleolithic” age, as the specimens were collected while the site was being prepared for housing construction. An age before 40,000 years was based on AIZAWA’s testimony several years later that he remembered that the artifacts lay below a layer of white pumice, which was subsequently radiocarbon dated to  $40,500 \pm 3,500$  uncal. BP (ARAI 1971).

Another group of assemblages were the results of meticulous excavations—such as at the Sōzudai Site (Figure 1.1: 10) in Kyūshū (SERIZAWA 1965; SERIZAWA and NAKAGAWA 1965) (see Chapter 2 herein) and at the Hoshino Site in northern Kantō (SERIZAWA 1966, 1978)—which recovered numerous lithic specimens in situ. In these cases, there was no question that the specimens came from formations dating to 40,000 to 130,000 years ago, but the specimens themselves failed to meet general acceptance as artifacts. To the third and final group belong a very small number of assemblages, such as the three bifacial pieces and flakes recovered the lowest layer of Fukui Cave (Figure 1.1: 1) in Kyūshū, famous for the very early occurrence of ceramic shards (KAMAKI and SERIZAWA 1967). A sample from the layer yielded a non-finite radiocarbon date of  $>31,900$  uncal. (GaK-952), but the assemblage consists of only 16 pieces of artifacts plus debitage, and it has not been replicated elsewhere.

### “Fujimura Scandal” of 2000, and its Aftermath

The situation began to change in the 1970s with the activities of the members of the Stone Age Study Group (Sekki Bunka Danwakai) situated in Sendai City, northern Honshū. A decisive moment came in April 1980, when FUJIMURA Shin’ichi, one of its members and a local amateur archaeologist, recovered ten artifacts—including hand-axes and picks, from a formation, clearly older than 30,000 BP—at



Figure 1.1 Paleolithic sites mentioned in the text

In alphabetical order: 1: Fukui, 2: Gongenyama, 3: Hoshino, 4: Iwajuku, 5: Kamitakamori, 6: Kanedori, 7: Nagaone, 8: Ōno, 9: Sōshin-Fudosaka, 10: Sōzudai, 11: Sunabara, 12: Zazaragi

Zazaragi Site (Figure 1.1: 12) in front of professional archaeologists and geoscientists (OKAMURA 2010: 70-74). This sensational discovery was followed by a series of equally remarkable finds at nearby sites.

Unlike the assemblages recovered by SERIZAWA and others in the 1960s, the artifactual nature of these lithic specimens were unquestionable, and they were sometimes unearthed in front of witnesses by FUJIMURA himself, from layers whose ages can be unambiguously determined in relation to well-dated horizon-marker pumice deposits. As FUJIMURA's reputation as "God's hand" to spot the location within a site where Early and Middle Paleolithic artifacts were likely to be buried increased, he was often invited to come and give advice to investigators working at the sites further away from the Sendai area, such as the Soshin-Fudosaka Site (Figure 1.1: 9) in Hokkaidō and the Nagaone Site (Figure 1.1: 7) in Saitama Prefecture, north of Tōkyō.

As the number of Early and Middle Paleolithic sites increased, so did the antiquity of human occupation of the archipelago, the oldest being the bifacial tools recovered from the lowest layer at the Kami-takamori Site (Figure 1.1: 5), dated 0.58~0.60 million years ago. As some archaeologists began talking about the need for a paradigm shift in Japanese Paleolithic studies, uneasiness about his uncanny ability was felt by others, and the Mainichi Newspapers organized a special team to follow FUJIMURA as he visited archaeological sites. He was caught on video in the early morning of 5 November 2000 as he was burying artifacts at Kami-takamori. He has since confessed to having manufactured the evidence by placing genuine, but later, stone tools from his collection into much older geological layers at 42 sites. The series of events and the socio-cultural background leading to the "Fujimura Scandal" of November 2000 have been described in several publications, including HUDSON (2005) and KANER (2002).

Immediately afterwards, in November 2000, the Japanese Archaeological Association established an *ad hoc* Committee for Investigation into the Early and Middle Paleolithic Issues (Zen-chūsekki Mondai Chōsa Iinkai), which set out to examine some 3000 artifacts from about 200 sites where FUJIMURA was, or may have been, involved in excavation. The investigation resulted in the nullification of over 100 assemblages, with profound negative impact on Paleolithic research in particular, and archaeological studies in general. Nevertheless, there are over 14,500 "untainted" archaeological sites dating to the Pleistocene in the archipelago, including about 100 that are thought to predate 40,000 BP (Japanese Archaeological Association 2004; Zen-chūsekki Mondai Chōsa Iinkai 2003).

### **Early Paleolithic Research Today**

Currently, the archaeological community in Japan seems to be divided into two camps: those who believe that hominins did not arrive in the Japanese archipelago until after about 40,000 years ago (e.g., ONO 2011; TSUTSUMI 2012), on the one hand, and those who accept at least some of the putative evidence for early occupation of the archipelago, on the other. As the results of renewed research efforts in recent years, new evidence is being brought forward.

At the 6th Worldwide Conference of the Society for East Asian Archaeology held in Ulaanbaatar in June 2014, SATŌ Hiroyuki and I organized a session, for the purpose of presenting some of the exciting, but possibly controversial, results to the assembled professionals for their own appraisal. We are pleased to be able to include four of the presentations in this volume. Two of them, on the Ōno Site (Figure 1.1: 8) in Kyūshū and the Sunabara Site (Figure 1.1: 11) in western Honshū are the results of investigations that were initiated after the exposure of the "Fujimura Scandal" in 2000 (see Chapters 3 and 5 herein). The Kanedori Site (Figure 1.1: 6) in northern Honshū, on the other hand, has been investigated since 1985, free of involvement with FUJIMORI's activities, despite proximity to Sendai (see Chapter 4 herein). We

are especially pleased to be able to include the report on the current state of the research on the Sōzudai Site, where—way back in 1964—the late SERIZAWA Chōsuke initiated the serious search for the credible evidence for the earlier Paleolithic remains in the Archipelago. The session concluded with SATO’s Overview which placed these and several other assemblages in a broader context (Chapter 6 herein).

### Terminological Debate

In the following papers on the Paleolithic, there are discrepancies in the use of Early, Middle, and Late terms for the Paleolithic. This reflects the variety of schemes used in the literature and is often confusing for the reader. We could have unified them for this volume, but that would obscure the authors’ preferred terms and would not have flagged the inherent disagreements in the literature and the diagnostics on which the terms are founded.

Of the two camps of the Japanese Palaeolithic archaeologists today, SATO (Chapter 6) and I are *not* of the group who dismiss out of hand anything claimed to be older than 40k. We are both prepared to look at, and evaluate, those assemblage purported to represent early evidence of human occupation of the archipelago. However, we approach the issue from different perspectives: SATO consider them in terms of the tripartite division of the Lower/Middle/Upper Palaeolithic, familiar in European Paleolithic studies—but he uses them strictly as a chronological framework. I, on the other hand, place the assemblages in the context of the binary division of the Early and Late Palaeolithic technological traditions. We have co-existed peacefully enough, to the extent of organizing a symposium together.

In particular, the definition of the Middle Palaeolithic is problematic. In some parts of Africa and western Eurasia, the Middle Paleolithic refers to the Mousterian assemblages based on a flake-producing technology called the “Levallois technique”, in which a cobble core is used to detach one specific flake of a characteristic shape. This technology, however, did not reach eastern Eurasia, beyond what has been called the “Movius Line” (SOLHEIM and MOVIUS 1958, 1960).

The concept of the Movius Line, however, might be getting out-of-date and fading away (NORTON et al. 2009; NORTON and BAE 2009; LYCETT and BAE 2010). The session entitled “Movius Line 70 years later” which I organized at the 2018 IPPA in Vietnam ended with Robin DENNELL declaring, “Movius Line—70 years is enough”. Nevertheless, for western Eurasia the “Middle Palaeolithic” still refers to the Mousterian assemblages with the Levallois technology (regardless of the ages), and those assemblages are very rare, if present at all, in eastern part of Eurasia.

Therefore, I continue using the two-part division of “Early” and “Late”, which we formulated at the 1973 conference in Montreal (IKAWA-SMITH 1978). The Early/Late division is a *typological* nomenclature, NOT a *chronological* one, even though the Late Paleolithic, characterized by the presence of blade technology, appears in many parts of East and Southeast Asia about 30~40,000 BP, making the typological and chronological synonymous in this case. However, Early Palaeolithic flake-based *technology* continues in many regions past that date. Thus, I call it “the Early Paleolithic **“Tradition”**”, not **“Period”**”.

Sometime along the line, China-based scholars started using the west Eurasian tripartite terminology of Lower/ Middle/ Upper, but strictly as chronological divisions. This is what SATO is using here in Chapter 6, as he explicitly gives the Lower/Middle borderline as “the beginning of the Late Pleistocene dated 120 ka” and speaks of the “transition from Middle to Upper Palaeolithic dated from 50 ka to 40 ka.” In Chapter 4, KURODA and his co-authors also use the term “Middle Paleolithic” as a chronological

unit, except that they use the term “Late Paleolithic” as well as “Upper Paleolithic”. UEMINE and MATSUFUJI in Chapter 5 note that the Middle Palaeolithic with the Levallois technology did not reach the Japanese Archipelago. Thus, they discuss the assemblages in terms of “Upper Paleolithic” and the “pre-Upper Paleolithic” remains.

The issue addressed by the following papers, however, is not which category the sites fit into—whether typological or chronological—but how old they are. These are the first valid dates that exceed the general boundary of 30~40,000 BP usually accepted for the appearance of blade technology, and they are the first valid dates that have been produced after the “Paleolithic Hoax” for which earlier dates for more than 100 sites have been dismissed. OSL is becoming a method increasingly used in archaeology, though it does have attendant problems as discussed by UEMINE and FUJIMORI in Chapter 5—which reflect back on WADA’s paper in Chapter 3. Although the dates presented here are few and need further substantiation, these papers vindicate the existence of bipolar, handaxe, and flake technologies existing in the Japanese Islands prior to the marker-tephra Aira-Tanzawa (AT or A-Tn in the literature) at ca. 30,000 BP.

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