



China's Economic Rise

Lessons from Japan's
Political Economy

Sangaralingam Ramesh

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*For my father and my mother,
Nallathamby Sangaralingam and Pathmarani Sangaralingam,
Inuvil and Karinagar, Ceylon.
For their courage, dignity and their humility*

PREFACE

This book is the fourth in a series of books by me which explores the economic and political rise of China and its consequences for China and the rest of the world. The first books of the series encompassed the two volumes of ‘China’s Lessons for India’. In Volume 1, *The Political Economy of Development*, the emphasis was on evaluating the economic and political past of China and the economic reform programme which started in 1978. In Volume 2, *The Political Economy of Change*, the emphasis was on how the economic reform programme impacted on the Chinese economy effecting its rise to become the world’s second largest economy by 2011 as well as its transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge economy. At this moment in time, the Chinese economy faces one of two future trajectories which also have historical precedents. The first of these historical precedents is the one in which China follows the path followed by Great Britain after it became the first country in the world to industrialise in the eighteenth century, subsequently building an empire. This potential future for China is explored in the third book of the series, ‘*The Rise of Empires—The Political Economy of Innovation*’. On the other hand, the purpose of this book, the fourth in the series, is to explore the second historical precedent which the Chinese economy will follow, that of Japan after the Meiji restoration of 1868. In this case, just as China started to reform its economy from 1978, Japan started its reforms in earnest after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This book will show that there are economic, political and military similarities between the rise of modern Japan today and the rise of contemporary China, and what it may face in years to come. In this context, this book will be useful

reading for academics, politicians, the general public and for anyone interested in one of China's possible future trajectories.

Japan's rise to statehood through the Kamakura Period (1185 AD to 1333 AD) to the Tokugawa Period (1600 AD to 1868 AD) was quite unremarkable. And for all of this time, China was the centre of the universe and Japan its vassal state. Japan itself was secluded for over 200 years during the Tokugawa Period when all foreigners were expelled from Japan. However, Japan's seclusion from the rest of the world was ended with the arrival off the coast of Japan of US, Russian and British warships. As a result of which western nations won trade concessions as well as other benefits from the Tokugawa Bakufu in the mid-nineteenth century. Japan at that time, compared to the United States and Britain, was underdeveloped and technologically backward especially in the military sphere. However, Japan had already gone through proto-industrialisation before the British had in the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, whereas British proto-industrialisation led to rapid technological development and industrialisation proper, this did not happen in the case of Japan. This is probably because Japan did not have increasing demand for its manufactured goods from overseas colonies whilst domestic producers faced increasing costs of production due to rising wages, as was the case of Great Britain. The arrival of the British in Japan in particular must have stirred intense debates in the Tokugawa Bakufu about the choices of either being colonised or rapidly industrialising and becoming militarily capable of defending Japan's borders. This is particularly true in the context of the use of superior military force against the Chinese Qing imperial court by the British to win trade and territorial concessions in order to further their domestic prosperity through enforced trade. At this time, unlike the Chinese, the Japanese realised that in order for their country, their society and culture to survive the ravages of becoming colonised, they would have to modernise extremely fast. The Tokugawa Shogunate and Bakufu were incapable and perhaps unwilling to take the policy steps required to safeguard Japan's sovereignty. It was for this reason that the Tokugawa Shogunate and Bakufu were replaced by a constitutional monarchy based on multi-party democratic politics as a result of the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Historically when countries have undergone rapid economic development, increasing disparities between the rich and the poor and economic crises have arisen. The historical trend has been a shift away from democracy, a mixed economic system encompassing free market forces,

government intervention and the use of private capital towards bureaucratic fascism. This was the case of Japan at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s and Germany in the 1930s. The result was a rise in nationalism, racial self-awareness of the peoples of these countries, a rush to militarism and inevitably global military conflict. Herein lies the juxtaposition between economic activity and human behaviour. In this case, negative economic activity resulting in increasing income disparities as well as increasing deprivation in society leads to the rise of populism, and the democratic system becomes the mechanism which facilitates the rise of autocracy. The issues which the contemporary world economy faces have been seen before specifically in the 1930s. Then globalisation and global trade came to a stuttering halt with economic crises in several countries most prominently associated with the Wall Street Crash of 1929. As western economies began to suffer the economic consequences of the crash, particularly associated with rising unemployment, increasing income disparities and social deprivation, they turned to protect their economies with the use of tariffs to make Japanese goods more expensive and domestically produced goods cheaper in comparison. The British Empire decided at the imperial economic conference in Ottawa in 1932 to impose tariffs on Japanese manufactured goods including textiles which were beginning to displace British and Canadian goods due to their relative cheapness.¹ However, this made the economic situation worse and led to military conflict. But the Japanese economy began to grow in the 1930s because of its militarily planned nature. This situation has comparisons with contemporary global economics. In this case, the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 can perhaps be compared to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The global and national economic crises which followed both of these economic events were similar in nature, increasing income disparities and increasing social deprivation. Both events were due to the fault of the poor regulation financial system which was being driven by the webs of human intrigue and avarice. However, the big difference between these two triggers of economic crisis was that the global and national economic impact of the Global Financial Crisis was mitigated, and it did not cause a Great Depression as the Wall Street Crash of 1929 did. Indeed, the negative economic effects of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 were mitigated by

¹ Miners, N. (2002), Industrial development in the colonial empire and the imperial economic conference at Ottawa 1932, 30:2, 53–76, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530208583141>.

a globally co-ordinated economic policy response which involved the use of expansionary monetary and fiscal policies in association with unorthodox monetary policies such as Quantitative Easing. Nevertheless, national debt-to-GDP ratios were indicating the unsustainability of the debt such that governments such as that of the United Kingdom in 2010 began an austerity policy in order to bring debt and government borrowing down to sustainable levels. However, contemporary global debt has increased by 50% in comparison to its levels in 2008–2009.² Moreover, Eurozone government and household debt is also higher in 2019 than was the case a decade ago.³ Furthermore, while debt is cheap, firms have accumulated debt in order to increase equity returns.⁴ But at the moment, it is difficult to pinpoint the trigger/s of the next financial crisis, at least in the long term. Although the heart of any potential financial crisis could lie with the Chinese economy in which unsustainable local government debt as well as the debt of state-owned enterprises has built up over several years. If China's economic growth continues to fall in subsequent years and/or it adopts a floating exchange rate mechanism, then these could serve as possible triggers for domestic economic stagnation and a potential global economic crisis in the context of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Nevertheless, currently the US economy seems to be in good shape because economic growth is taking place at a sustained and consistent level, and housing debt has fallen since the crisis.⁵ In the short term, firms may be able to manage debt repayments because interest payments remain low and dividend payments can be cut.⁶ However, if unemployment begins to rise as a result of an economic crisis, then this may lead to payment defaults by households. But in the United States, mortgage-related household debt is at its lowest since 2008, although sub-prime auto loans are increasing.⁷ Nevertheless, in contrast to the levels of sub-prime mortgage loans in 2008, the value of the sub-prime auto loans is comparatively

² Fletcher, L. (2019), Global debt – when is the day of reckoning? <https://www.ft.com/content/949d08da-462d-11e9-a965-23d669740bfb>.

³ Fletcher, L. (2019), Global debt – when is the day of reckoning? <https://www.ft.com/content/949d08da-462d-11e9-a965-23d669740bfb>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tett, G. (2019), Driven to default: what's causing the rise in sub-prime auto loans? <https://www.ft.com/content/1ce6d32e-4520-11e9-b168-96a37d002cd3>.

smaller at \$300 billion.⁸ Moreover, the size of Eurozone household debts is at its lowest levels since 2006.⁹ This reduces the risk of big Eurozone loan defaults due to either rising unemployment or rising interest rates. However, the main concerns seem to lie with the status of the Chinese economy and other emerging economies. In China's case, the property market is cooling as the Chinese economy has begun to slow from its double-digit growth rates.¹⁰ As Chinese property developers find it difficult to offload new developments, they begin to slash prices and profits and revenues fall. At the same time, in 2019 Chinese property developers face debt repayments amounting to \$55 billion.¹¹ Despite the fact that the growth of the Chinese economy has slowed to its lowest level in thirty years, Chinese property developers increased their US-related bond debt by \$19 billion in the first two months of 2019.¹² Public sector debt in other developing countries is also a major concern where such debt now accounts for 50% of GDP.¹³ This is the highest level in nearly fifty years.¹⁴ Furthermore, while 80% of developing countries have increased public debt over the last five years, the number of developing economies with high risk, unsustainable debt has increased to thirty-two.¹⁵ More worrying is that the source of debt is not just Chinese lending but also lending by other countries and multilateral institutions.¹⁶

In the case of the European Union (EU), the free movement of labour, one of the economic pillars of the European Union, caused additional competition for jobs and public service provision in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the influx of workers from the former Soviet Bloc countries which joined the EU in 2004, the EU-8 which included Poland and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Romei, V. (2019), Eurozone household debt falls to lowest levels since 2006, <https://www.ft.com/content/3cbbf5f8-1a41-11e9-9e64-d150b3105d21>.

¹⁰ Dunkley, E. (2019), Jiayuan crash underscores China property risks, <https://www.ft.com/content/b5560666-1a37-11e9-b93e-f4351a53f1c3>.

¹¹ Dunkley, E. (2019), Jiayuan crash underscores China property risks, <https://www.ft.com/content/b5560666-1a37-11e9-b93e-f4351a53f1c3>.

¹² Weinland, D. (2019), China's property developers binge on record dollar debt, <https://www.ft.com/content/e8ff4e1a-3fe3-11e9-9bee-cfab61506f44>.

¹³ Callan, P., Bendary, B., and Sequeira, Y. (2019), Emerging markets face a new debt crisis: Chinese lending is not the only cause, <https://www.ft.com/content/4fd4e6ac-440a-11e9-b168-96a37d002cd3>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Hungary,¹⁷ acted to lower the wages of UK skilled and semi-skilled workers.¹⁸ In association with the Coalition government's austerity policies, the lowering of wages would have contributed to the growing poverty in British society and the increased economic deprivation. This would have led to a resurgent national identity which would have resulted in the people of Britain voting to leave the European Union in the June 2016 Referendum, by a winning margin of 3.8%.¹⁹ Those who voted to leave the EU represented 51.9% of those who voted, while those who voted to remain in the EU comprised 48.1% of a total electorate of 46,501,241 eligible UK voters.²⁰ Thus, the majority in favour of leaving the EU may have arisen because of either the Coalition government's economic austerity policies or the influx of cheap labour from the EU. Child poverty in the United Kingdom has also increased due to low economic growth and cuts in welfare benefits by the government.²¹ Moreover, working-class UK families are increasingly having to rely on charities in order to meet their basic needs.²² In America, Donald Trump was voted into office as President in November 2016 with a promise to 'make America great again'. His election victory may have resulted because of increasing inequality in America due to the loss of manufacturing jobs caused by the economic rise of China. In an effort to bring jobs back to America, President Trump has imposed tariffs on cheap Chinese goods just as the United States did to Japanese goods in 1932. In the European Union, economic stagnation following the Global Financial Crisis has given way to far right governments in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Italy.²³ In Germany, the far right has been gaining a popular mandate in elections, and in

¹⁷Portes, J. (2017), Immigration and the UK-EU relationship, IN *The Economics of UK-EU Relations: From the Treaty of Rome to the Vote for Brexit*, Campos, N., Coricelli, F. (Eds), Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸Clarke, H., Goodwin, M., and Whiteley, P. (2017), *Brexit: Why Britain Voted To Leave The European Union*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹⁹Withnall, A. (2016), EU referendum results in full: Brexit campaign secures victory by 4 points, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-eu-referendum-final-result-leave-campaign-secures-official-lead-a7099296.html>.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Wright, R. (2019), Child poverty set to hit record levels, says think tanks, <https://www.ft.com/content/0e26447c-3455-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812>.

²²Rovnick, N. (2019), UK working poor increasingly rely on charities for basic needs, <https://www.ft.com/content/f6c2dd6e-343a-11e9-bd3a-8b2a211d90d5>.

²³Camus, J., and Lebourg, N. (2017), *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

France, the far right has been momentarily seen off by promises of better things to come from an enfeebled Emmanuel Macron. This is all at a time when countries are not experiencing sufficient levels of economic growth. For example, China's economic growth is slowing from its historic levels of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods is clearly negatively impacting on Chinese economic growth. As a result, many Chinese firms have begun to freeze recruitment and instead relying on unpaid internships to maintain their staffing levels. Simultaneously many if not all Chinese families are investing heavily in their children's future by spending a lot of money on their education in order to acquire a foreign education. At the same time, China is enhancing its military power by increasing training and investing in and introducing new technologies. China's leaders take for granted that the South China Sea is its own backyard and that the breakaway province of Taiwan must be re-joined to the motherland. At the same time, children in China are taught about the atrocities committed by the Japanese in the invasion of China in the 1930s. Just as in Japan there was an antagonism against foreigners and the foreign powers, can the same thing be said of China today? Furthermore, the rapid ascent of the Chinese economy since 1978 has fuelled a national pride which has lent itself to increasing nationalism. This is exactly the same thing which happened to Japan in the decades which followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868. And from an economics perspective, the contemporary Chinese economy is beginning to experience difficulties which are particularly associated with the imposition of tariffs by the United States. The rate of Chinese factory output growth, a measure of the country's manufacturing sector, year on year in January 2019 grew at its lowest level since 1995.²⁴ Similarly, just as the Chinese economy is struggling to create jobs, the Japanese economy of the 1930s was unable to create enough jobs for an increasing population. Moreover, while the Japanese had been building and technologically upgrading their military capacity since 1868, China has begun to do this in a big way only in the last decade or so. Unfortunately, contemporary China has some of the characteristics of post-Meiji Japan—rising nationalism, increasing militarisation, a potentially impending economic crisis and millions still living in poverty in the rural parts of the country. If, indeed, China today is on the same economic, political and military trajectory as post-Meiji Japan, then

²⁴ Wildau, G. (2019), Chinese factory-output growth slows to weakest on record, <https://www.ft.com/content/a2c7cdf8-45fb-11e9-b168-96a37d002cd3>.

its policy makers must turn the country away from this trajectory to conflict and human suffering. Rather, China today is at a place where it can benefit humanity and return to its place as the centre of the universe. But in order to achieve this it must turn away from the negativity of nationalism and militarism and instead embrace humanity and its neighbours in benevolence. Today's rivals were ancient friends, and today India and China must return to their ancient status. In fact, 2020 will be marking the beginning of the Asian century as from that date the value of Asian economies will be bigger than the rest of the world combined.²⁵ In terms of purchasing power parity, China is already the world's largest economy and India the third.²⁶

Japan had begun the process of modernising its economy in the mid-nineteenth century because of a fear of colonisation by the western powers. However, this modernisation did not take off until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 in which the Shogun and a military government of a decentralised Japan were replaced by a constitutional monarchy based on a democratic system of government. Japanese society and economy then developed according to a twin-track approach. One track favoured the use of market forces, private capital and government support in order to rapidly modernise and industrialise the Japanese economy in association with an educational system which still favoured traditional Japanese values. The second track involved developing Japanese institutions along western lines and improving Japan's military capacity by increased manpower and technological ability. At the same time the rising urban middle classes and the availability of a relatively free press gave way to increasing individualism and a strong democratic system based on party politics. However, an ever-present and growing undercurrent in Japan was the antagonism against the western powers because of unfair treaties and constraints upon Japan's military capacity, as well as increasing income disparities between the well off and the less well off. The growing undercurrent sentiment in Japan was becoming stronger in the 1920s and the early 1930s such that liberalism and multi-party politics were being swept away by rising militarism and nationalism towards bureaucratic fascism. This it was felt would be able to more efficiently allocate economic resources, especially social goods, which could help to alleviate poverty, and income disparity, in

²⁵ Romei, V., and Reed, J. (2019), The Asian Century is Set to Begin, <https://www.ft.com/content/520cb6f6-2958-11e9-a5ab-f8ef2b976c7>.

²⁶ Ibid.

Japanese society. The transition to bureaucratic fascism was made easier through the destabilising effect of an economic crisis in Japan in the 1920s and in the 1930s which was only made worse by the imposition of tariffs by the western powers, notably the United States, on Japanese exports in 1932. Japanese military aggression, notably against China in the 1930s, led to sanctions being imposed by the United States. These developments contributed directly to the Japanese bombing of US warships based at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Moreover, Japanese politicians of the first three decades of the twentieth century were unable to formulate the optimal economic policy in order to resolve the economic crises which had been developing. This was because policies had to be diluted in order to achieve a compromise to facilitate agreement amongst multi-party politicians in the Japanese parliament, the ‘Diet’. This is similar to what is happening in the UK Parliament with regard to Brexit. While China does not have the problem of having to dilute economic policy, it does have a multitude of other factors which could easily contribute to a large-scale economic crisis. These factors include huge provincial government debts and the property bubble in major urban centres, most notably Shanghai and Beijing. Property prices are so high that people simply have to work in order to pay their rent with little money left to enjoy anything else.

In the light of what has been previously discussed, China has the same ingredients—nationalism, militarism, income disparities, social deprivation and economic crisis—in a hostile global environment in which tariffs are being imposed on Chinese goods, and Chinese firms are placed under intense scrutiny, as was Japan in the first decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the distribution of income in Japan in the 1920s as well as in the 1930s was unfair.²⁷ This may have led to the undermining of the democratic system of governance and the imposition of the command economy by the military. Like Japan in the decades following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, China took its first steps along the same path with the market-oriented economic reforms of 1978. Since then China has industrialised in the context of manufactured goods, to become the world’s second largest economy. Although it may be the world’s largest economy in PPP terms. But this has, like the Japan of the 1920s and the 1930s, been at the expense of growing income inequality between China’s

²⁷ Minami, R. (1998), Economic development and income distribution in Japan: an assessment of the Kuznets hypothesis, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 22, pp. 39–58.

regions and its peoples.²⁸ It is, therefore, important that the Chinese government instigates and implements policies to mitigate the unequal distribution of income in Chinese society to prevent the political and social instability which Japan experienced in the 1920s and the late 1930s. Moreover, China's economic growth is also experiencing a downturn, but only time can tell how severe that will be or not. In this case, the purpose of this book is to determine where Japan went wrong and how China can learn from that experience in order to build a better future for itself and the rest of humanity. This analysis will primarily be based on Japanese economic and political development as a state over time, and the policies which were followed by successive governments in the decades which followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868. At this time, Japan having embraced economic and political reform went onto industrialise at the start of the Meiji Restoration of 1868. At the same time, Japan's history of government by the military, the Bakufu, under the command of an all-powerful Shogun lent itself to the start of militarisation at the same time. As the Japanese economy developed after WWI, economic crises were not managed sufficiently well enough. The result was that income disparities between Japan's rural and urban populations increased. The poor were in the ranks of the military, and increasing disparities between the rich and the poor led to military control of the Japanese economy which became a military command economy after the mid-1930s. Today, China stands on ground upon which Japan stood in the first decades of the twentieth century. Disparities in income between the urban rich and the rural poor are ever omnipresent. Due to this and the exploitation of workers, some Chinese have become fervent supporters of neo-Marxism. The danger is that it is not the old who are turning against the Chinese capitalist state but the young, the young educated, who see the suffering of their young countrymen and women.²⁹ Now that China's economic engine has begun to slow, the situation of the poor and the issue of the divide between China's rural poor and its urban rich become ever more critical. At the same time China has been modernising its military forces. Economically, tariffs have been imposed by the United States on Chinese exports, and

²⁸ Shi, L., Sato, H., and Sicular, T. (2013), *Rising Inequality in China*, IN *Rising Inequality in China: Challenges to a Harmonious Society*, Shi, L., Sato, h., and Sicular, T. (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

²⁹ Yang, Y. (2019), *Inside China's Crackdown on Young Marxists*, <https://www.ft.com/content/fd087484-2f23-11e9-8744-e7016697f225>.

Chinese firms are under attack by western governments due to security fears.³⁰ For example, Huawei, a Chinese mobile and telecommunications company, is being sidelined from western government contracts and tenders because of fears that it is controlled by the Chinese state. And, if Huawei technology is used in western countries' telecommunications infrastructure, then China would be able to use such infrastructure to gather data which it could use to its military advantage in the event of a conflict. It is for this reason that western governments, the United States, the countries of Europe, New Zealand and Australia, are disinterested in doing business with Chinese firms. Unfortunately, this will only cause resentment in China against foreigners. A similar thing happened to a developing Japan at a time in the nineteenth century when the same western governments were imposing unfavourable treaties on Japan. And in the latter part of the twentieth century, Japan was being blamed for the economic misfortunes of the western economies, just as China is being blamed today. Similarities between Japan's economic reform and rise and the China of today abound. The question remains whether China will be able to find a way to become a peaceful and harmonious country and neighbour or will it fail and embroil the world in another war. Will history repeat itself? Whether or not it does, economic crisis will always occur as it did to a resurgent Japan, by now a superpower, in 1989. The economic crisis Japan experienced from 1989 onwards may also happen to contemporary China.

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³⁰ Ram, A. (2019), Huawei lashes Out at US 'Political Campaign', <https://www.ft.com/content/458f173c-2fa9-11e9-ba00-0251022932c8>.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Rise of a Nation

CHINESE CHRONICLES

The earliest known writings inclusive of Japan, the Chinese chronicles before 700 AD, refer to Japan as ‘Wa’ which was composed of one hundred conflicting states.¹ The earliest of such records, which can be dated to 57 AD, notarised the names of chieftains and other polities in the archipelago.² The Chinese chronicles also mention the tributary missions between the chieftains of Japan and the Chinese Han and Wei courts.³ Reference was also made to Han colonies in Korea.⁴ These included Lelang and Daifang.⁵ The reference made by the Chinese Chronicles to the conflicting states in Japan could have been due to a population explosion which necessitated the need for more land for intensive agriculture following the emergence of the Yoyoi culture on the island of Kyushu. Archaeological evidence from around this time does suggest an increase in defensive settlements; and skeletons with evidence of damage due to the

¹ Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

² Barnes, G. (2007), State Formation in Japan, Emergence of a 4th Century Ruling Elite, Routledge, London.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Walker, H. (2012), East Asia: A New History, Author House, Bloomington.

impact with projectiles.⁶ Nevertheless, which of the Wa states was the most powerful is indeterminate. This is because one Chinese chronicle written between 280 AD and 297 AD refers to it as ‘Yamaichi’, while another Chinese chronicle written 150 years later refers to it as ‘Yamadai’.⁷ It is difficult to determine if they were the same states, different or whether they existed at all. An alternative theory which has been put forward is that an entirely different entity existed, the state of Kyushu, one of whose princes invaded the Kinai-Yamato area becoming the first Emperor of Japan, Jimmu.⁸ The early Chinese writings are the only literary evidence of early Japanese history, because either no Korean or Japanese literary evidence exists or survived prior to the early eighth century AD. The first Japanese literary evidence of Japanese history did not arrive until 712 BC, with the emergence of the first tangible Emperor from whom the current Emperor can claim to be a direct descendant. In this case, it is evident that literary influences developed much earlier in China than they did in either Korea or Japan. The early Chinese literary sources suggest that there was a significant diffusion of cultural influences from both Korea and China, with Korea as a conduit, to the peoples of the islands of Japan.⁹ However, Chinese influence was more significant over the Japanese archipelago; and the legitimacy of the titles of Japanese chieftains was somewhat dependent on recognition by the imperial Chinese court.¹⁰ But the legitimacy of Japanese polity ended in 631 AD when the Tang Emperor absolved the Japanese from having to pay annual tribute to the Tang Court.¹¹

PALAEOLITHIC, JOMON AND YAYOI PERIODS

Until 13,000 years ago the Japanese islands were part of continental Asia, but as the ice age ended and glaciers melted, sea levels rose, flooding the land bridges across which ancient animals, including *Homo Erectus* and

⁶ Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

⁷ Toro, T. (1983), The Kyushu Dynasty: Furuta’s Theory on Ancient Japan, Japan Quarterly, Vol. 30, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

¹⁰ Holcombe, C. (2001), The Genesis of East Asia, 221BC–907AD, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.

¹¹ Ibid.

Homo Sapiens, had crossed over from Asia to Japan half a million years previously.¹² The earliest Palaeolithic stone tools found in the Japanese islands were at a site called Takamori in Miyagi Prefecture, dated to be as 500,000 years old.¹³ The stone tools found at Takamori are of a similar age to the stone tools found at the Zhoukoudian in China.¹⁴ At the latter site, a remarkable number of *Homo Erectus* fossils were also found. The presence of land bridges which connected the islands of Japan to the Asian mainland may have facilitated the movement of *Homo Erectus* populations from China to Japan during the mid to the late Pleistocene period.¹⁵ The latter period ranges from 125,000 years to 10,000 years ago.¹⁶ Dynamic changes in human evolution were taking place during that time.¹⁷ *Homo Sapiens*, having evolved in Africa, were moving out of Africa to colonise other continents.¹⁸ Where the Japanese islands were once connected to mainland Asia, this facilitated the movement of hominid species like *Homo Erectus* and *Homo Sapiens* to Japan. The land bridges to the Japanese islands from continental Asia are best associated as starting from either the Korean peninsula, Siberia and/or Sakhalin.¹⁹ Nevertheless, no archaeological evidence has been found which can shed light on the physique of the early *Homo Erectus* population of Japan or to provide sufficient grounds to infer that these early populations were the root of future Japanese populations.²⁰ However, the skeletal remains found on the island of Okinawa, the so-called Minatogawa remains, do provide an insight into the physique of the first Palaeolithic inhabitants of Japan 17,000 years

¹² Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

¹³ Kazumichi, K. (2001), The Japanese as an Asia-Pacific Population, IN Multicultural Japan, Palaeolithic to Postmodern, Denoon, D., Hudson, M., McCormack, G., and Morris-Suzuki, T. (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gowlett, J., and Dunbar, R. (2011), A Brief Overview of Human Evolution, IN Early Human Kinship, from Sex to Social Reproduction, Allen, N., Callan, H., Dunbar, R., and James, W. (Eds), Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

¹⁷ Kaifu, Y., and Fujita, M. (2012), Fossil Record of Early Modern Humans in East Asia, Quaternary International, Vol. 248, pp. 2–11.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Naumann, N. (2000), Japanese Prehistory, The Material and Spiritual Culture of the Jomon Period, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.

²⁰ Kazumichi, K. (2001), The Japanese as an Asia-Pacific Population, IN Multicultural Japan, Palaeolithic to Postmodern, Denoon, D., Hudson, M., McCormack, G., and Morris-Suzuki, T. (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

ago.²¹ Analysis of the cranium of the Minatogawa population indicates similarities with populations in southern China, 30,000 BC, and to north China, 10,000 BC.²² However, the mainland Japanese population during the Holocene period were different in form and structure from the Minatogawa people.²³ The Holocene period covers the time period from the present to 11,000 years ago.²⁴ Nevertheless, stone tools have been found in the south of Kanto which may be older than 30,000 years in age.²⁵ The technology used to produce the stone tools is unique to Japan, although some examples have been found in Australia.²⁶ The technology itself was reflected by the use of edge grinding to produce sharp stone blades which were then fixed to wooden handles to produce axe like stone tools.²⁷ Archaeological evidence suggests that knowledge of the technology moved from Kanto to Honshu and then on to Kyushu.²⁸

As sea levels began to rise at the end of the last ice age, the Japanese islands, Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu and Hokkaido, became cut off from the rest of humanity, and the cut-off populations on the islands developed on their own for some time. However, throughout Japan's history, the three plains in Japan's geographical topography were important to its development.²⁹ These plains include the Kanto plain encompassing Tokyo Bay, the Nobi plain encompassing Ise Bay and the Kinai plain encompassing Osaka Bay. While all three plains house the greatest population concentrations in the islands of Japan due to their fertile nature, the Kanto plain is by far the largest of the three plains encompassing 5000 square miles.³⁰ As these three plains are the most fertile regions in Japan, the three plains are of historical importance in the story of Japan's rise as a nation. This is because agricultural production would be substantive in

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kaifu, Y., and Fujita, M. (2012), Fossil Record of Early Modern Humans in East Asia, *Quaternary International*, Vol. 248, pp. 2–11.

²⁴ Giraud, R. (2004), *Geologic Hazards of Monroe City, Sevier County, Utah*, Special Study 110, Utah Geological Survey, US.

²⁵ Oda, S., and Keally, C. (1992), The Origin and Early Development of Axe-Like and Edge-Ground Stone Tools in the Japanese Palaeolithic, *IPPA Bulletin*, Vol. 12, pp. 23–31.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sansom, G. (1959), *A History of Japan to 1334*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.

³⁰ Ibid.

these regions whose possessors would be bestowed with great wealth and power.³¹ This would to some extent explain the migration of peoples from the southwest of Japan to eastern Japan, through its central region.³² It would therefore follow that the development of Japan's cultural, social, political and economic development would be influenced by the possession and the competition for possession of these lands. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout Japan's long history, all three plains have contributed to it in some way or another. For example, in distant time, the Nobi plain was the seat of the food goddess, the plain of Kinai housed the commercial centre of Osaka and the ancient royal capital of Kyoto, while the plain of Kanto houses the strategically important Tokyo Bay which also was the seat of feudal power.³³

While there is insufficient evidence to conjecture that there was a Palaeolithic culture in Japan,³⁴ it is logical to deduce that animals including humans must have had to live there after the disappearance of the land bridges. Moreover, it would be reasonable to conclude that the Minatogawa population would have also expanded to the main islands of Japan.³⁵ Nevertheless, archaeological evidence does suggest that a Neolithic culture did exist on the Japanese islands. The climate proved to be beneficial to plant and animal ecosystems, and as result, the Neolithic people of Japan, the Jomon, were best placed to thrive and to innovate. The Jomon culture prevailed between 14,000 BC and 2500 BC.³⁶ The early Jomon populations may have evolved from the beings similar to those who occupied the Minatogawa site because the early Jomon remains found in coastal and mountain areas are similar to the remains found at Minatogawa.³⁷ Thus, it would be safe to conclude that the early Jomon population

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Kidder, J. (1954), A Reconsideration of the 'Pre-Pottery' Culture of Japan, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 135–143.

³⁵ Kazumichi, K. (2001), The Japanese as an Asia-Pacific Population, IN *Multicultural Japan, Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, Denoon, D., Hudson, M., McCormack, G., and Morris-Suzuki, T. (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

³⁶ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006), The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

³⁷ Kazumichi, K. (2001), The Japanese as an Asia-Pacific Population, IN *Multicultural Japan, Palaeolithic to Postmodern*, Denoon, D., Hudson, M., McCormack, G., and Morris-Suzuki, T. (Eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

inherited the physical characteristics of the mid to late Pleistocene period.³⁸ However, by the latter half of the Jomon period, evolution seems to have played its part in changing the physique of the inhabitants of Japan.³⁹ Human fossil remains were more abundant as the Jomon had begun to use shell mounds to bury their dead. As a result, it was possible for anthropologists and archaeologists to discern that the Jomon had become taller, with robust limb bones, and had more moderate tooth wear in comparison to their ancestors of the mid-late Pleistocene.⁴⁰ However, the people of the Jomon culture were strikingly dissimilar to modern Japanese people in several ways.⁴¹

There were two main innovations which resulted from the Jomon culture. The first of these innovations was pottery, with Japanese pottery being the oldest known in the world, made in Japan nearly 13,000 years ago in Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese islands, spreading northwards to reach the northern most of the Japanese islands, 7000 years ago.⁴² However, more up to date analysis suggests that the Neolithic Jomon culture of Japan produced the world's oldest pottery at between 10,750 BC and 10,000 BC.⁴³ The latter date coincides with the emergence of the Jomon culture on the island of Honshu.⁴⁴ The word 'Jomon' is associated with the rope pattern found on pottery made during the time of that culture.⁴⁵ The earliest pottery found was on the island of Kyushu.⁴⁶ This may suggest that the Jomon culture existed there too, perhaps by migrating from Honshu. However, it is probable that Jomon culture extended throughout the islands of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa.⁴⁷ But Jomon culture flourished predominantly on the main island in the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

⁴³ Karan, P. (2005), Japan in the 21st Century, Environment, Economy and Society, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

⁴⁴ Richardson, H. (2005), Life in Ancient Japan, Crabtree Publishing Company, New York.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Irapta, A., and Duka, C. (2005), Introduction to Asia: History, Culture and Civilisation, Rex Book Store, Manila.

⁴⁷ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006), The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, World Archaeology, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

districts of Kanto and Tohoku.⁴⁸ There was also a high population density in the mountainous areas of Chubu, but a sparsely populated area of western Japan which was covered by evergreen forest.⁴⁹ Although there was a tendency for the population to flourish in regions where there was a big availability of nuts, such as in Southern Hokkaido.⁵⁰ The Jomon diet of nuts probably proved to be the cause for the need to find something to hold them in. Pottery provided an answer. The invention of pottery in Japan proved to be revolutionary because food could now be combined and cooked; and food could be stored. The implication of this is that people could be consistently fed; and they could maximise the accumulation of the nutritional value of food. The hunter-gatherers of Japan were then better able to exploit the natural abundance of the Japanese ecosystem far better than possible before the arrival of intensive agricultural techniques nearly 10,000 years later.⁵¹ However, while there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that the Jomon were anything but hunter-gatherers, they may have not been exclusively so.⁵² This is because although the Jomon did not use metal tools, they may have used wooden and stone tools to plant chestnut trees and grow millet grain to make bread at around 2500 BC.⁵³ Indeed, there is archaeological evidence to suggest that the Jomon culture was a hybrid of a hunter-gatherer existence as well as small-scale *in-situ* agricultural production.⁵⁴ But, in this case the Jomon may simply just have been ‘managing’ their forestry resources.⁵⁵ It was only after 2500 BC that the agricultural production of food sources became a

⁴⁸ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006), The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

⁴⁹ Koyama, S. (1978), Jomon Subsistence and Population, *Senri Ethnological Studies* 2.

⁵⁰ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006), The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

⁵¹ Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, *Discover*, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

⁵² Karan, P. (2005), *Japan in the 21st Century, Environment, Economy and Society*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

⁵³ Richardson, H. (2005), *Life in Ancient Japan*, Crabtree Publishing Company, New York.

⁵⁴ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006) The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

⁵⁵ Bleed, P., and Matsui, A. (2010), Why Didn’t Agriculture Develop in Japan? A Consideration of Jomon Ecological Style, Niche Construction, and the Origins of Domestication, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 17, pp. 356–370.

predominant feature of the local economy in Japan, with the mass migration of wet rice farmers from Korea or China.⁵⁶ This represented the start of the Yayoi period. The beneficial exploitation of the land led to a population explosion in which a few thousand people became hundreds of thousands of individuals.⁵⁷ However, in order to better understand the transition from the semi-agrarian economy of the Jomon culture to the agrarian economy of the Yayoi culture, it is necessary to consider changes in the environment, settlement for subsistence, ceremonial practices as well as the location of a specific craft or trade at a specific site.⁵⁸ The Sannai Maruyama archaeological site is best placed to provide evidence of the decline of Jomon culture in its Middle Period.⁵⁹ This occurred between 4800 BC and 4050 BC.⁶⁰ The plant-based remains at the site indicate that the site went into decline at a time when subsistence specialisation in plant food, such as chestnuts, had occurred.⁶¹ The settlement may have become smaller as the population declined because the food consumed had less nutritional content than the food types which had been consumed before.

The discovery of the oldest pottery in the world in Japan caused some contradictions to be overturned.⁶² The first of these contradictions was that hunter-gatherers, which the Japanese of that time were, could not innovate. Nevertheless, the invention of pottery would allow the population of the time to become more sedentary leading to a fall in the hunter-gatherer existence.⁶³ The second contradiction to be overturned was that innovation could only occur in large populations and that it could not occur in small isolated populations, which would be an apt description for the categorisation of the population of Japan during that time. The second

⁵⁶ Matsui, A., and Kanehara, M. (2006) The Question of Prehistoric Plant Husbandry during the Jomon Period in Japan, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 259–273, DOI: 10.1080/00438240600708295

⁵⁷ Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

⁵⁸ Habu, J. (2008), Growth and Decline in Complex Hunter-Gatherer Societies: A Case Study from the Jomon Period Sannai Maruyama Site, Japan.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Oh, C. (2011), *Cosmogonical Worldview of Jomon Pottery*, Sankeisha Co., Ltd., Aichi, Japan.

⁶¹ Habu, J. (2008), Growth and Decline in Complex Hunter-Gatherer Societies: A Case Study from the Jomon Period Sannai Maruyama Site, Japan.

⁶² Diamond, J. (1998), In Search of Japanese Roots, Discover, <http://discovermagazine.com/1998/jun/japaneseroots1455/>

⁶³ Ibid.

innovation or diffuse of innovation again occurred on the island of Kyushu, nearest Korea, in 200 BC. This second innovation can be associated with the emergence of the use of the first metal tools and intensive agriculture with crop irrigation, cultivation and animal husbandry, especially that of the pig.⁶⁴ This signified a transition from the original Jomon culture of Kyushu to the emergent Yoyoi culture, with intensive agriculture taking another three centuries to spread north to Honshu.⁶⁵ The Yoyoi Period, 200 BC to 300 AD, was then a time of simultaneous change from the use of stone tools and the gathering of food to intensive agriculture and metallurgy.⁶⁶ It was also a period of time which in many ways can be compared to the Meiji Period several centuries later for two reasons.⁶⁷ Firstly, while in Yoyoi Period small isolated settlements became unified showing tangible signs of state formation, this actually did occur during the Meiji Period.⁶⁸ Secondly, while in the Yoyoi Period there was rapid technological change, the same is true of the Meiji Period when Japan went through a process of rapid industrialisation.⁶⁹ In this case, during the Yoyoi Period, intensive agriculture and husbandry, the weaving of cloth from a single thread using a spindle whorl and the emergence of the metal and glass industries facilitated increasing specialisation of labour and the development of a class structure.⁷⁰ Furthermore, pottery was seen to have more use value rather than an ascetic value, allowing for it to be produced in greater quantity.⁷¹ However, despite advances in technology and the increased specialisation of labour, goods such as bronze mirrors, iron weapons and tools as well as glass ornaments still had to be imported from central China.⁷² At the time, Han Dynasty China was the contemporary civilisation of Yoyoi Period Japan.⁷³ Therefore, the contemporary Han

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Kanaseki, H., and Sahara, M. (1976), *The Yoyoi Period, Asian Perspectives*, Vol. 19, No. 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Keene, D. (2002), *Emperor of Japan, Meiji and his World, 1852–1912*, Columbia University Press, New York.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kitagawa, J. (1987), *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

⁷² Kanaseki, H., and Sahara, M. (1976), *The Yayoi period, Asian Perspectives*, Vol. 19, No. 1.

⁷³ Walker, H. (2012), *East Asia: A New History*, AuthorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana.