

## The Beginings of Mordern Archaeology in Japanese Archaeology before World War II

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# The Beginnings of Modern Archaeology in Japan and Japanese Archaeology before World War II

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper charts the trajectory of modern archaeology's development in Japan from the Tokugawa feudal period to the era before World War II and considers some of its implications, including its colonialist element, the role of amateur archaeologists, and Marxist influences.*

**KEYWORDS:** Japanese archaeology, colonial archaeology, amateur archaeologists, Marxist archaeology

## The birth

Modern archaeology began in 1877 in Japan, when Edward S. Morse excavated the Omori Shell Mounds (Figure 1). In 1879, he published the first excavation report in Japan: *Shell Mounds of Omori* (Morse 1879). However, his students failed to continue with his efforts. After Morse introduced modern archaeology to Japan, Shogoro TSUBOI and others established the Anthropological Society of Nippon in 1884, and in 1893, the Department of Anthropology was established at the Tokyo Imperial University. In those times, much controversy prevailed over the prehistoric peoples in Japan, with one theory linking them to the Korobokkuru people of the legend and the other to the indigenous Ainu of Hokkaido. Race was a key element in this controversy. Both hypotheses considered the prehistoric peoples of Japan as savages, while the ancestors of the Imperial Family were believed to have been civilized, and the direct ancestors of the current Japanese people (Teshigawara 1988).

## Pre-modern developments

However, even before modern archaeology arrived in Japan, the Japanese people were keenly interested in antiquity. The double tomb of Emperor Tenmu and Emperor Jitō constructed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century was looted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A record of the inside of this tomb was documented as early as 1235, the Kamakura Era, in the book *Aokino-Sanryō-ki*. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the lord Mitsukuni TOKUGAWA excavated at the

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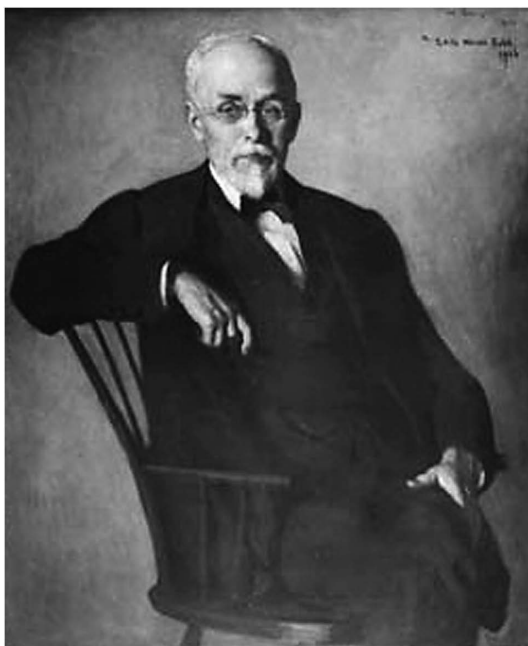


Figure 1. Edward S. Morse

Shimo-kurumazuka and Kami-kurumazuka tombs in order to identify their occupants. In 1879, Chujiro SASAKI and Isao IJIMA, who were students of Edward S. Morse but not archaeologists, excavated at Okadaira Shell Mounds, Ibaragi Prefecture. This was the first excavation at a shell mound site by Japanese nationals.

## The foundation

The birth of modern archaeology in Japan corresponded with the establishment of the Department of Archaeology at Kyoto Imperial University in 1916 (Figure 2). Kosaku HAMADA, the department's first professor, went to study at the University of London and introduced modern archaeology from England to Japan upon his return (Figure 3). In 1926, he published the first ever archaeology textbook in Japan, *Tsuron Kokogaku*, which is still in use today (Hamada 1926). Furthermore, he also introduced the typology of Oscar Montelius, which was interpreted in his book *Kokogaku Kenkyuuhou*, published in 1932 (Hamada 1932). The typological method became an important tool for the production of very detailed and accurate relative chronologies of pottery and so on. In 1943, a chronology of pottery of the Yayoi period was established based on excavations at the Karako Site in Nara Prefecture by Yukio KOBAYASHI, a research assistant at



Figure 2. Exhibition Hall, Faculty of Letters, Kyoto University: Former building of the Department of Archaeology

Kyoto Imperial University (Suenaga *et al.* 1943).

In 1915, in an excavation report on the tombs of Saitobaru, Miyazaki Prefecture, Professor HAMADA mentioned that the relative dating of the tombs was different from that of the legends contained in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, Japan's oldest extant chronicles. This idea was similar to the theory proposed by Professor Teikichi KIDA, a historian who divided the Kofun period into two phases (Teshigawara 1988). Professor Kosaku HAMADA excavated at Kou Site, Osaka Prefecture, in 1917 (Hamada 1918), and at Ibusuki Site, Kagoshima Prefecture, in 1918 and 1919 (Hamada 1921), wherein the stratigraphy clearly revealed that artefacts belonging to the Jomon and Yayoi cultures came from distinct layers, although these two archaeological cultures were in those days believed to belong two different races that were contemporaries. This was the first time the Jomon and Yayoi periods were understood as different periods based on stratigraphic evidence from the excavations. In this manner, modern archaeology gradually made inroads in Japan.



*Figure 3. Kousaku HAMADA: The first professor of the Department of Archaeology at Kyoto Imperial University*

## **Colonial archaeology**

In 1910, Japan occupied the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese government of Korea—known as the Chosen Soutoukufu—was established. The Japanese government of Korea had an archaeological section, and several archaeologists from Japanese universities, like Professor Kosaku HAMADA of Kyoto Imperial University and Professor Yoshito HARADA of Tokyo Imperial University, were involved in the section of the colonial Korean government that promoted heritage management and excavations at archaeological sites in Korea. These excavations were conducted at cemeteries in the capital city of Silla, Gyeongju, and at Lelan provincial office sites dating to the Han Dynasty, with Han period cemeteries in Pyongyang, etc. (Figure 4).

In 1926, Kosaku HAMADA, Yoshito HARADA, and others founded the Far Eastern Archaeological Society in order to excavate at archaeological sites in China. They first excavated at Dantuozhi and Gaolizhai sites in southern Liaodong Peninsula in 1927 (Hamada ed. 1929). These sites date to the Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Their



*Figure 4. Excavation at the Site of the Lelang Provincial Office in Korea, conducted by Prof. Yoshito HARADA, Tokyo Imperial University*

excavations at these sites were followed by an excavation at Hongshan Site, Chifeng, in Eastern Inner Mongolia, in 1936. The Hongshan Site had a Neolithic settlement and a cemetery dating to the Bronze Age. These excavations at Hongshan Site led to the designation of Hongshan culture, a type of Neolithic culture, in Manchuria, after the establishment of the Republic of China. They published Numerous voluminous excavation reports were published soon after these excavations (Hamada & Mizuno 1938). On the other hand, during 1941 to 1942, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science conducted excavations at three prehistoric sites: Shangmashi Shell Mounds (Figure 5), Sipingshan Cairns (Figure 6), and Wenjiatun Shell Mounds in Liaodong Peninsula. These were conducted by Professor Sueji UMEHARA of Kyoto Imperial University and other Japanese scholars. Unfortunately, however, they did not report the outcomes of those excavations at that time. It is only recently that the reports were finally published by Japanese archaeologists (Okamura ed. 2002, Sumita, Onoyama, Miyamoto ed. 2008, Miyamoto ed. 2015).

These excavations are recognized as examples of colonial archaeology. However, ironically, they also were the first ever instances of modern archaeology in the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria in China. These academic archaeologists were inextricably linked to colonialism along with their archaeological interests. At the same time, their archaeological interest in the continent related to the centrism of legends appearing in ancient Japanese documents. Professor Soukichi TSUDA, a historian who researched the ancient history of Japan at that time, cast doubts over the historicity of the legends



Figure 5. Excavation at Shangmashi Shell Mound, Liaodong Peninsula, conducted in 1941 by Japanese archaeologists



Figure 6. Excavation at Sipingshan Cairn, Liaodong Peninsula, conducted in 1941 by Japanese archaeologists

of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, which were compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. His views expressing doubts over the legends forced him to resign as professor at Tokyo Imperial University due to the relationship between the centrism of the legends and imperial

fascism based on the imperial system. Therefore, academic archaeologists endeavoured to distance themselves from issues surrounding the historicity of legends to escape oppression from imperial fascism. Instead, they concentrated on the cultural history in archaeology to identify relative chronologies and the placement of artefacts. They made a conscious decision to avoid exploring issues related to society in the history of Japan through archaeology. This is the reason Professor Sueji UMEHARA, who researched Chinese mirrors during this time (Umehara 1925), made it clear that their dating was unconnected with issues about tombs in the Kofun period in Japan, which included Chinese mirrors among the grave goods. The reason was that the giant keyhole-shaped tombs of the Kofun period are recognized as the tombs of the imperial family and related to the imperial system as a whole.

## Contributions of amateur archaeologists

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, amateur archaeologists who did not have academic authority began to gradually make a name for themselves. Rokuji MORIMOTO organised an archaeological society in Tokyo to conduct research, mainly on the Yayoi period. He and Yukio Kobayashi made a chronological table for Yayoi pottery covering the whole of Japan (Kobayashi & Morimoto 1938, 1939). Sugao YAMANOUCHI, who was a lecturer in the Faculty of Science, Tokyo University, after World War II, made a relative chronology for the Jomon covering the whole of Japan. He was the first to make the observation from a social perspective even before World War II that the Jomon was a hunter-gatherer society and the Yayoi an agricultural society (Yamanouchi 1932). It is also remarkable that archaeology based on Marxist historical materialism, such as the work of Masashi NEZU and Seichi WAJIMA, existed before World War II (Teshigawara 1988). The existence of amateur archaeologists helped promote democratic archaeology after World War II.

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