



# The General History Of Japan

< Jomon ~ Meiji Periods >

**Akito Igarashi**

Jomon

Yayoi

Tumulus

Asuka

Nara

Heian

Kamakura

Muromachi

Azuchi · Momoyama

Edo

Meiji

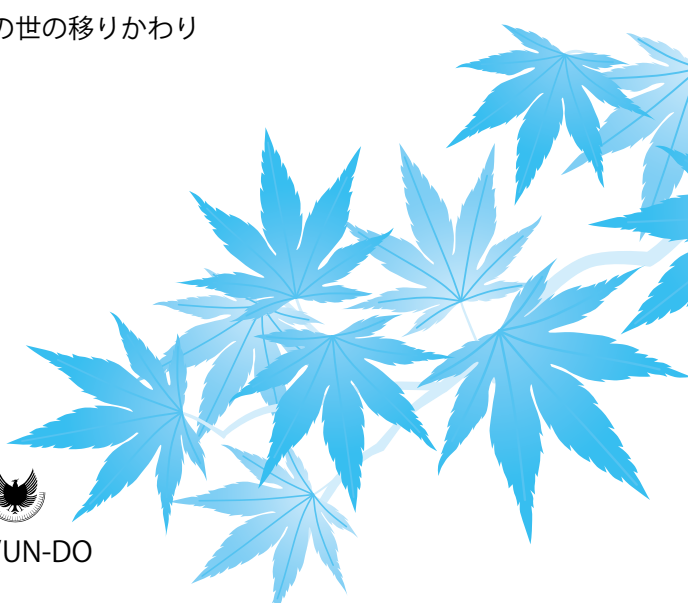
Modern

**The Stream of Time and Changes of Life**

時の流れと人の世の移りかわり



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## Preface

When did the Japanese first appear, and when did their history begin?

These are big questions for those who study Japanese history, and needless to say for the Japanese themselves. There once were two ideas about the beginning of the Japanese: the northern origin and the southern. The northern origin was the idea that said the Japanese had come from the north, and the southern origin was the one that said they had come from the south. But today we do not maintain these ideas anymore, because we have come to know that different people came to the island chain of Japan through various routes, forming the Japanese people in the course of centuries of mixing. In fact, there are various types of modern Japanese: hairy, smooth skinned, round faced, square faced, with large eyes as well as narrow, etc. These physical characteristics are considered to be proof of racial mixing. Therefore, it is a difficult question to pinpoint the beginning of the Japanese, although we usually begin with the Jomon period for the historical study of Japan.

History is generally divided into six stages: the primitive, ancient, medieval, pre-industrial, industrial and modern ages. This text will begin with the Jomon period, which is included in the primitive age.


### The General History Of Japan

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## Chapter 1 The Jomon Period

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It is said that people started living on the Japanese island chain when it was formed about 10,000 to 15,000 years ago during the primitive age. During that time, stone tools were still used, which were products of the Neolithic age. Besides stone tools, people used earthenware which had rope designs on it. The rope design, called “jomon,” gave its name to the Jomon period, in which the people were named the Jomon people and their culture was called the Jomon culture. This period lasted about 10,000 years. How did the Jomon people live, what did they think about life, and what kinds of customs did they have?

The Jomon people’s way of life was based on hunting and gathering. Their homes were called “tateana” houses, or simply dugouts with thatched roofs. They ate a lot of shellfish, as shell heaps called “kaizuka” have been discovered near housing sites.

The Jomon people were in awe of nature and believed in supernatural powers. Their religion was animism, based on nature worship. As for customs, they had a unique custom called “basshi,” or the extraction of a tooth. It was probably done for an initiation ceremony. They made clay dolls in the shapes of women, called “doguu.” The Jomon people probably believed that women had special powers of life and sorcery.

A few relics of the Jomon period have been recently discovered. One source is the San-nai Maruyama site in Aomori prefecture which was the large site of a village where people continuously lived for a long time. Some interesting things have been excavated there. Pieces of earthenware, for example, were piled up over the course of 1,500 years, from 5,500 to 4,000 years ago. Bags woven from plants and decorated with jade have also been found. These findings give us the impression that the village was prosperous and

縄文時代

竪穴式住居

貝塚

抜歯

土偶

populated by about 500 people at its peak. Furthermore, traces of rice cultivation have been found. This discovery may change our understanding of the Jomon period.

**primitive** 原始的な **tool** 道具 **the Neolithic age** 新石器時代 **earthenware** 土器  
**custom** 習慣 **base** 基づく、土台 **dugout** 掘立小屋 **thatch** わら（草）でぶく **shellfish** 貝  
**heap** 堆積 \*shell heap 貝塚 **awe** 畏敬 **supernatural** 超自然の **animism** アニミズム、精霊信仰  
**worship** 信仰、崇拜 **extraction** 抜粋 **initiation** 入会式、通過儀礼 **clay** 粘土  
**magic** 魔法、妖術 **relic(s)** 遺跡 **source** 出所、史料 **prefecture** 県 **excavate** 発掘する  
**pile** 積み重なる **jade** 玉 **prosperous** 繁栄する **trace** あと **cultivation** 耕作 \*rice cultivation 稲作 **discovery** 発見



三内丸山遺跡

## Exercises

### A. Choose the best word or phrase that is similar in meaning to the underlined part of the sentence.

- The Japanese island chain was created about 10,000 to 15,000 years ago.  
a) extended    b) reduced    c) styled    d) formed
- This period lasted about 10,000 years.  
a) continued    b) longed    c) controlled    d) appeared
- Shell heaps called “kaizuka” have been discovered near housing sites.  
a) thrown    b) found    c) made    d) buried
- Some interesting things have been excavated there.  
a) thrown out    b) broke out    c) dug out    d) buried in
- Pieces of earthenware were piled up over the course of 15,000 years.  
a) covered    b) heaped    c) lifted    d) stored

### B. Write T for the true statements and F for false statements.

- The Jomon period lasted about 10,000 years and belonged to the primitive age, and the people didn't use any pottery. \_\_\_\_\_
- The people's lives were based on hunting and gathering, and they lived in houses covered with thatched roofs. \_\_\_\_\_
- The people respected natural power very much and their spiritual life was concerned with nature worship. \_\_\_\_\_
- The San-nai Maruyama site is considered a relic of the Jomon period, but most of the findings are less than 5,000 years old. \_\_\_\_\_
- The findings impress upon us that the village was rich and the people enjoyed their lives. \_\_\_\_\_

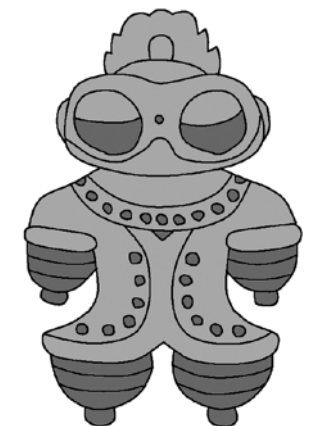
### C. Fill in the blanks by choosing the words below.

Japanese history starts with the (1. \_\_\_\_\_) period which belonged to the primitive age in which (2. \_\_\_\_\_) tools were still used. But people made (3. \_\_\_\_\_) that had rope designs on it. This is the reason why the period is called so.

The people lived by hunting and (4. \_\_\_\_\_). Their houses were dugouts called “tateana” which were covered with (5. \_\_\_\_\_) roofs. It seems that they ate much (6. \_\_\_\_\_) because shell heaps called “kaizuka” have been discovered (7. \_\_\_\_\_) to their houses.

As they lived in (8. \_\_\_\_\_) and believed in supernatural power, their religion was based on nature (9. \_\_\_\_\_). Their lives were deeply (10. \_\_\_\_\_) with nature.

worship	stone	gathering	concerned	based	nature
pottery	thatched	shellfish	close	Jomon	Yayoi



D. Put the words in the parentheses in the right order to make sentences that correspond in meaning to the Japanese sentences. Use capital letters or add commas where necessary.

1. 縄文時代は原始的で人々は石器を使っていた。

( primitive, used, the Jomon period, tools, was, and, stone, people )

\_\_\_\_\_.

2. 縄文時代は新石器時代を通して数千年続いた。

( several thousand years, the Neolithic Age, lasted, through, for, the Jomon period )

\_\_\_\_\_.

3. 新しい発見で我々の縄文時代への理解が変わるかもしれない。

( may, of, new findings, our, by, be, the Jomon period, changed, understanding )

\_\_\_\_\_.

E. Fill in the blanks as you listen.



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F: What was the first period in the history of Japan?

J: Japanese history (1. \_\_\_\_\_) with the Jomon period.

F: What was the period like?

J: People used stone (2. \_\_\_\_\_) and lived by hunting and (3. \_\_\_\_\_).

J: So it was during the (4. \_\_\_\_\_) age.

J: That's right. But they used pottery, too.

F: You mean (5. \_\_\_\_\_)?

J: Yes. They made it decorated with rope designs.

## Chapter 2 The Yayoi Period



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The Yayoi period followed the Jomon period. The name came from the Yayoi area of Tokyo, where a new type of earthenware was discovered.

The Yayoi period was different from the Jomon period in many ways. Firstly, people's way of living was based on agriculture, centering on rice cultivation. There are a few traces of rice cultivation from the Jomon period, but rice cultivation had not really been established. Hunting, gathering, and fishing had been dominant in the Jomon people's daily life. The Yayoi people however, engaged in agricultural activities, mainly rice cultivation. There are tools and relics to prove that they were agricultural people. The earthenware, which was called Yayoi earthenware, was also different from that of the Jomon period. Yayoi pottery was harder, more sophisticated and stable in shape, and had decorative designs on it. It is obvious that the Yayoi people had more advanced skills than the Jomon people.

The Yayoi culture, which had advanced agricultural skills, sophisticated earthenware, and metal goods, came to Japan from the continent (China), by way of the Korean Peninsula. Since rice cultivation required group labor, the people lived together and formed villages. Their houses were not of the dugout type, but wooden structures, called "takayuka shiki jukyo," with highly elevated floors. They also made bronze objects such as swords, spears, and bells. The bronze bells might have been used for ceremonies.

Agricultural life based on rice cultivation brought about villages, which gradually developed into nations which had divisions between rich and poor and formed class systems. It is said that there were about 100 small nations in the 1st century. An

弥生時代

高床式住居