

Editorial

The May 2018 Japanese Archaeological Association meetings at Shizuoka University, a short distance from one of the most iconic archaeological sites in the whole of Japan, the Yayoi rice-farming village of Toro, included a special session on the archaeology of agriculture in East Asia and Japan. 80 years ago, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Association was instrumental in the excavations at Toro which for the first time offered the potential to understand the everyday lives of some of the earliest farming communities in Japan.

The session, however, was much more than simply a commemorative act for these first steps towards an archaeology of agricultural society in the Japanese archipelago. All the papers, for the first time in the 80-year history of the Japanese Archaeological Association, were given in English. And the room was packed with those wanting to hear from the distinguished panel which included both Japanese and non-Japanese specialists. Two of the papers in this issue, by Miyamoto Kazuo and Mizoguchi Koji derive from this session, and they demonstrate how sophisticated debates around the appearance of agriculture in the Japanese archipelago have become. Miyamoto reprises his discussion of how rice spread from northeastern China, in particular the Shandong peninsula, via to Korean peninsula, into the western part of the Japanese archipelago. Miyamoto is a very capable synthesizer and draws together many diverse data sets to make a compelling argument which draws on the ‘wave of advance’ model of agricultural spread originally put forward by Marek Zvevibel. Mizoguchi brings his trademark philosophical approach to bear on the questions of ‘origins’ and ‘beginnings,’ setting the development of agricultural society in terms of ‘the spatio-temporal organisation of social life’ and raising broad questions of relevance to all those understanding (pre)-historical processes, challenging teleology with a discussion of historical contingency.

The beginning of the Yayoi period, which is commonly defined by the introduction of rice paddy field agriculture to the Japanese archipelago, has often been equated with the beginning of the traditional ‘Japanese’ way of life. Accordingly, approaches taken used to be predominantly that of diffusionist inclinations and often related the spread of certain items of the Incipient and Early Yayoi assemblages to movements of migrant groups. However, recent years have witnessed significant changes in the approach, many of which are inspired by methods and theories developed in the study of the origins, developments and transformations of farming and their various implications to human lives across the world. They also have potential to give something back to our international colleagues by combining the richly detailed and well relative-dated data and novel approaches deriving from the unique historical trajectory that Japanese archaeology has been through. The two papers exemplify such ongoing process. We look forward to seeing how our readership responds.

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