

1 Introduction

In recent years, European archaeologists have begun to develop a new view of the Bronze Age, one which emphasises long-distance trade, transport and connectivity. Such ideas are not completely novel but, compared to even ten years ago, we have a much deeper understanding of how people, things and ideas were circulating. Studies of ancient DNA have shown that a large migration into central Europe from the western steppes occurred in the third millennium BC (Haak et al. 2015). Trade had long been considered an important element of the Bronze Age world. Childe (1930) stressed that the production of bronze required the exchange of tin, lead and copper – metals which were only found in certain limited places – but new research has explored the social and cultural meanings of this trade. Vandkilde (2016) coined the term *bronzeisation* as a way to emphasise the processes by which bronze formed a *transculture* across Europe and beyond. A transculture can be understood as engagements with the world which encourage meanings transcending place of origin; those meanings can be quite different but share a certain unity in diversity (Vandkilde 2014; Autiero & Cobb 2021).

The darker side of Bronze Age society has also come into clearer focus. In a recent essay, Molloy and Horn (2020: 117) write that ‘The transformation of warfare in the Bronze Age was perhaps the most profound transformation in human history.’ They go on to explain how new weapons such as swords, shields and body armour established ways of fighting which remained little changed for millennia thereafter. These technical changes were associated with a new sociality of violence and it has been argued that warriors formed a type of Bronze Age ‘craft specialist’ (Molloy 2017). Since 2008, excavations in the Tollense valley in north-east Germany have uncovered a Bronze Age battlefield dated to circa 1300–1250 BC and which involved fighting between as many as two thousand combatants, implying that armies already existed by the late second millennium BC (Molloy & Horn 2020: 134). Bronze cylinders found at Tollense may have been the personal belongings of a warrior who came from far to the south, suggesting that the battle was part of a supra-regional conflict (Uhlir et al. 2019). A stable isotope study also found evidence for a diverse, non-local group of warriors at Tollense (Price et al. 2019). Growing violence in Bronze Age Europe may have been associated with the spread of steppe pastoralists (Schroeder et al. 2019), leading *New Scientist* magazine to ask: ‘were the Yamnaya the most murderous people in history?’ (Barras 2019).

New ideas about long-distance interaction during the Bronze Age recall debates some years ago over ancient world systems (Frank 1993; Sherratt

1993; Ratnagar 2001). In my previous research I also made use of world systems theory (Hudson 1999, 2004). However, while previous writings on ancient world systems saw core/periphery relations as *determining* economic dependency and ‘underdevelopment’, the relationship between core and periphery in the Bronze Age seems to be much more fluid than originally conceived. The fact that sources of tin, copper and lead were limited – and geographically marginal to centres of power in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean – gave the ‘barbarians’ of the periphery a new dynamism. In some regions, the economic power of the periphery continued long after the Bronze Age and Scott (2017) has dubbed the period from the Bronze Age until around 1600 the ‘Golden Age of the Barbarians’. I use the term ‘barbarian niche’ to emphasise the new opportunities for trade available to non-state peoples from the Bronze Age onwards (Hudson 2019, 2020a).

The ‘barbarian niche’ is a deliberately tongue-in-cheek way of thinking about a more interconnected and ‘democratic’ Bronze Age, and is thus also a critique of state-centric views of the past. The idea of the barbarian niche suggests broad similarities in historical processes across Eurasia through the presence of what we might call the ‘meta-barbarian’. But to what extent can ‘bronzisation’ and other concepts developed by European archaeologists actually be applied outside Europe? In this Element I argue that many of the same processes of bronzisation were also at work in eastern Eurasia. This argument is provisional and perhaps at times provocative. In adopting a comparative approach, my intention is not to force East Asia into a European framework. The European research discussed here is itself new and sometimes controversial. Nevertheless, this Element proposes that the historical development of many societies in East Asia from the third millennium BC can be approached as part of a broad, Eurasia-wide process of bronzisation.

1.1 Bronze Transformations

One way to begin to explain the perspective adopted here is to note that bronze often engendered ‘creative translations’ in material culture, expressions which are not easily interpreted through standard typological frameworks (Kristiansen & Larsson 2005: 13; Sofaer, Jørgensen & Choyke 2013). Skeuomorphs – whereby an artefact fabricated in one medium is made to evoke the physical properties of another – are a common Bronze Age phenomenon. Such skeuomorphs should not be seen as inferior or uninventive; often they displayed great artistic creativity and, in this sense, ‘bronzisation’ was not just about bronze. In China, Shang elites made jade weapons which mimicked bronze yet retained the ‘native’ power of jade (Rawson 2017). In Korea, Japan and the Russian Far

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East, polished stone daggers, which clearly follow metal prototypes, appear before bronze itself. In fact, East Asian societies such as Mumun Korea (1300–400 BC) and Yayoi Japan (1000 BC–AD 250) seem to follow Bronze Age historical trajectories without possessing bronze in their earlier stages.¹ During the Yayoi, material culture sometimes incorporates designs from the preceding Neolithic Jōmon, one example being decorative patterns on bronze bells. This is usually understood as reflecting the continuing influence of Jōmon tradition (Shitara 2014a), but a broader view would be to see Yayoi appropriation of the Jōmon as a new type of transculture, especially as some decorative designs on Final Jōmon pottery already seem to reflect continental influence (Hudson et al. 2021).

In addition to material translations, in European archaeology the expanding world of the Bronze Age has been discussed in terms of trade, warrior aristocracies, pastoralism, migrations, maritime economies, religious institutions and new disease vectors. In this Element I focus particularly on two aspects of this complex transformation – trading/maritime dynamics and warrior aristocracies. As noted already, trade and the international division of labour grew in importance as bronze became the ‘economic motor’ of a new Eurasian economy (Kristiansen 2018). Trade required political institutions which allowed safe travel over ever greater distances. Trade and travelling are clearly linked to warriors in Bronze Age rock art in Europe (Ling & Toreld 2018). In East Asia, a system of long-distance travel is clear from texts like the *Wei zhi*, a section of which describes western Japan. This Chinese text has received attention mostly for its confusing directions to the kingdom of Yamatai, which supposedly controlled part of Japan at the time (Young 1958; Kidder 2007). Less often remarked upon is how it portrays a world in which traders and envoys could apparently move smoothly across vast areas. While the *Wei zhi* itself dates to the third century AD, the system of travel it describes must have been established much earlier.

The sea was crucial for Bronze Age communications and sailing technologies played a major role in the new connectivities (Broodbank 2010). Less attention has been given to fishing and other economic uses of the sea. In Atlantic Europe, it is argued, there was a sudden decline in the exploitation of marine foods from the onset of the Neolithic (Richards, Schulting & Hedges 2003; Cramp et al. 2014). While there are certainly exceptions to this trend – for example, excavations on Molène island off Brittany have produced evidence for an Early Bronze Age settlement which combined farming, fishing and exchange (Pailler et al. 2019) – a similar argument is sometimes made for parts of East Asia. For

¹ For debates over the absolute chronology of the Yayoi period, see Mizoguchi (2013: 33–6).

example, the Jōmon cultures of Japan are well known for their high dependence on the sea, but a significant decline in fishing with the arrival of cereal farming in the archipelago at the beginning of the first millennium BC has been noted (cf. Hudson 2019, 2021a, *in press*). However, there was a new trend towards more *specialised* use of the sea and marine resources in at least parts of East Asia from the third millennium BC. Furthermore, we should not assume that fishing groups never engaged in farming themselves. For too long, archaeologists in East Asia and elsewhere have focussed on ‘peasant farmers’ (Zvelebil 1995; Amino 2012) but, as discussed below, there is a need to consider alternative models, including what Ling and colleagues (2018) have called the ‘maritime mode of production’ as discussed in section 2.1.

The recent publication of the *Cambridge World History of Violence* has provided a new, global perspective on this topic, but Bronze Age East Asia is thinly covered in these volumes and in this Element I want to take the opportunity to discuss the region in more depth. Building on Hudson and colleagues (2020), I discuss warfare and violence in Bronze Age Japan in a more comparative framework.

This Element is not an attempt at a synthesis of Bronze Age East Asia. Rather, the text explores maritime and warrior dynamics in Island East Asia in a comparative framework and provides a new ‘framing’ for the issues it discusses. Given the space limitations of the Element format, the arguments made here are provisional and designed to provoke debate. The author is currently writing a longer work in which a more detailed theoretical basis for these ideas will be presented.

1.2 Bronze Age East Asia: Some Orientations

There are two rather different ways of defining the Bronze Age in East Asia and indeed elsewhere. The traditional way is to look at when bronze actually began to be used in each regional sequence. In some parts of eastern Eurasia this can be quite late. In Korea and Japan, for example, bronze appears around the eighth and fourth centuries BC, respectively (Rhee et al. 2007: 413; Barnes 2015; Fujio 2015: 110). In some places, bronze is introduced at more or less the same time as iron, giving rise to terms like ‘Palaeometal Age’ in the Russian Far East or ‘Metal Age’ in Island Southeast Asia.

Another approach is to adopt a more standardised framework incorporating Eurasia as a whole. If the Bronze Age in the Near East began in the late fourth millennium BC and if bronze appeared in western China by 2800 BC (Gansu Provincial Cultural Relics Work Team et al. 1984), then might it not make sense to use the *same* periodisation even if some local areas had not yet adopted

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bronze working? In this approach the Bronze Age becomes a ‘world historical epoch’ (Kristiansen 2015). In my view this perspective makes a great deal of sense, even for the Japanese islands. While Japan remained one of the most isolated parts of Eurasia in the third millennium BC, many of the changes which occurred there from that time can be understood as a *reaction* to the Bronze Age as a world historical epoch (Hudson et al. 2021).

On a regional scale, the problem of time/space classification is nicely illustrated by debates over Yayoi Japan. In an influential book titled *Two Other Japanese Cultures*, Fujimoto (1988) attempted to classify the prehistoric cultures of Hokkaido and Okinawa as different but still ‘Japanese’. At the time, this was an important statement supporting a ‘multicultural’ identity. Fujimoto proposed three cultural zones located in the north, centre and south of the archipelago; these were separated by intermediate areas which he termed *bokashi* or ‘fuzzy’ zones (cf. Batten 2003: 72–3). Fujimoto’s approach was taken up by Fujio (2013), who defined the Yayoi as a culture based on irrigated wet-rice farming and maintained through ‘Yayoi rituals’. Such definitions assume that wet-rice agriculture is the necessary basis of a ‘central’ Japanese culture. In my view, the great diversity and dynamism of the Yayoi period can be better understood through an approach which places the whole archipelago – and indeed its mainland connections – within the same frame of analysis. A similar perspective on Bronze Age China is adopted by Campbell and colleagues (2021).

Of course it would be unhelpful to insist that one of these two approaches to periodisation is necessarily superior to the other; both describe aspects of the same historical reality. As in medieval studies (Jervis 2017), there is a need for a multi-scalar perspective which considers both the local and the global. Sherratt (2011: 4) reminds us that ‘It is the privilege of archaeology to deal with all scales of phenomena, from the global to the local, over timescales from the momentary to the long term.’ Furthermore, given our imperfect knowledge of the archaeological record, it can be hard to distinguish between the two approaches. When I was an undergraduate in the 1980s, for example, there was considerable excitement about early dates for bronze in Southeast Asia. Excavations in the mid-1970s at Ban Chiang in Thailand had produced radiocarbon dates which seemed to suggest that bronze had reached mainland Southeast Asia as early as 2000 BC. White and Hamilton (2009) have proposed that this reflects a separate ancestry from bronze in China and can be connected with the Seima–Turbino horizon distributed from Finland to the Altai. A reanalysis found that the early Ban Chiang dates are unreliable, concluding that bronze reached mainland Southeast Asia only around 1000 BC in a context of trade with China in cowrie shells and turtle plastrons (Higham, Higham &

Kijngam 2011). The most recent overview of the bronze chronology of north-east Thailand argues that there is now ‘near universal acceptance’ for this short chronology (Higham & Cawte 2021). The details of this debate will perhaps continue to be discussed but retain important implications for a broader historical interpretation.

A further problem is how we approach the *end* of the Bronze Age and the transition to the Iron Age. The term ‘Iron Age’ is rarely used in East Asian archaeology. This is sometimes because there is a very short period after the arrival of bronze before iron is also adopted. In the Primorye province of the Russian Far East, for instance, bronze was introduced around 900 BC and iron some four centuries later around 500 BC (Popov, Zhushchikhovskaya & Nikitin 2019). In Europe, the Iron Age saw a move away from long-distance trade and a new tension between local autonomy and control (Kristiansen 1998; Cunliffe 2008). To some extent the same trend can be seen in East Asia. In the Warring States era (475–221 BC), the Chinese state attempted to prohibit the export of iron to outlying ‘barbarians’ yet the metal nevertheless spread to Korea and Japan through various non-state actors (Barnes 2007: 65–7). One might say that Japanese society became more autonomous once iron deposits in the archipelago were widely exploited. That did not occur, however, until the late sixth century AD (Fujio 2000: 97; Matsugi 2018); before then, the inhabitants of the Japanese islands obtained iron from the Korean peninsula in a trading system which, *in its economic structure*, was little changed from the Bronze Age. Furthermore, the period when Japan became metallurgically autonomous was one when it was increasingly influenced by new religious and political ideas, notably Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Barnes 2014; Bauer 2017; Deal 2017). The mix of these international ideologies with changing patterns of political and economic centralisation and decentralisation lends the period encompassing Japan’s Kofun and ‘classical’ (Nara–Heian) ages more similarities with what Di Cosmo and Maas (2018) call ‘Eurasian Late Antiquity’ than with the west Eurasian Iron Age.

However one approaches the periodisation of the Bronze Age in East Asia, there now seems little question that metallurgy spread from west to east across the steppes and neighbouring regions of Inner Eurasia (Chernykh 1992; Linduff & Mei 2009; Li & Chen 2012). The societies of the central plains of the Yellow River basin adopted bronze from that corridor zone but changed the steppe tradition in significant ways (Rawson 2017). While the Shang dynasty developed its distinctive bronze culture in the second millennium BC, the bronze-working traditions of the northern steppe continued to spread east, influencing Korea and Japan. Despite some relatively small typological differences, many bronze swords and spearheads found in the Korean peninsula and the Japanese

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islands share close similarities across a very wide area of northern Eurasia (cf. Kobayashi 2014; Matsumoto 2021). From mainland centres in southern China and Vietnam, bronze spread into Island Southeast Asia, most dramatically in the shape of Dong Son drums which reached as far south as Papua and Timor (Oliveira, O'Connor & Bellwood 2019). Dating of these drums, which may have been reused for long periods, is often insecure but they were still in use in the first millennium AD.

A major difference between the Bronze Ages of west and east Eurasia relates to the original relationship between centre and periphery. In the west, urban centres in the Near East expanded their connections with the European 'periphery' in their search for raw materials, transforming the societies of both regions. In eastern Eurasia, bronze was first introduced via the Inner Eurasian 'periphery' and then adopted – and often reinterpreted – by the 'core' states of the central plains (Rawson 2017). Island East Asia – the string of islands off the east coast of the mainland from Sakhalin down to Taiwan – seems to have followed a similar pattern of bronzisation, being first influenced by the Inner Eurasian periphery through Korea and only later by the Chinese core. This historical structure means that Island East Asia is an important region for understanding Bronze Age dynamics in eastern Eurasia.

2 Trade, Transculture and Maritime Connectivities

The Imazu site in Aomori, northern Japan has produced a three-legged jar from a Final Jōmon layer. The top of the vessel is damaged but it has a remaining height of only 11.4 cm. The jar has cord marking and red paint and belongs to the Ōbora C₂ type of the Final phase Kamegaoka culture (Shintani & Okada 1986) (Figure 3). Radiocarbon dates on charred material from other Ōbora C₂ sherds at Imazu have returned results of 1430–1396 and 1419–1383 cal BC, though a marine reservoir effect may make these dates a few centuries older than their absolute age (Horiuchi et al. 2015).

Tripods of the same shape as the Imazu jar are found in northern China after about 2500 BC (Wagner & Tarasov 2014). A variety of tripod forms are known from ancient China, but the more functional tripods served to boil water to steam cereals. The miniature size of the Imazu vessel rules out such a function. Tripods were rarely found in the Korean Bronze Age (Nelson 1999: 161) and An (1991) regards the Imazu tripod as a direct imitation of a Chinese vessel. Three more tripods from the same period found at other sites in Aomori may similarly have been influenced by continental Bronze Age contacts (Hudson et al. 2021). A possible connection with long-distance trade is suggested by salt-making pottery found at Imazu. Kamegaoka-style pottery sherds have

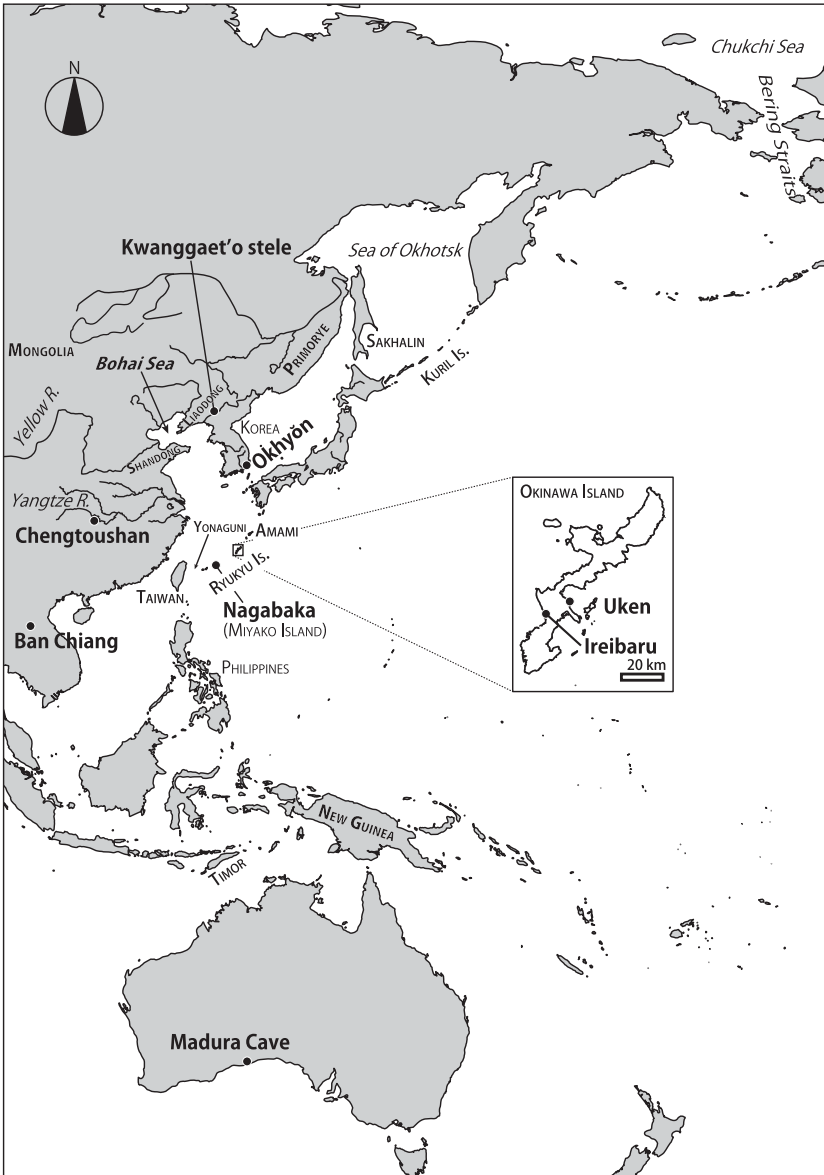


Figure 1 Eastern Eurasia and Australia with sites mentioned in the text. For sites in Japan, see Figure 2. Map drawn by J. Uchiyama.

been discovered from as far south as Okinawa, more than 2,000 km from the northern Tohoku heartland of the culture (Shitara 2018). The Ireibaru site on Okinawa (Figure 1) has also produced jade from Niigata in a Final Jōmon context.

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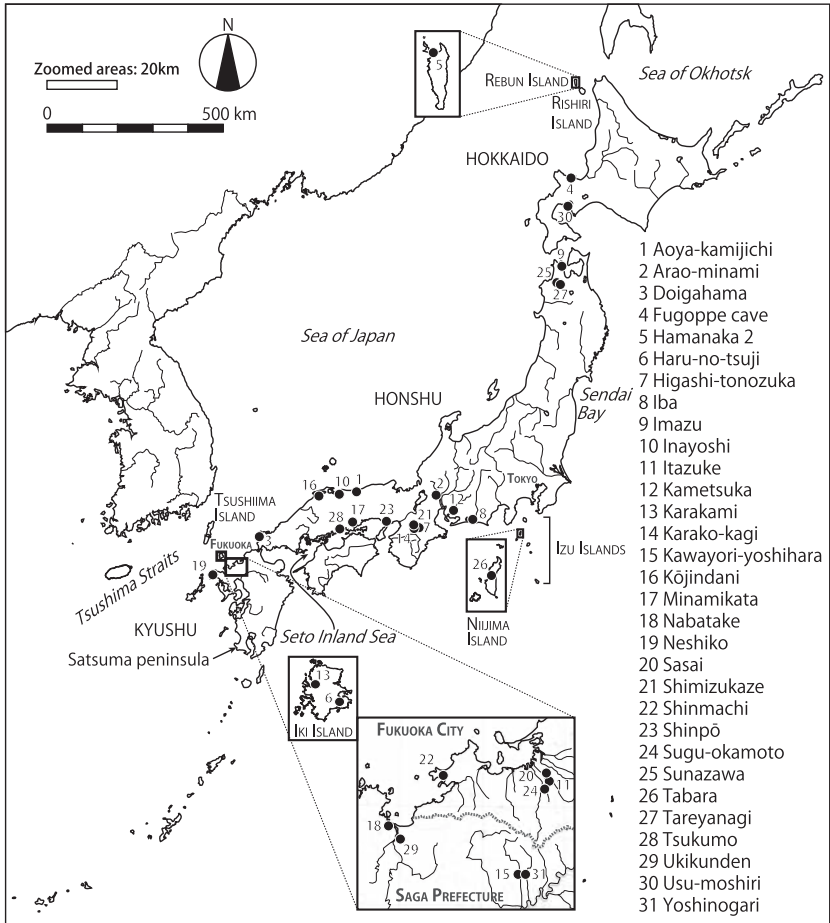


Figure 2 The Japanese islands with sites mentioned in the text.
 Map drawn by J. Uchiyama.

The Kamegaoka people were participating in exchange networks over very long distances and with very different cultures. Many archaeologists have, however, assumed that it was only with the arrival of rice in south-west Japan that the Jōmon was opened to the outside and began to change. We might call this the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ model of the Jōmon world. Shitara (2014b: 8) imagines the reaction of Jōmon villagers in northern Honshu upon hearing about rice and other crops being grown in the west of the archipelago:

[A] number of young people assembled a crew for a boat and packed it with trade goods such as masterpieces of pottery, red lacquered with intricate designs. Rowing against the current on rough seas they headed west.

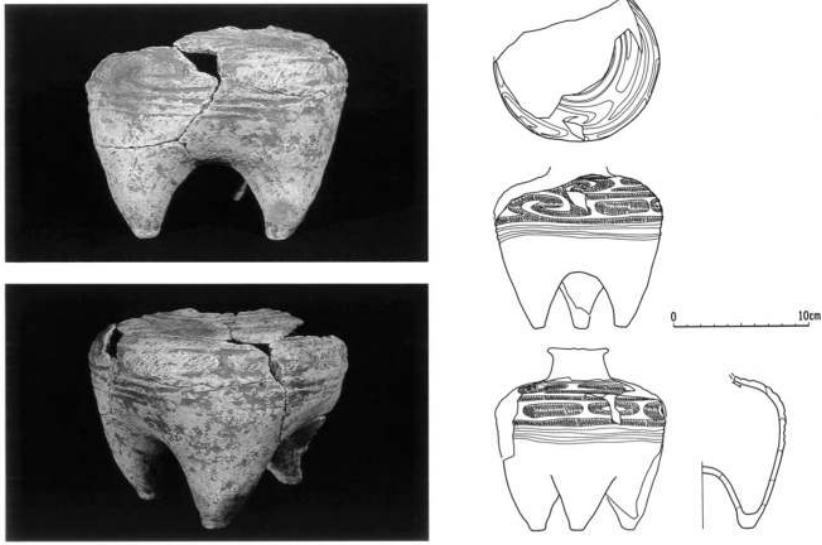


Figure 3 Final Jōmon tripod from the Imazu site.

Courtesy of Aomori Prefecture Archaeology Research Centre

The place they eventually reached was a settlement called Sasai on the plain of . . . Fukuoka. It was their first time to visit that place and the scene they saw was of rice paddy fields built by tall outsiders who were working in a friendly fashion with local people who – to judge from their faces – were their own comrades.

Shitara's story takes it as a given that the Jōmon people from the far north were country 'bumpkins' who had their eyes suddenly opened to civilisation by seeing and, later in the story, tasting rice. These were, however, the same Kamegaoka people who were imitating pottery from the Chinese mainland rather than just from the Korean peninsula, even if their knowledge of 'Chinese' pottery may have been obtained second-hand. Presumably they already knew all about about rice – even if they had decided not to grow it themselves. In total contrast to traditional 'rice-centred' views of Japanese history, it is such complex processes of reception and resistance which can be said to characterise bronzisation.

In many parts of Northeast Asia, millet farming initially spread overland within Neolithic cultural contexts, reaching Korea and the Primorye by the fourth millennium BC (Li et al. 2020). Around the same time, millet farmers in the Yellow River basin began to take up rice and many sites of the Yangshao culture have evidence for both millet and rice cultivation (Stevens & Fuller 2017). In the middle Yangtze, millet was adopted by some rice-farming societies, as for example