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The Introduction to the History of the Japanese Archipelago

Abstract: In this paper, the author provides an introduction into the terminology, spatial and temporal scope, and main issues regarding the research of the content covered in the course subject „Introduction to Japanese History and Culture 1’ which spans the time from the first human occupation until the ending of 8th century AD. It presents information about periodization and classification into pre-history, protohistory and history as well as the problem of the terms Japan and the Japanese. Lastly, the history of interest in the past, native inquiries, and the introduction and development of the discipline of archaeology were presented to show the influences of contemporary society on the focus and manner of research.

Keywords: prehistory, history, Japan, archaeology, multiple interpretations

1. Introduction

At the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb, the Japanese Studies Course was introduced as a three-year „free study course” in 2004 and continues to be categorized as such at the time this article is written („O kat-edri” 2020). The right to enrolment in the free study course is granted to students enrolled in the 5th semester or graduates of a university program. Good knowledge of English is also required as the literature used during the course is predominantly written in the English language („Uvjeti za upis” 2020). As for Japanese language competence, most students that enroll have no previous knowledge of the language or are beginner learners („Questionnaire for first-year students”, 2019 and 2020).

The subject „Introduction to Japanese History and Culture 1” (from now on HC1) is compulsory for first-year students („Hodogram” 2020) and covers the time frame from the beginning of human settlement on the Japanese archipelago until the end of 8th century („Silabi” 2020) - the subject matter dealt with in this article. As mentioned above, students enroll with little or no knowledge of the Japanese language, and only a small number of students major in history or archaeology („Questionnaire for first-year students”, 2019 and 2020). Therefore, the author believes it necessary to write a short introduction of the terminology, the spatial and temporal scope, and major issues concerning the research of the content covered in the mentioned course subject.

Two other aims of this article are to demonstrate that interpretations of the past do not reflect the „truth” but are influenced by the present and the archaeologists themselves. And to show the importance of learning and/or teaching the prehistory of the Japanese islands, including the prehistory of Hokkaido and the Ryukyu islands, as one of the ways to combat the stereotypical presentation of a homogeneous Japan – a Japan that was inhabited by one ethnicity since time immemorial.

2. The temporal scope – labeling the past

2.1. Periodization

As mentioned in the introduction, the temporal scope of the course subject HC1 ranges from the first human settlements on the islands until the end of the 8th century AD – incorporating time periods designated as Paleolithic, the Jōmon, Yayoi, Kofun, Asuka, and Nara periods, as well as the Early and Late Shellmound periods in the Ryukyu islands, and the Epi-Jōmon¹, Satsumon and the Okhotsk culture period in Hokkaido (Hudson 2007: 13-14). The beginning and dividing dates of the individual periods vary in literature because new data is continuously being acquired (Barnes 2015: 23).

The first human occupation is dated to the Upper Paleolithic, around 40,000-35,000 BP² (Barnes 2015: 23, Hudson 2007: 13). The next, Jōmon period starts around 16,500-15,000 years ago, while the ending dates range from around 3200-2920 BP in southwestern and 3200-2350 BP in northeastern Japan. While the Epi-Jōmon period was present only in Hokkaido and continued until the second part of the 7th century AD (Barnes 2015: 23, Hudson 2007: 13). The Early Shellmound period of the Ryukyu islands formed about 7,000 years ago, and the subsequent Late Shellmound period started around 300 BC (Hudson 2017: 13-14).

¹ Called Zoku-Jōmon in Japanese.

² BP=Before Present, the „present’ is AD 1950 when C14 dating began (Barnes 2015: 396).

The beginning of the Yayoi period set around 1000-800 BC (the Initial Phase), or 400 BC (the Early Yayoi) until around 250-300 AD (Barnes 2015: 25, Hudson 2007: 13). The following Kofun period is dated from around 250-300 AD until the late 7th century or even 710 AD. While this late ending date is used when taking archaeological remains into account, the period from 552 AD is also designated as the Asuka period (Barnes 2015: 25, Hudson 2007: 13-14). In Hokkaido, there was the Satumon period (from around 650 AD) and the Okhotsk culture (from around 550 AD) on the coast of north and east Hokkaido. And lastly, the Nara period is dated from 710 until 794 AD (Hudson 2007: 14).

2.2. The designations - prehistory, protohistory, and history

This above periodization encompasses periods designated also as „prehistoric”, „protohistoric”, and „historic”. All three of these terms deal with the past, more specifically the human past, and all could be said to be in the domain of the discipline of history – if one takes the definition of history as „the past of the human race”. But history is more used in the meaning of „the part of human history after the invention of the script” and therefore the dividing line between history and prehistory is set there - the existence of written sources in the case of the former, and their lack in the latter case (Barnes 2015: 7-13; Šošić Klindžić 2015: 42).

Table 1 – Distinction of the terms prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic (Barnes 2015: 7)

	Prehistoric	Protohistoric	Historic
Existence or absence of written records	no written records	absence of domestic written records but the societies are written about by others	written records
Source of the data for interpretations	material records	material records documents written by other peoples excavated documents (if present)	written documents (domestic and written by other peoples) excavated documents material records

In the simplest terms (see Table 1) „prehistoric” designates the period of peoples that have not developed or are using a script and therefore no written records are present. „Protohistoric” designates peoples that have not created any written documents themselves but are written about by other peoples, and „historic” means that written records created by the peoples themselves are preserved (Barnes 2015: 7). However, in the case of protohistoric societies written documents excavated from archaeological

sites can be present, but „transmitted texts that have been handed down through the generations” are absent (Barnes 2015: 7). According to Barnes (2015: 9) what designates societies as protohistoric is (1) the very limited amount of preserved records made by themselves, (2) they often include state formation, (2) are documented in records of other peoples, or (4) have „retrospective histories” written about them.

The source of the data for interpretations of prehistoric periods and peoples are material records – artefacts (ceramics, lithics, etc.) excavated from various archaeological sites (Barnes 2015: 7-8). In the case of protohistoric periods, data can be obtained not only from material records, but also from documents created by „fully historical” societies, as well as inscriptions or other forms of „fragmentary documents” made by the peoples themselves (Barnes 2015: 9). And, as for fully historical peoples the data can be acquired from all above-mentioned sources and documents compiled by the society itself (Barnes 2015: 12). Every type of data is characterized by specific features or means of interpretation. For the material records the interpretation is created exclusively by the hands of the archaeologist/interpreter and is therefore influenced by their beliefs and prejudice (Šošić Klindžić 2015: 41). Written records can also reflect various interests, biases, and ideological manipulations of the authors whether they write about other societies or their own (Barnes 2015: 9, 12). It is important to stress that material records and written documents need to be separately analyzed and then compared, to ensure that the former are not just interpreted in a way to fit the textual descriptions (Barnes 2015: 13).

In the case of the Japanese archipelago, the Paleolithic and the Jōmon period are classified as prehistoric, the Yayoi and Kofun periods as protohistoric, and the Nara period as the beginning of the fully historic period³ (Barnes 2015: 7-13). For the Yayoi period written records that give insight into the society are the Chinese dynasties chronicles – the He Han-sue⁴ (The Book of Late Han) and the Wei-zhi⁵ (Barnes 2015: 9; De Bary et al. 2001: 5; Mizoguchi 2013: 30). As for the Kofun period, in addition to the Liu Song⁶ and Sui⁷ Chinese dynasties chronicles, the oldest preserved imperial chronicles of Japan – the *Kojiki* (AD 712) and *Nihon Shoki* (AD 720) document past

³ This classification concerns only the Yamato state which became fully historic, while territories outside their domain can be classified as protohistoric since they are mentioned in the imperial chronicles (Kaner 2001: 46).

⁴ The Han Dynasty (AD 25-220), but the He Han-sue chronicle was compiled in the 5th century AD (De Barry et.al. 2001: 5).

⁵ The Wei Dynasty (AD 220-265), and the chronicle was compiled AD 297 (De Barry et.al. 2001: 5).

⁶ Liu Song (AD 420-479), and the chronicle was compiled around AD 513 (De Barry et.al. 2001: 9; Mizoguchi 2013: 30).

⁷ The Sui Dynasty (AD 581-611), and the chronicle was compiled around AD 630 (De Barry et.al. 2001: 10; Mizoguchi 2013: 30).

periods from the mythological past until the beginning of 6th century and end of the 7th century respectively (De Bary et al. 2001: 3,9-10; Mizoguchi 2013: 30, 32). Lastly, Nara period *Shoku Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan Continued) chronicles cover the reigns of the period, from 697 to 791 (De Bary et al. 2001: 240).

3. Japan and the Japanese

Any discussion about the past needs to include definitions or explanations of terms used to designate the spatial scope of the subject matter and the people inhabiting that space. In the context of Japanology, these are „Japan” and „the Japanese (people)”. Explicitly defining terms is important in order to not only clarify what one means but also to hint at the multiple meanings and interpretations of terms that at first glance seem self-explanatory and clear. And in addition, to avoid giving the impression and perpetuating the idea that there is „one, uniform” Japan or an internally homogenous entity called the Japanese people.

3.1. Japan – the changing political and geographical entity

We can only talk about the past from the point of view and in terms of the present - the familiar and the known (Mizoguchi 2013: 7; Morris-Suzuki 2001: 81). Therefore, when we talk about „Japan” - we think about the Japan of today, the modern state with its clearly defined borders whose territory encompasses the Japanese archipelago consisting of four big islands situated on the east of the Asian continent and is „seemingly clearly bounded by the sea (Mizoguchi 2002: 3).”

Looking more closely, the boundaries are not clear or self-evident in every aspect. The modern state of Japan is currently in disputes about borders on three points – in the North with Russia, in the East with South Korea, and in the South with China and Taiwan (Naikaku Kanbo 2020). And even if, from the perspective of the Japanese government these are without a doubt part of the Japanese state’s territory, the viewpoints of the countries that are contesting this claim show that the matter is not so clear-cut (see Mofa ROK; Seokwoo 2001: 7-10; Seokwoo 2002a: 10-14; Seokwoo 2002b: 8-12). Further, as we go back in time, it is evident that the borders of the *state* called Japan have shifted – inside and outside the *geographical entity* of the Japanese archipelago (Amino 1992: 127-132; Gordon 2003: 1, 75; Morris-Suzuki 2001) – which makes the equation of the state „Japan” with the term „Japanese archipelago” problematic.

Japan as well as the consciousness of the people of belonging to Japan, did not exist from time immemorial. Or to be precise – the evidence of the existence cannot be traced to the deep past from which written documents are not preserved. It is the documents that give historians and researchers clues as to the appearance of a term, its usage,

frequency of usage, and the possible meaning. Regarding the term 日本 (Japan) itself, there are still debates and uncertainties pertaining to the time of appearance, the meaning, usage, and the reading of the characters (see Amino 1992). The general view is that the term was used from the latter 7th century, but a definite date cannot be established (Amino 1992: 124). The meaning is also not clear – as Amino (1992: 125) states the name „signifies a natural phenomenon or orientation” and does not originate from a place or clan name, even though he also mentions Iwashi Koyata’s theory that the name could have represented the word „Yamato” and therefore be „derived from the dynasty’s place of origin (1992: 126).” As for the reading of the characters, in addition to the two readings „Nihon” and „Nippon” – which were probably in usage from the Heian period (794-1185) – there are views that they were either read „Hi no moto”, or as mentioned above „Yamato” (Amino 1992: 126). It is important to note that the debates surrounding the name 日本 are not only a product of modern historical research, but were conducted from the Heian period – a time period that came shortly after the term was apparently introduced (Amino 1992: 123, 126).

If we agree with the claim that „Japan” was used from the late 7th century, then any discussion that deals with the time before should avoid employing that term to avoid artificially extending its existence (the existence of a country called Japan) into the deep past – where, at some point, the beginnings of the future state appeared, but the identification with it being „Japan” could not be said to have existed. Connected with this is also the question of the degree of a sense of belonging to a „country of Japan” that existed in society (Amino 1992: 127-132). As Amino (1992) argues, the territory of „Japan” in the 7th or 8th century did not encompass the whole of the archipelago, and even in the territories under its rule, the consciousness of the people regarding the existence of the state varied (1992: 127-132).

The fact that in the second half of the 19th century, the Japanese government one-sidedly incorporated both the island of Hokkaido and the Ryukyuan islands (Okinawa) shows that for the majority of history, these areas were not part of the state of Japan (Gordon 2003: 75; Morris-Suzuki 2001: 86). The way the territories and peoples outside their domain were regarded by the state of Japan differed through time. For a long time they were viewed as „foreign”, „barbarian”, „primitive”, in one word they represented the „Other” (Morris-Suzuki 2001: 83), and it is only around the end of the 18th and from the beginning of the 19th century that the attitudes of the Japanese government changed (Morris-Suzuki 2001: 85-86). The change was brought out by events occurring outside the archipelago. The extension of borders into Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands by the Russian Empire and the Russification of the population urged the Tokugawa shogunate to „assert a claim to control over the Ainu” and started to implement measures to turn them into Japanese (Morris-Suzuki 2001: 85). After that,

during the 19th century with the more aggressive demands for opening trade relations coming from the „West”⁸ and finally the „opening of the country” brought about not only the change of the ruling regime – with the toppling of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868 during the Meiji Restoration, and the re-installation of the Emperor as the highest ruling figure – but also compelled the new government to implement „Western-style” political system of the nation-state with its clearly defined borders (Gordon 2003: 46-76). It was under these circumstances that the above-mentioned territories of Hokkaido and the Ryukyuan islands were declared as parts of „Japan” – the first in 1869 and the second in 1879 (Gordon 2003: 75).

In conclusion, using „Japan” as a blanket term for various points in history can be misleading due to the unconscious connection with the territory of today’s state of Japan – the Japanese archipelago, as the clear picture of the four big islands surrounded by the sea compel us to see „Japan” as a unity regardless of the period. Therefore, a clear distinction between the two terms is needed since it presupposes not only an equivalence of state and territory but that these two entities were always overlapping. To mitigate this danger, when talking or writing about the history of „Japan” further explanations employing temporal markers such as „the state of the 12th century”, „the modern nation-state”, or giving some additional information pertaining to the spatial scope of the topic at hand should be used.

3.2. The inhabitants of the Japanese islands

From the time of the arrival of the first human inhabitants, various populations occupied the Japanese archipelago. The beginning of human occupation is dated at around 40,000 BP and belongs to the Upper Paleolithic (Barnes 2015: 23). It is possible that the islands were repopulated after the eruption of the Aira caldera about 29,000 years ago, with potential re-settlements occurring thereafter (Barnes 2015: 23). The population of the upcoming Jōmon period is assumed to have developed from the earlier inhabitants with possible immigrations from the continent (Barnes 2015: 23; Ding et al. 2011: 19-20). The population spread throughout the islands reaching as far as the island of Okinawa, but the islands of the southern Ryukyu are thought to have not been populated by the Japanese island in the north (Hudson 2007: 16). Consequently, the wide geographical occupation of the people and the long period resulted in the development of various lifestyles, substance strategies, and social groupings (Barnes 2015: 23; see Habu 2004).

⁸ The term „West” is limited to the United States and countries of Western Europe – Britain, the Netherlands, France, Russia, Spain, Portugal (Gordon 2003: 3, 44, 46-50).

The next big immigration into the islands occurred around 1000 BC⁹ – the start of the so-called Yayoi period whose settlers brought wet rice paddy agriculture. The spread of aforementioned agriculture did not occur instantly and at the same time throughout the archipelago, nor were the Jōmon settlers replaced – therefore various populations with distinct lifestyles lived on the islands (Barnes 2015: 272-278; Ding et al. 2011: 20). As mentioned above, the societies belonging to the Yayoi period (and thereafter) were mentioned in Chinese dynastic chronicles – and here we have the first written descriptions about the appearance of the people, their clothes, various manners, and even some names of individuals and communities (De Bary et al. 2001: 5-9).

During the Kofun period the first Japanese state – the Yamato state was formed and information about „foreigners” can be found in the 8th century imperial chronicles compiled by the Yamato. The chronicles mention people called the Emishi who occupied the northern parts of Honshu and Hokkaido, and the Hayato and Kumaso living in south Kyushu (Hudson 1999: 37, Kaner 2001: 46). As these peoples did not leave any written documents themselves, there is no way of knowing how they self-identified (Hudson 1999: 242). They are written about from the point of view of the „others” – the Yamato, and therefore these accounts have to be carefully and critically examined to detect possible bias.

The „Japanese” themselves, their origin, and the problems connected with such questions are widely debated (see Hudson 1999; Kaner 2001; Oguma 2002). Ding et al. (2001: 21) propose three models of various hypotheses on the *genetic* origin of the modern Japanese: (1) the Replacement Model, (2) the Transformation Model and (3) the Admixture Model. The first one argues that the Yayoi populations completely replaced the earlier Jōmon ones, while the second one argues that the modern Japanese are direct descendants of the Jōmon peoples. The third model proposes that the ancestors of the Japanese are a mixture of the Jōmon, Yayoi, and recent migrant populations. While these models deal with genetics, they cannot give any answers pertaining to the ethnicity and ethnogenesis of the past populations. Archaeologically it is highly problematic attributing material remains to particular ethnic groups since the expression of ethnicity through an artefact is dependent on society’s ideas regarding the kind of artifact that can mark an ethnic group (Ian Hodder cited in Kaner 2001: 50). Therefore without „direct evidence for ethnic self-awareness in the distant past” the whole debate on what ethnicity some groups had at some point in time present a problem (Kaner 2001: 57).

If one looks at the above-mentioned information about the terms Japan and the Japanese it is clear that they are not „clear-cut”, clearly defined or without controversy.

⁹ The exact date and number of immigrants are still debated (Barnes 2015: 270-278; Hudson 1999: 50-51).

They are designating things that are complex, influenced by various ideologies and ideas of what the term *should* designate. The reality is that they are, as Hudson states „convenient labels (with which to refer to what were internally heterogeneous and changing groups) (1999: 15)” used for the sake of simplicity and readability (Habu 2004: 5). But they have to be explicitly defined at the beginning of writing or talking about Japan and the Japanese to make this apparent and draw attention to the possibility of alternative definitions, designations, and interpretations, and to not conceal their complexity. As well as avoid reproducing ideologies of a homogeneous Japan populated by one ethnic group – the Japanese from time immemorial which negates and erases all other groups of people that have and still are populating Japan, the changing identities and characteristics of the ethnic group called the Japanese today and the changing territory and its occupation by various groups throughout the history of the islands.

4. Interest in the past

Here I will first give a brief historical overview of historical inquiries before the introduction of archaeology as a discipline and the introduction and development of the latter. I will give an account of developments in 19th and 20th century Japan and the influence on the focus of research and interpretations of data.

4.1. Interest in the past – before the establishment of archaeology

Archaeology in Japan was not introduced in a vacuum of historical inquiry. Interest in the past existed in earlier times such as the interest in immaterial and material aspects of the court that emerged in the 12th century with the rise of militaristic rule (Barnes 2015: 27, 402). From the 17th century onward, during the time period that preceded the establishment of the discipline of archaeology, scholars of two major philosophical schools - *kokugaku* („national learning”) and Neo-Confucian - were interested in the early history of Japan (Hudson 1999: 24; Hudson 2007: 14). Both schools focus were the oldest preserved texts compiled on the archipelago in the 8th century – the imperial chronicles the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. The difference lay in the significance appointed to the influences of China on ancient Japanese history and the origin of the Japanese people. While for the Confucionists the „Chinese” influence was at the center of their approach, the *kokugaku* scholars tended to downplay any outside interferences (Hudson 1999: 24-25).

The distinctive characteristic of these early investigations into the past was their limitation to written documents. Even though it was known that „ancient objects could be found in or on the ground” they could only be linked to entries in the historical records and the existence of peoples or time periods outside these documents was beyond

the bounds of possibility (Barnes 2015: 402-403). This possibility of unearthing a past outside written documents was introduced in the discipline of archaeology (Barnes 2015: 403).

4.2. History of archaeology in Japan

4.2.1. Introduction of archaeology – from the Meiji Restoration until the end of the Second World War

The history of Japanese archaeology as a discipline begins after the Meiji Restoration (1868) with the arrival of American and European scientists, advisers, and teachers hired by the Meiji government (Oguma 2002: 3; Trigger 1996: 261) as part of the efforts to „modernize” Japan which had been relatively closed off from the most parts of the world during the Edo Period (Gordon 2003: 17-19; Oguma 2002: 3). From the beginning of 19th century ships from various countries such as Russia, Britain, or the US increasingly asked or even demanded of the shogunate to open trade relations and the government became aware of, not only the technological achievements of the „West” but also their colonization efforts (Gordon 2003: 46, 48). The government therefore deemed it necessary to create a „strong nation” that could repel any attempts at colonization and could stand equal to the big powers of the „West” (Gordon 2003: 46-76; Mizoguchi 2013: 11). The way for this success was seen in introducing „western” knowledge, technology, and to create a modern nation-state (Gordon 2003: 73; Mizoguchi 2013: 11; Trigger 1996: 261).

While archaeology was introduced from outside it gradually began to be colored by the political atmosphere of the times in the country itself. At the beginning of archaeological research in Japan, archaeologists tried to connect peoples or certain racial groups to artefacts (Fawcett 1995: 233; Kaner 2001: 46-47; Trigger 1996: 262). Soon the political pressure and government regulations made most archaeologists steer clear from interpretations and discussions on ethnicity. To create a modern nation-state and raise awareness in the people that they belonged to one single state, the government needed to promote a certain image of Japan – a unique nation, continually ruled by a single, uninterrupted line of emperors (Mizoguchi 2013: 9, 11-12). The legitimacy and authenticity of this image were found in the imperial chronicles *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* compiled with the goal of legitimizing the power to rule of the imperial line (Mizoguchi 2013: 12, 32). The official history in which the information in the chronicles was seen as facts had to be constantly supported by intellectuals and any expressions of doubt were dealt with by forced resignation from positions or imprisonment (Fawcett 1995: 233; Mizoguchi 2013: 12-13; Trigger 1996: 263). The „climate of fear” of the late 1920s and the 1930s ultra-nationalist thought turned archaeologists to safer topics such as creating chronologies or detailed typologies and the Jōmon period (Habu 1989: 38; Mizoguchi 2013: 13; Trigger 1996: 263-264).

Another thing that needs to be mentioned is the fact that before and during the war, with the annexation of Korea, the Japanese archaeology also became colonial and it was in this context that archaeology in Korea developed. Even though the research carried out is still referenced, the fact is that the Japanese government used results to justify Korea's subordination (Barnes 2015: 403).

4.2.2. After the defeat in 1945 – rise to an economic giant during the 1960s

The defeat in the Second World War in 1945 brought about drastic changes to the country as a whole, as well as the viewing of the past and the discipline of archaeology. The early postwar period is characterized by remorse, introspection, and the search for the causes of mistakes made before and during the war *inside* Japan and its history (Mizoguchi 2013: 15). The myth of the imperial line was rejected, the imperial chronicles were critiqued, and the focus of research shifted onto scientifically derived and verifiable data (Habu and Fawcett 2008: 95). Accordingly, archaeology was viewed as a means to uncover the truth and the history of ordinary Japanese people and to discover what was „Japanese” (Habu and Fawcett 2008: 95; Trigger 1996: 264).

Shortly after the war, the number of carried-out excavations was small, as were the full-time positions of professional archaeologists. Consequently, many active archaeologists were amateurs who nonetheless produced valuable knowledge about the pre-history of the islands (Fawcett 1995: 233).

From the late 1950s and during the 1960s Japan became reintegrated into global politics and economy and went through a period of rapid economic development (Mizoguchi 2013: 9). Rapid economic development brought upon increase in construction, which in turn resulted in the destruction of archaeological sites, but with the implementation of laws for preservation the number of rescue excavations steadily increased (Fawcett 1995: 237; Hudson 2007:14). Archaeologists needed to compromise between development and the ideal of preserving every site. The increase of rescue excavations resulted in acquiring immense data, but at the same time brought about the destruction of many sites that were decided to be excavated and therefore not preserved (Fawcett 1995: 238). With the increase of rescue work in the late 1960s which were mostly funded by private business, national and prefectural governments the structure of archaeology changed (Fawcett 1995: 239).

4.2.3. The administrative archaeology - 1970s and the 1980s

In the 1970s and the 1980s pollution and environmental destruction raised the consciousness about the negative consequence of prosperity and created an atmosphere of „despair and anxiety” (Mizoguchi 2013: 19). It was a time when the prevailing

theory was that change in society is caused by violence. The search for origin of this violence was looked for in the past and found in the Yayoi period during which the beginning of systematic rice paddy agriculture emerged violence and warfare (Mizoguchi 2013: 19-20).

The number of rescue excavations increased even more, and most archaeologists in charge of those were government officials who could not „adopt a particular political stance” but also could not be seen as antinationalistic since excavations were funded by large companies and the government (Habu and Fawcett 2008: 96). Since the administrative rescue system provided funds many archeologists stopped protesting the destruction of sites and took the stand that with more excavations they will produce more results which will then improve the understanding of Japanese history (Fawcett 1995: 240-241). So, on the one was archaeology was de-politicized, but on the other hand political and business elites were exerting (indirect) power over archaeology – by shaping the kind of research taking place, how archaeological work is organized and how the results are used in the public realm (Habu and Fawcett 2008: 96; Fawcett 1995: 240). The increase in rescue excavations resulted also in the obtainment of large quantities of raw data, improvement of typological chronologies, the systematization of excavation and research methods and their efficiency (Habu 1989: 39-40). The focus of the research on the other hand became narrower – with the studies of the origins of the Japanese people and the formation process of the ancient state (Habu and Fawcett 2008: 96). With the rise of a number of rescue excavations there also was not enough time to spend on the analysis of data or their synthesis (Fawcett 1995: 241). The archeology is further characterized by a lack of theoretical discussions and little contact with other countries’ archaeologists – meaning the archeologists were cut off from theoretical and methodological trends (Habu 1989: 41-42; Habu and Fawcett 2008: 96).

4.2.4. Contemporary archaeology from the 1990s

The focus of contemporary archaeology are the „details of history” and „micro causes of individual events” (Mizoguchi 2013: 20-21). Archaeologists are pursuing specialized topics but attempts at a synthesis of the research results are rare (Mizoguchi 2013: 21). Mizoguchi states that seems that there is a „fear of engaging with others” and that the contemporary society that regards theorizations useless obscures the aims of archaeology, which could result in the loss of the standard of the „critical data handling” and in engaging in sensationalism – publicizing data before it was peer reviewed (Mizoguchi 2013: 21). Even though in today’s society where sharing and obtaining information is possible with a click, it is important to still take time for research and present the most accurate results that are possible in a clear and understandable manner to reduce the danger of one’s results being misinterpreted or abused.

5. Conclusion

In this short introduction into the subject matter of the course HC1 offered to students of the Japanology Department of the University of Zagreb I tried to provide information that would become a starting point in the study of not only the deep history of the Japanese islands but also the contemporary society – which colors and produces the images of the past that are presented to the public. Providing multiple dates for the same period, various types of sources of data and their nature, and debates of seemingly self-explanatory terms such as „Japan” or the „Japanese people” should urge us to re-think and critically examine the source of knowledge and the possible obscuring of processes that created this knowledge to make it seem natural. Japan did not exist from time immemorial; it – the state, the people, and the history was and is still made through various processes. People have settled in the islands and during the long history of tens of thousands of years new populations arrived. It was their interactions on the archipelago that have created the sum of the „history of Japan”.

The albeit very short overview of historical inquiries on the archipelago, does depict how the political and economic environment of the time the archaeologists themselves lived can exactly influence – overt or subtle – over topics that are researched or those that are not, possibly compromises that researchers have to take (in this context to preserve or destroy a site), and at the end what the aims of the discipline itself are. The process of creating the past needs to be made clear in order to break away from dominant narratives and reproduce it all over again. The history of the whole archipelago and its past and current inhabitants is messy, complex, interesting and worth knowing.

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