Chapter 1: Japan from Prehistory to Ancient Times
- The Paleolithic, Jomon, Yayoi, Kofun, Asuka, Nara, and Heian periods -
Section 1 - The dawn of civilization

Topic 1 - Where did the people of Japan come from?
Where did mankind arise and how did the ancestors of the people of Japan come to live in the Japanese Isles?

The birth of mankind in Africa
Human beings came into existence on the grassy plains of the continent of Africa. About seven million years ago, primitive apes known as *ape-men* began walking on two legs. Once their hands were freed, ape-men began using *stone tools* that they created by chipping rock. As they evolved, the size of their brains gradually increased.

Around 2.4 million years ago, *hominids* evolved. Early hominids spread from Africa to the colder climates of Europe and Asia with the aid of the use of fire and fur clothing. However, it seems that they were unable to adapt and ultimately died out.

About 200,000 years ago, the first *modern humans* (*Homo sapiens*), the direct ancestors of the people living on Earth today, appeared in Africa. Around 100,000 years ago, some of them left Africa and journeyed to Eurasia. Those who migrated westward were the ancestors of the peoples of Europe and those who migrated eastward were the ancestors of the peoples of Asia. Some of the Asian migrants also spread into North and South America.

*1=Homo sapiens, which means "wise person," is the biological name that refers to our species. Those modern humans who remained in Africa became dark-skinned people, sometimes referred to as Negroids, whereas those who migrated to Eurasia developed different skin colors as adaptations to their environment. The white-skinned peoples of Europe are sometimes referred to as Caucasoids, whereas the yellow-skinned peoples of Asia are sometimes referred to as Mongoloids.

Humans attained high levels of intelligence and developed languages to communicate their intentions to one another. Modern humans evolved the capacity to create sophisticated tools and to hunt and gather food as a community. The paintings of the animals that they drew in the hopes of a successful hunt and the voluptuous female figures that they carved while praying for a bountiful harvest continue today to be found in caves around the world. Soon, humans also came to possess forms of spirituality that begat art and religious belief.
The people who settled the Japanese Isles

Around 2.6 million years ago, the Earth entered a cold phase known as the Ice Age. During the Ice Age, the Earth repeatedly experienced periods when air temperatures were ten degrees colder than they are today. In the northern hemisphere, much of the Earth's surface was covered by glaciers. Because of this, the sea level around Japan was one hundred meters lower than it is today, and a land bridge connected the Japanese Isles to the continent.

2=Glaciers form when snow builds up on high ground and, after turning into ice, gradually slides down like a river.

Even during the Ice Age, the Japanese Isles were not covered thickly with ice. Instead, Japan's plains were thick with vegetation and were home to large animals, including the mammoth, Naumann's elephant, and the giant fallow deer, that came to Japan across the land bridge. The people following these animals began to settle in the Japanese Isles tens of thousands of years ago.

3=Today, archeologists can analyze the components of the animal fat stuck to prehistoric stone tools that were used to cut meat in order to identify every species of animal being hunted.

The discovery of the Japanese Paleolithic period

Prehistoric hunters worked as a team to drive their prey into bogs and then kill them with rocks and spears. Around Nagano Prefecture's Lake Nojiri, the tasks of Naumann's elephant and the horns of the giant fallow deer have been found alongside tools made of stone, bone, and wood. Because people hunted and gathered food using chipped stone tools, archeologists around the world refer to this era as the Paleolithic period, which means the "Old Stone Age". Until just sixty years ago, it was believed that Japan never had a Paleolithic period, but this conventional wisdom was turned on its head with the discovery of the Iwajuku Site by Aizawa Tadahiro. Thanks to Aizawa, it was confirmed that the ancestors of the Japanese people lived in the Japanese Isles over 30,000 years ago.

4=In contrast to chipped stone tools, polished stone tools, such as stone axes, are ground into shape

Topic 1 Recap Challenge! - (1.) Explain how people from the continent arrived in the Japanese Isles during the Ice Age. (2.) Write about how humans hunted during the Paleolithic period.
I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT...
Aizawa Tadahiro, Discoverer of the Iwajuku Site

Thanks to a huge discovery by a young and unknown researcher, Japan's history was extended backwards in time by tens of thousands of years.

The conventional wisdom in Japanese archeology

"Japan's oldest culture was the Jomon beginning a little over 10,000 years ago." From the time of the Meiji period, that was the conventional wisdom in Japanese archeology. For a long time, archeologists at Japanese dig sites excavated only the black earth layer and stopped digging once they had hit the red earth layer.

"Red earth," also known as Kanto loam, refers to the layer of soil deposited as volcanic ash. It was thought that over 10,000 years ago Japan was an inhospitable wasteland where ash rained from the sky and not even plants, let alone animals, could survive. For this reason, it was long believed that Japan never had a Paleolithic culture.

The man who would overturn this conventional wisdom was a virtually unknown archeological researcher named Aizawa Tadahiro.

Dreaming of a "happy family gathering"

Aizawa was born in 1926 and spent his childhood in the city of Kamakura. At the age of nine, his family broke up for personal reasons, and Aizawa used to go looking for artifacts like old pottery as a means to assuage his loneliness. On one such day, he showed the pottery that he had collected to an adult and asked him what it was used for. The adult responded, "A long time ago, the father of a family hunted and the mother made pottery vessels just like the ones you have. At night, they would all gather around their sunken fireplace for a happy family gathering. What you have there are the remnants of just such a gathering." "Happy family gathering" was a phrase that the young Aizawa would never forget for the remainder of his life.

At the age of eleven, Aizawa became an apprentice at a shoe warehouse in Shitamachi, Tokyo. He lived on the premises and worked from early in the morning until evening. After sundown, he attended a late-night elementary school where he studied diligently. On holidays, he made trips to the museum, and he saved up his pocket money to buy books on archeology. Once he finished his work, he studied late into the night.

"When was it that people began living in Japan? How far back can we date the remnants of those happy family gatherings of ages past?" Discovering the answers to these questions became...
Aizawa's lifetime dream.

After the war, he devoted himself to serious investigation of archeological sites, while working on the side as a travelling salesman of fermented soybeans in the city of Kiryu, Gunma Prefecture. However, human remains do not fossilize easily in the Japanese Isles because volcanic ash has rendered the soil highly acidic. Proving that people lived in Japan as far back as the Paleolithic period is, therefore, a matter of digging up stone tools that are obviously man-made from a clearly defined layer of Paleolithic soil.

In 1946, Aizawa found several pieces of obsidian, also known as volcanic glass, within a layer of Kanto loam on a cliff face that had been exposed by a roadway cutting through a mountain in the village of Kasakake (now Midori City) in Gunma prefecture. Obsidian is not naturally found in that area, and Aizawa realized that he had uncovered a clear sign of the existence of a Paleolithic culture in Japan. In 1949, he finally discovered complete stone tools.

In the shadow of the find of the century

Aizawa went to various universities in Tokyo and asked for an opportunity to present his findings, but the scholars at the universities refused to recognize his discovery right away. Soon, a survey team was formed, which found more Paleolithic tools from the layer of soil to which Aizawa had guided them. It was thus academically proven that Japan did experience a Paleolithic period and that Japan's history went back several tens of thousands of years.

And yet, Aizawa's name never appeared in either the newspapers or the research papers reporting on his find of the century. Indeed, he became the subject of inconsiderate remarks like, "I would not expect a fermented soybean vender without even an elementary school education to understand such a subject," and "Do you really make so much money from just digging up dirt?"

Nevertheless, he did not lose his passion for archeological excavation, and he went on to accomplish much more. Since then, over 10,000 Paleolithic sites have been unearthed across Japan.

In 1967, he received the first Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for his discovery of the Iwajuku Site and his subsequent achievements. Aizawa Tadahiro, the man who accomplished his boyhood dream of finding out for how long the people of Japan had been enjoying their "happy family gatherings," passed away in 1989 at the age of 63. Aizawa's work left an extraordinary impact on the field of archeology that continues to be felt even today.
Under what sort of natural conditions did the Jomon culture of the Japanese Isles develop?

The bountiful blessings of nature

Over 10,000 years ago, when the Ice Age came to an end, sea levels rose. The Japanese Isles were separated from the continent and took on their modern-day appearance. Atmospheric temperatures on the Japanese Isles rose and, as warm currents increased in strength and flowed into the Sea of Japan, broad-leaved trees became more plentiful alongside Japan's vast coniferous forests. Before long, the mountains became places where an even more impressive array of plants could be gathered.

At the same time that the climate changed, Japan's large mammals such as Naumann's elephant went extinct and were replaced with growing numbers of small and medium-sized animals, including deer, boars, and rabbits. To catch such swift animals, the bow and arrow were invented and dogs came to be used by humans for hunting. Furthermore, because sea levels had risen, which was a phenomenon known as the "Jomon transgression," sea water flooded the land, sparking the flourishing of edible sea life, including skipjack tuna, sea bream, and shellfish.

The era of Jomon pottery

Over 10,000 years ago, the people living on the Japanese Isles were already starting to create pottery. This represents some of the world's oldest pottery. The surface of the pottery produced at this time was often decorated with a rope-like pattern, and for this reason it was called Jomon pottery, which in English means "cord-marked pottery". Many are deep bowls used for cooking things, which allowed the people of Japan to develop techniques to remove the astringency from food through boiling. Homes in the Jomon period were created by digging into the ground to create the floor, erecting a post, and then placing a thatched roof over it. This is known as a pit dwelling. One can easily imagine what life was like in Jomon society where the men went out to fish and hunt, the women busied themselves gathering and cultivating plants, and the elderly kept an eye on the food cooking on the fire.

*1=Radiocarbon dating indicates that pottery discovered at the Odai Yamamoto I Site in Aomori Prefecture is about 17,000 years old.

*2=In 2013, a team of Japanese and British researchers discovered the world's earliest traces of cooked food from 15,000-year-old pottery unearthed in Hokkaido and Fukui.
The period when Jomon pottery was being used, which lasted over 10,000 years from 16,000 years ago to about 400 BC, is called the **Jomon period**, and its culture is known as **Jomon culture**.

### Life in the Jomon period

In the past, it was believed that the people of the Jomon period led primitive, insecure lives, migrating nomadically from place to place while eking out a meager existence from hunting and gathering. However, our perceptions of the Jomon period were revolutionized through the discovery of the remains of a huge, 5,500-year-old Jomon settlement at the **Sannai-Maruyama Site** in Aomori Prefecture. It is thought that this permanent community existed for as long as 1,500 years and had a peak population of about five hundred people.

Simple agriculture was already in practice at the village found at the Sannai-Maruyama Site. Perilla, gourds, beans, chestnuts, and other plants were cultivated.

Rice was also grown during the Jomon period, but it was dry field cultivation and only on a small scale. Because food was abundant in the Japanese Isles, large-scale agriculture and animal husbandry never took off among the people of the time.

The Jomon people were grateful for the abundance of nature that blessed the Japanese Isles. They created lacquered ornaments as well as unique **clay figurines** modeled on the women who bore and raised their offspring, and they offered their prayers to them. It is believed that the stable and peaceful society that endured throughout the Jomon period laid the foundations of Japan's culture and of the calm and conciliatory disposition of the Japanese people.

---

**Topic 2 Recap Challenge!** - Using bullet points, list four ways that people's lives changed between the Paleolithic period and the Jomon period.

---

*3=Lacquered burial accessories about 9,000 years old that were unearthed in Hakodate, Hokkaido, are the world’s oldest lacquerware.*
I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT...
The "Harmonious Society" of the Jomon People

The excavation of the Sannai-Maruyama Site, where a Jomon village large-scale in every way once stood, had a tremendous impact on our perception of the period. At this extensive site, huge buildings stand in orderly rows and a great number of artifacts were found.

The Sannai-Maruyama Site and the prosperous lives of Jomon people

At the Sannai-Maruyama Site in Aomori Prefecture, archaeologists discovered the remains of a huge Jomon village far larger than anything they had thought possible up to then. The village existed for about 1,500 years, from 5,500 years ago to 4,000 years ago, and covered an area of about forty hectares, equivalent to eleven baseball stadiums the size of the Tokyo Dome.

The remains of more than 1,000 dwellings were found, but it seems that the village contained roughly one hundred homes at any given period of time. The remains of thirty-five raised granaries and over ten large buildings were also confirmed, the largest of which occupied an area of nearly 140 square meters. Graves, embankments, roads, storage pits, and garbage disposal areas were all neatly arrayed in a planned pattern. One of the buildings unearthed was built from the trunks of massive chestnut trees 1.5 meters in diameter. Once reconstructed, it was an immense raised structure towering fifteen meters. This is a testament to the high level of civil engineering technology known to the Jomon people. It is believed that this building was a temple, judging from the fact that the front of the building was designed to face the sun at the time of the summer solstice, just like the Oyu Stone Circles in Akita. This in turn seems to be evidence that the Jomon people were sun worshippers.

Artifacts found at the site include not only over 10,000 pieces of pottery and 1,500 clay figurines, but also sewing needles, clothing, and a handbag made of tree bark, as well as woodwork and colorfully lacquered pottery, all crafted using highly advanced techniques. There were also a great number of pendants including bracelets, waist ornaments, hairpins, and necklaces and earrings made by cutting holes into hard stones like jade. One can see that people were just as fashion-conscious at that time as we are today. Excavation at the Sannai-Maruyama Site continues to this day.
A society based on mutual cooperation

The key to the survival of the village, which was permanently settled for 1,500 years and had a peak population of five hundred, was the ability of the Jomon people to secure a stable supply of food across all four seasons. The people of the village extensively cultivated chestnuts, which were their staple food, as well as potatoes, perilla, millet, and gourds. They practiced agriculture using wooden farming tools such as shovels and hoes. They also benefited from the ocean’s bountiful stocks of seafood, including fish that they caught with hooks made of the bones and horns of animals. In this way, the people of the Jomon period enjoyed prosperity from living off the blessings of nature.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Jomon society that endured over 10,000 years is that no weapons of war have ever been unearthed from any archeological site. Even in very large settlements like the one at Sannai-Maruyama, no weapons have been found except for bows, arrows, and spears used in hunting. It seems that the Jomon people maintained a harmonious society based on mutual cooperation and were rich not just materially, but spiritually as well. Japan’s Jomon forefathers constructed a peaceful society that can fairly be described as a harmonious, characteristically Japanese civilization.
**Topic 3 - The rise of civilizations**

**How did ancient civilizations originate?**

The start of agriculture and use of metal tools

About 12,000 years ago, at the time of the Jomon period in Japan, agriculture and animal husbandry were gradually coming into use in various places around the world. During this era, known as the *Neolithic period*, people used pottery as well as *polished stone tools* with ground surfaces, but had not yet developed metal tools.

Shortly after, irrigation was used along the great rivers of Africa and Asia, and intensive agriculture developed in the form of the cultivation of cereal crops. As a result, the land could support larger human populations, and that, in turn, fostered the growth of commerce, industry, and cities where many people could congregate. Metal tools, first bronze and later iron, also came into use. The spread of iron tools in particular was responsible for major improvements in agricultural productivity.

The rise of civilizations and birth of nations

Leaders were needed to preside over the construction of large-scale irrigation projects involving the mobilization of great numbers of people. These leaders collected taxes from the people and, to manage public affairs, they employed scribes (government officials) who kept records using written words. These leaders also enacted calendars, enshrined deities, and commanded soldiers. They won respect from the people and, after unifying a wide area, many became hereditary kings.

When societies possess certain advanced traits such as metal tools, cities, and writing, we call them *civilizations*. In addition, an organization that unites people over a broad territory, forming one community, is referred to as a *nation*.

Around 3,500 BC, the Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia formed powerful city states that built terraced pyramids known as *ziggurats*, wrote in a script known as *cuneiform*, and used a numeral system with sixty as its base. Following the collapse of this civilization, the Babylonian Empire came into being.
In 3,000 BC, Egyptian civilization emerged in the Nile River basin. The ancient Egyptians constructed pyramids using their advanced knowledge in fields such as geometry, and they kept records on papyrus, a paper made from the papyrus plant, using hieroglyphic characters.

Around 2,300 BC, the Indus Valley Civilization was born along the Indus River. This civilization constructed planned cities, but it soon died out. The Aryans invaded from the north and introduced a status system, later known as the caste system, which made the “Brahmins” the highest class.

The ancient civilizations of the Yellow and Yangtze River Valleys
In the Yellow River Valley, animal husbandry and cultivation of barley were practiced around 6,000 BC. On the other hand, a civilization centered around rice cultivation was founded further south in the Yangtze River Valley. Soon the Yellow River Valley came under the control of a dynasty of kings known as the Shang. The Shang used bronze tools for their religious rituals and they invented a writing system known as oracle bone script that is the direct ancestor of modern Chinese characters.

Around the eleventh century BC, the Shang dynasty fell and was replaced by the Zhou dynasty, which used weapons and farm tools made of iron. Later, as the Zhou dynasty declined, the nation fractured, sparking a prolonged era of civil war known as the Warring States period. During the violence, many philosophers emerged, promoting political ideals and model kingship. One of them was Confucius, whose teachings are known as Confucianism.

Around the third century BC, Qin Shi Huang unified China for the first time and took the title of emperor. He standardized China’s currency and writing system. His Qin dynasty was succeeded by the Han dynasty, which forged a great empire and ruled over China for four hundred years. Han China absorbed the Korean Peninsula and designated it as the Lelang Commandery. When a trade route known as the Silk Road opened up with the Roman Empire, which flourished in Europe at around the same time, Chinese silk was sent westward to Rome in exchange for horses and raisins.

**Topic 3 Recap Challenge!** - Write down all the terms that describe the distinguishing features of each of the four great civilizations that arose along major rivers.
Topic 4 - The origin of religions

How did religion come into being?

Reverence of nature and ancestor worship
Ancient peoples believed that gods or spirits dwelled within all things, including the mountains, forests, and seas. This is known as animism, from the Latin word "anima," meaning "spirit". They feared and revered thunderclaps and storms, and they showed gratitude towards both the sunshine that shone down on their crops and the rain that watered them. They viewed these natural phenomena as being the work of the gods and offered prayers during rituals corresponding to each season. They also prayed that the spirits of their ancestors and the elders of their village would watch over their day-to-day lives. The former is referred to as nature worship while the latter is known as ancestor worship.

Nature worship and ancestor worship were the precursors to religions. Religions come into being through comprehension of and faith in a world that transcends everyday life, especially a life after death.

A great many deities appear in the mythologies of Japan, Egypt, Greece, and Germany. It is thought that all peoples used to believe in polytheism, which refers to any religion that makes several deities the object of worship.

The advent of monotheism
After the nomadic Hebrew people, the ancient Jews, settled in Palestine on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, they began worshipping a single god unique to their race, a belief known as monotheism. When they were subjugated by the Babylonian Empire, many of them were forcibly settled in Babylon, the capital city. After being freed in the sixth century BC, they constructed a temple in the city of Jerusalem. This was the beginning of Judaism, a religion based on faith in a single god. The tenets of this religion were recorded in The Holy Bible.  

*1=The sacred scriptures of Judaism, known as the Old Testament, represent a covenant forged between the ancient Jews and their one god, Jehovah. The sacred scriptures of Christianity, known as the New Testament, record a new covenant between God and his people as conveyed through the deeds of Jesus Christ and the words he exchanged with his apostles. The religion of Islam uses a holy book called the Qur’an, in addition to the Old and New Testaments. Adherents of Islam view Muhammad as "the final and greatest prophet."
Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) and Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama was born around 560 BC into the royal family of a small kingdom situated in the southern foothills of the Himalayas. His palace had four gates, and he was profoundly moved upon seeing a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and a religious ascetic in front of each of the gates. At the age of twenty-nine, he forsook his princely status, abandoned his wife and children, and left the castle on a journey of discovery in the hope of learning a way to escape from worldly suffering.

At first, he engaged in many strict ascetic rites such as fasting, but realized that he was gaining nothing from causing pain to his physical body. One day, he sat under a bodhi tree and quietly meditated. Finally, he achieved spiritual enlightenment and became aware of how people could be relieved of their suffering. From then on, he was called Buddha, which means "the enlightened one".

Central to Buddha's teachings are the Middle Way, meaning moderation and avoidance of extremes, and a belief in *karma*, meaning that all things happen for a specific reason. According to Buddhism, one must rid oneself of negative states of mind in order to be freed from human suffering.

The three great world religions

At the start of the first century AD, a young Palestinian man named *Jesus* preached God's love and forgiveness and became revered by some Jews as the Christ, which means "Messiah". The Roman prefect governing Palestine at that time sentenced Jesus to be crucified, but a community of "Christians" was founded by those who believed him to have been the Messiah. Many of the persecuted Christians left Palestine for other places, but because of their zealous propagation of their faith, *Christianity* was eventually declared the state religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity spread across all of Europe and became a world religion\(^2\) professed by many ethnic groups across many nations.

\(^2\)=In contrast to a world religion, a religion that is linked to the culture or traditions of one specific ethnic group is called an ethnic religion. Examples of ethnic religions include Judaism and Japanese Shinto. Indian Hinduism surpasses Buddhism in its number of adherents, but even so is an ethnic religion.
Around the sixth century BC, **Buddhism** was born in India. **Siddhartha Gautama**, the founder of Buddhism, taught the means through which people could be freed from worldly suffering. His teachings and their accompanying training methods spread from India across Asia, including to Southeast Asia, China, and Japan.

In the early seventh century, **Muhammad** founded **Islam** in the Arabian Peninsula. Soon, a great Islamic empire unified western Asia and extended Islam's burgeoning culture across the world. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam worships one god, named “Allah”. Its holy book, the **Qur'an**, is reputed to be the words of Allah. Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam all became world religions and have been called “the three great world religions”.^3

^3=Christianity and Islam emerged in civilized regions of western Asia, while Buddhism emerged within an area influenced by Indian civilization. The birthplaces of world religions overlap with the birthplaces of world civilizations.

*Topic 4 Recap Challenge! - Summarize the distinguishing characteristics of the three world religions.*
**Topic 5 - The spread of rice cultivation and the Yayoi culture**

How did people’s lives change due to the rise of rice cultivation?

The spread of wet rice cultivation

Rice had already been brought from the continent to the Japanese Isles during the Jomon period. At some archeological sites on Kyushu in southern Japan, evidence for wet rice cultivation and the irrigation canals that go hand-in-hand with it have been excavated from vegetable fields dating back to around 500 BC. After that, wet rice cultivation spread all over western Japan and even reached the coastline of Tohoku in northern Japan.

With the start of rice cultivation, the people who had been living on hilly terrain migrated down into the plains that were more suitable for rice paddies. Here, people gathered together and formed villages. They worked together as a community and even managed to create large-scale rice paddies. They scattered unhulled rice directly into those paddies, and then at harvest time gathered the rice ears using stone reaping knives. The rice crop was dried and stored in the raised granaries they constructed. The people of each village prayed for a bountiful crop and then organized festivals in thanks for their harvest.

The Yayoi culture

Metal tools made of bronze and iron were imported from the continent, and were later produced within Japan. Bronze swords and spears were initially used as weapons, but soon were also being used alongside bronze mirrors and bells as ceremonial treasures during festivals. Ironware, on the other hand, was employed for more practical ends in weaponry, farming equipment, and other tools. Iron was imported via the Korean Peninsula, but eventually Japan developed its own foot-operated bellows that were used to smelt iron collected from the iron sand deposits in central Japan.

Around the same time, the people of Japan started to make a new form of light brown pottery called Yayoi pottery. It was lighter than the dark brown pottery of the Jomon period, and it was used for a wide variety of purposes, including jars, pots, and tableware. This form of pottery spread throughout Japan in tandem with rice cultivation. The period when Yayoi pottery was being used, which extended over about seven hundred years from around the fourth century BC to the third century AD, is called the Yayoi period, and the agricultural society of this period is known as Yayoi culture.
From villages to nations

As food became plentiful thanks to rice cultivation, the population of the villages also rose. This led to frequent intermingling between the peoples of each village, as well as wars fought over rice paddies, irrigation water, and crops. Moats were built around the villages to protect them, and for this reason they are known as moated settlements. The remains of this sort of Yayoi period village have been found at the Yoshinogari Site in Saga Prefecture and the Toro Site in Shizuoka Prefecture.

In each village, leaders arose who took responsibility for supervising cooperative work and organizing festivals. They also played major leadership roles during wars. In time, groups of multiple villages united together to form small nations. The leaders of these small nations, who were called headmen or chiefs, eventually became hereditary kings.

*Topic 5 Recap Challenge!* - Give four ways in which the Yayoi culture was different from the Jomon culture.

### HISTORICAL KEYWORDS

**Villages, Nations, and Communities**

The Japanese word *mura* refers to a village where groups of people live together. This word is closely related to the Japanese word *mure*, which means a congregation of people. By contrast, the English word "village" comes from the Latin word *villaticum*, referring to a collection of farms. When several farming villages join together politically, they form nations.

The leaders of each small nation, known as "headmen" or "chiefs," came to be revered as kings. Both the villages and nations were composed of people sharing territorial or blood ties and both thus constituted "communities".

*Get the questions above right, and you will get 1/3 credit for this assessment.*
Section 2 - The making of an ancient nation

Topic 6 - Ancient Japan as seen in Chinese history books

What do ancient Chinese history books have to say about the state of the Japanese nation?

A divided Japan at the turn of the century

During Japan's Yayoi period, China was a powerful ancient civilization governed by a series of dynasties of emperors, such as the Qin and Han, who controlled vast territories. Chinese history books from this time contain details about the state of Yayoi Japan.

One of them, *The Book of Han*, written during the Han dynasty, states that the Japanese people at the turn of the century, who were known to the Chinese as *wajin*, were divided into over one hundred small nations, some of which sent envoys to China. According to *The Book of Later Han*, the king of one of these nations, Na, dispatched an envoy to Han China around AD 50 and was bestowed with a *gold seal* from the Emperor of China.

Yamatai and Himiko

At the turn of the third century, the Han dynasty collapsed and China entered into a period of conflict between three rival kingdoms, Wei, Shu, and Wu. One portion of the contemporary history book, *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, deals with Japan up to the first half of the third century AD. This section, about 2,000 words long, is called *The Book of Wei: An Account of the Wajin*.1

One passage of this work refers to a powerful nation named *Yamatai* that had subjugated thirty other Japanese nations and was ruled by *Queen Himiko*.2 Himiko was said to serve the deities, administer the government through ritual and magic, and keep the people under her control with a mysterious power. It is also written that Himiko sent an envoy to the capital of Wei where the Emperor awarded her a variety of gifts, including one hundred bronze mirrors and a gold seal bearing the title “Kin to Wei, Queen of Japan”.

---

1 *Within The Book of Wei, which is part of Records of the Three Kingdoms, there is An Account of the Eastern Barbarians that discusses a variety of East Asian nations outside China. That in turn contains one section on the Japanese, referred to simply as The Book of Wei: An Account of the Wajin.*

2 *Yamatai and Himiko*, as discussed by scholars, refers to the Yayoi period's imperial court, whose chief queen, Himiko, ruled over the Japanese archipelago. The term *Yamatai* refers to the capital where she resided along with her vibrant court, and Himiko is said to have been a powerful and influential figure in ancient Japan.
JAPAN AS SEEN THROUGH FOREIGN EYES
A Society With Little Conflict and No Theft

The Book of Wei: An Account of the Wajin provides us with an outside perspective on the state of Yamatai during the first half of the third century AD. It reports the special characteristics of "wajin" society and even the disposition of the people. It can be considered the earliest written account of the disposition of the Japanese people. Let's discuss three details documented in this account.

(1.) "Women are not morally loose"
The Book of Wei stated that the women of Japan maintained strict public morals. It also stated elsewhere that men and women of all ages participated together in meetings as equals.

(2.) "There is no thievery"
The fact that The Book of Wei expressly asserted that there was no thievery in Japan suggests that the Chinese surveying Yamatai were deeply impressed by this. The Book of Sui: An Account of the Wajin Nation, a description of Japan recorded in the early 600s during a later period of Japanese history, likewise noted that thievery did not exist in Japan.

(3.) "Litigations are few"
The Book of Wei also mentioned that there was very little conflict in Japan. This suggests that the harmonious society that characterized the Jomon period carried over into subsequent periods of Japanese history.

An Excerpt from The Book of Wei: An Account of the Wajin

"The wajin live on islands in the middle of the ocean southeast of Daifang. Previously, they were divided into more than one hundred nations. Currently, about thirty nations send envoys to us... Originally, Japan was ruled by a male king. Such kings ruled Japan about seventy or eighty years ago, but, then, Japan was rocked by an extended period of chaos and infighting. Finally, they mutually agreed to select a single woman named Himiko as their ruler. Queen Himiko kept a hold on the people using her spiritual powers. Even as she got older, she did not marry. Instead, her younger brother assisted her in governing the domain. After becoming queen, she was seen by few people. One thousand maidservants waited on her. There was also one man who entered her dwelling in order to serve her meals and convey and relay her messages. She constructed a palace with imposing fortifications and watchtowers that was always protected by armed guards."

The Book of Wei states that women of Japan maintained strict public morals. It also stated elsewhere that men and women of all ages participated together in meetings as equals. The Book of Wei expressly asserted that there was no thievery in Japan, suggesting that Chinese surveying Yamatai were deeply impressed by this. The Book of Sui also noted that thievery did not exist in Japan. The Book of Wei also mentioned that there was very little conflict in Japan, suggesting the harmonious society that characterized the Jomon period carried over into subsequent periods of Japanese history.
The words "Yamatai" and "Himiko" are attempts by the Chinese to replicate native Japanese pronunciation in the Chinese language. However, the Chinese character for "tai" was at that time pronounced very similarly to "to". Therefore, the actual name of this nation may have been "Yamato".

**The Sino-Barbarian World Order and Japan**

China adopted the Sinocentric perspective that it was the only civilized nation on earth and its neighbors were barbarians. In China, even words referring to Japanese people and places, including the words Yamatai and Himiko, were written using Chinese characters that suggested inferiority. The Emperor of China regarded the leaders of barbarian nations paying tribute to China as his vassals. The Emperor offered these leaders the title of "king" and, after they had accepted a written appointment, he recognized their right to rule their respective nations. The nations whose leaders were granted the title of "king" became tributary states under Chinese tutelage. This is known as the **Chinese tributary system** and the order it imposed on East Asia is known as the “Sino-Barbarian World Order”.

Because Japan was divided into many small nations during the Yayoi period, Japan's leaders accepted titles such as "King of the Japanese Nation of Na under Han China" and "Kin to Wei, Queen of Japan", which were engraved onto gold seals, to demonstrate that they had the support of a powerful country and consequently signify their dominance over the other Japanese nations. Around the year 600 AD, once Japan attained internal political stability, Japan became a so-called "non-subject tributary" that continued to pay tribute to China as a means of receiving the continent’s culture, but refused to accept any titles from the Chinese emperor.

**Topic 6 Recap Challenge! - Using bullet points, list the details about Yamatai that we know from ancient Chinese history books.**
Topic 7 - The Yamato State and the spread of the kofun

What can the spread of the kofun tell us about the expansion of the Yamato State's power?

National unification under the Yamato State
In the second half of the third century AD, a powerful federation arose in Japan dominated by the wealthy clans of Yamato in central Japan (modern-day Nara Prefecture). This government is known as the Yamato State.

Meanwhile, China split apart during the fourth century and, by the fifth century, was divided into a northern dynasty and a southern dynasty locked in a mutual state of war. Around the same time, Koguryo became a major power in the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, while Paekche and Silla came to occupy the southern half. These three states also battled each other for supremacy.

The Yamato State gradually unified the country, and we can trace this process by examining the spread of the Yamato State's characteristic burial mounds.

Front-squared, rear-rounded kofun and the Yamato State
Around the third century AD, mammoth mounded tombs that rose up from the earth like small mountains were constructed across Japan. These burial mounds are referred to as kofun. The era when kofun construction was widespread in Japan, which lasted for about three hundred years until the end of the sixth century, is called the kofun period.

Today, kofun are mountainous and thick with greenery, but back when they were first constructed, they boasted a commanding presence for graves. Their surfaces were covered with stones that shone brightly in the sun and clay statues called haniwa, which were shaped like cylinders, human beings, houses, and horses, were lined up on their sides and summits. Most of the large-sized kofun were front-squared, rear-rounded kofun composed of a square-shaped entranceway in front and a circular back. A stone chamber was buried within the circular part, which contained both the coffin of the deceased and an assortment of burial goods, including mirrors, jewels, swords, horse gear, and farming tools.
The people who were buried in the *kofun* were members of each region's wealthy clans. Many massive *kofun* were erected in the vicinity of Yamato and Kawachi (modern-day Osaka). This indicates that the Yamato State was governed through the formation of an alliance between these regions' most powerful clans.

About 5,200 front-squared, rear-rounded *kofun*, the Yamato State's preferred style of *kofun*, exist throughout Japan, as far south as Kagoshima Prefecture and as far north as Iwate Prefecture. This would, at least, suggest the influence of the Yamato State.

The successive leaders of this federation of clans styled themselves as "great kings", and later as emperors,¹ and it was they who boasted especially large *kofun*. The *Emperor Nintoku Mausoleum*, or *Daisen Kofun*, is the largest imperial tomb in the world.

¹=Tenno, an exclusively Japanese word for "emperor", did not come into use until the seventh century. It is customary to refer to all Japanese monarchs of the Imperial line, beginning with Emperor Jimmu, with the title "emperor". Before the seventh century, Japanese monarchs took the title *ōkimi*, meaning "great king".

*Topic 7 Recap Challenge!* - Describe the extent of the Yamato State’s authority on the basis of a map identifying the locations of Japan’s front-squared, rear-rounded *kofun*.
Topic 8 - Japan's national origin myths

What can the myths and legends of the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki tell us about the establishment of the Yamato State?

The myths and legends of the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki

The origin and evolution of the Japanese nation are recorded in the form of myths in the Kojiki, which means "Records of Ancient Matters" in English, and the Nihon Shoki, or "Chronicles of Japan". The Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki, the oldest works of Japanese history, were completed in the eighth century. The myths and ancient legends contained within included supernatural stories and cannot be accepted uncritically as historical facts.

*1=The Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki have slightly different contents, but both books have the same structure, utilizing stories about the deities to explain the rise of the Yamato State.

However, it is thought that these myths and legends were attempts by the ancient peoples of Japan to make sense of the origins of nature, the land they inhabited, and their societies while incorporating the beliefs they had held since the Jomon and Yayoi periods, such as nature worship of the mountains and seas, and rice harvest rituals. In the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, the tales of the deities were organized into consistent narratives and became associated with the genesis of the Yamato State.

Izanagi, Izanami, and the birth of Amaterasu

When the heavens and earth divided, the deities emerged from the heavens (Takamagahara). A male deity, Izanagi, and a female deity, Izanami, married and gave birth to eight of the Japanese Isles. This is known as the Kuniumi Myth, literally the Myth of the Nation's Birth.

*2=According to the Kojiki, the Japanese Isles were born one after the other: Awaji, Shikoku, Oki, Kyushu, Iki, Tsushima, Sado, and, finally, Honshu.

Izanagi and Izanami also gradually produced each of the mountain deities, sea deities, wind deities, and others, but Izanami finally perished from the burns she received while giving birth to the deity of fire.

Izanagi went to the Underworld in the hopes of retrieving his beloved wife. From the darkness, the deceased Izanami instructed him, "I will take up this matter with the Deity of the Underworld, and I will prepare it."

Japanese myth tells us that the Japanese were born from the union of Izanagi and Izanami. This story is not just a myth, but a way of explaining the birth of the Japanese people. The story of Izanagi and Izanami is a representation of the Japanese people's belief in the origin of their nation.
so until then do not look at me.” Nonetheless, Izanagi was unable to keep his promise, and the moment that he gazed upon the lifeless corpse of his wife, he so taken aback that he fled from her.

*3=In Japanese mythology, the Underworld (yomi) is the afterlife or land of the dead.

Upon his return from the Underworld, Izanagi undertook a purification ceremony in a river to cleanse his body of the contamination of the dead. As he washed his eyes and nose, three new deities were born from them: Amaterasu, Susanoo, and Tsukuyomi. Amaterasu is the deity personifying the sun and is the greatest of Japan’s deities. She is regarded as the divine progenitor of the Imperial Family of Japan.

Okuninushi and the Izumo Mythology

On the other hand, Amaterasu’s younger brother Susanoo descended to Earth where he saved the daughter of the earth deity from the dragon Yamata Orochi and made her his wife. Among their descendents was the divine Okuninushi, who ruled the Earth from Izumo. This series of stories is known as the Izumo Mythology.

However, the deities in heaven decided to have Ninigi, the grandson of Amaterasu, become ruler of the Earth. After negotiations, Okuninushi agreed to hand his territories over to Ninigi. This is known as the Kuniyuzuri Myth, literally the Transfer of the Land Myth.

Ninigi’s descent to Earth and Emperor Jimmu

Ninigi descended to Earth together with the deities while bearing the Imperial Regalia of Japan. This is known as the Tenson Korin Myth, literally the “Myth of the Descent to Earth of the Sun Goddess’ Grandson”. Ninigi then settled in Himuka where he married the daughter of a mountain deity and had a son named Hoori. Hoori, in turn, married the daughter of the sea deity, who bore him a son named Ugayafukiaezu. Ugayafukiaezu’s child was Kamuyamato Iwarehiko. This is known as the “Himuka Sandai Myth,” literally the Three Generations of Himuka Myth.

Iwarehiko inherited both the divine power of the heavens and the spiritual powers of the mountain and sea deities. He entered Yamato via the Inland Sea and from there ascended to the throne as Jimmu, Japan’s first emperor. This is known as the “Legend of Jimmu’s Eastern Expedition,” and it marks the beginning of the Yamato State.
National Foundation Day, the day Jimmu ascended to the throne, was said to have been New Year's Day 660 BC, which equates to February 11 on the modern-day solar calendar.

This is how Japan's myths and legends describe the foundation of the Japanese nation.

*Topic 8 Recap Challenge! - List out the national origin myths of the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki in their proper order.*
The Kuniyuzuri Myth and the Ancient Peoples of Japan

The Kuniyuzuri (Transfer of the Land) Myth is the story of how Okuninushi peacefully transferred his bountiful territories to Amaterasu. An examination of this myth reveals much about the beliefs of the people of the time and how they saw the world.

Okuninushi’s transfer of the land

Okuninushi, a Japanese mythological figure, is known as the kindhearted deity who saved the hare of Inaba. He became the glorious ruler of a vast domain centered around Izumo (modern-day Shimane Prefecture).

Meanwhile, the sun deity, Amaterasu, considered to be the ancestor of the modern Imperial Family, consulted with the other deities in the heavens and ultimately decided to have Okuninushi relinquish control over his territories. Amaterasu sent an envoy to negotiate the transfer with Okuninushi. However, the first and the second envoys that she sent both sided with Okuninushi and did not return. The final envoy she sent, Takemikazuchi, arrived on Inasa Beach in Izumo, plunged his sword into the ground, sat cross-legged, and yelled, “The nations of the Earth are for the descendants of Amaterasu to rule. Please, relinquish this land!”

Okuninushi asked his two sons on their opinion, and then replied to Takemikazuchi: “In accordance with what my sons have told me, I will offer up my lands. In exchange, build a magnificent shrine for me to live in, with pillars extending to the bowels of the earth and roof finials rising as far as the heavens, and worship me there. If you do this, I will go into retirement and disappear from sight.”

The ancient Japanese way of thinking

The Kuniyuzuri Myth, as recorded in the Kojiki, contains clues to understanding the thinking of the ancient Japanese people.

Firstly, Amaterasu sent her envoys after discussions with the deities of heaven, and Okuninushi likewise determined his course of action only after he heard out his sons. The Japanese people have a tradition of mutual consultation, deciding all matters as much as possible through discussion.
Secondly, in any other part of the world, the circumstances described would have caused a bloody war over control of territory, but in the Kuniyuzuri Myth, transfer of control was decided through mutual consent, without any fighting.

Thirdly, if we consider Okuninushi's state of mind, he surely must have felt aggrieved over the fact that the lands he had painstakingly developed with his own sweat and tears were to be ceded to another deity, even though he himself had done nothing wrong to deserve such a fate. Thus, Okuninushi's last wishes were honored and a huge shrine was dedicated to worship him. This is the famous Izumo Grand Shrine. The victors in the dispute recognized and honored the accomplishments of the loser, and made sure to undertake the proper rites to appease his soul. The people of ancient Japan viewed this as the ideal way of conducting politics.

The discovery of a massive shrine suspended in air

During the Heian period, the mnemonic "Unta, Wani, Kyo-san" was created to help children remember the names of the three tallest buildings in Japan in order of height by likening them to three brothers. The characters used to spell the mnemonic in Japanese were taken from the masculine names Izumo Taro, the eldest brother whose name comes from Izumo Grand Shrine, Daiwa Jiro, the second brother whose name comes from Nara's Daibutsu Hall, and Kyosaburo, the youngest brother whose name comes from Kyoto Imperial Palace's Great Audience Hall.

Today, Izumo Grand Shrine stands at twenty-four meters in height, but recently we have learned definitively from unearthing its pillars up to their base that the ancient Japanese had managed to build the original shrine suspended at a height of forty-eight meters in the air, higher than the Great Buddha of Nara. The fact that the huge shrine where Okuninushi's soul was to rest was constructed higher than the Imperial Palace or the Great Buddha of Nara is perhaps a sign of just how important the Kuniyuzuri Myth was in the national unification of Japan.

In 2003, Empress Michiko composed the following tanka during a visit to Izumo Grand Shrine.

"We shall not forget the illustrious act of Okuninushi who surrendered all his lands and is enshrined here today..."
Topic 9 - The nations of East Asia and the Yamato State
What sort of relationship did the Yamato State have with other nations in East Asia between the fourth and sixth centuries?

Fighting Koguryo to save Paekche

In ancient times, Japan and the nations of the Korean Peninsula were under the sway of political trends within China. Then, in 220 AD, the Han Dynasty fell, ushering in a period of civil war and political disunion in China that lasted for about four hundred years, until the end of the sixth century. During this time, China’s influence upon neighboring states was markedly reduced.

As China disintegrated, three nations controlled the Korean Peninsula: Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla. Before long, the northernmost state, Koguryo, emerged as the dominant state. At the start of the fourth century, Koguryo attacked and destroyed the Lelang Commandery, Chinese territory within the Korean Peninsula, and then turned its attention southward in the second half of the fourth century by invading Paekche.

Since around the third century, the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula was divided between a great number of small states. The Nihon Shoki called this general region Mimana, whereas the Koreans referred to it as Kaya or Kara. This area enjoyed close connections with the peoples of both Paekche and Japan. Mimana was a center of production for iron, and it is believed that the Yamato State carried out its unification of the country by importing iron from Mimana and distributing it to various regions of Japan.

In the face of Koguryo’s attack, Paekche called upon the Yamato State for help. According to a stele dedicated to King Kwanggaet’o of Koguryo, who was posthumously dubbed King Hot’ae, a Japanese army crossed the sea and made Paekche and Silla “subjects” of Japan, so the King of Koguryo responded by dispatching his own troops to drive the Japanese out. Though the Yamato State did battle with Koguryo, Japan’s strategic situation gradually deteriorated. Ultimately, Japanese forces were defeated and withdrew from the Korean Peninsula in 404.

Tribute from the Five Kings of Japan

Around the middle of the fifth century, China entered the Northern and Southern Dynasties period when the nation was torn into two warring dynasties. The Liu Song Dynasty in the south was ethnically Chinese, whereas Northern Wei was founded by nomadic tribes. According to the history books written by the Liu Song at this time, the Yamato State strengthened its grip on Japan and five successive Japanese kings sent envoys to China to pay tribute.
The Five Kings of Japan

The Book of Song: An Account of Japan documents five successive Japanese kings who sent envoys to the Liu Song emperors. Their names, written in Chinese style, were San, Chin, Sei, Ko, and Bu. Historians have various ideas about which Japanese emperors these names refer to, but most agree that King Bu was the man known in Japan's Nihon Shoki as Emperor Yuryaku, the 21st Emperor.

International Relations in East Asia According to Ancient Inscriptions and Chinese Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>372</td>
<td>The heir to the crown of Paekche gives the King of Japan a seven-branched sword.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>391</td>
<td>Japan makes Paekche and Silla its &quot;subjects&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404</td>
<td>Koguryo and Japan go to war, but Japan is defeated and withdraws its troops from the Korean Peninsula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>421</td>
<td>King San of Japan sends an envoy to the Liu Song Dynasty of China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>438</td>
<td>King Chin of Japan is named &quot;Pacifier of the East and King of Japan&quot; by the Liu Song Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>451</td>
<td>King Sei of Japan is named &quot;Supreme Military Commander of the Six States of Japan, Silla, Mimana, Kara, Chinhan, and Mahan, Pacifier of the East and King of Japan&quot; by the Liu Song Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>478</td>
<td>King Bu of Japan (Emperor Yuryaku) sends a memorial to the Liu Song Emperor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>562</td>
<td>Mimana is annexed by Silla.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Excerpt from the Memorial of King Bu (Emperor Yuryaku)

(as recorded in The Book of Song: An Account of Japan)

"Since ages past, our ancestors have personally donned their armor and helmets, and have sallied forth tirelessly across fields, mountains, and rivers. We subjugated the fifty-five nations of the Mojin \(^1\) in the east, the sixty-six nations of the Shui \(^2\) in the west, and even the ninety-five northern nations \(^3\) across the sea."

---

\(^1\) This refers to the people of the Tohoku Region of northeastern Japan.  
\(^2\) This refers to the people of Kyushu.  
\(^3\) This seems to refer to the Korean Peninsula.  

---

中国資料から見た東アジアの国際関係

6世紀になると、朝鮮半島では高句麗に加えて、新羅が力を増した。

両国に圧迫された百済は苦しい立場にあがった。百済は、日本に救援をもとめて、日本に技術者や知識人を送った。

いっぱい囲まれた新羅は領有を日本とあきらめ、562年には新羅を併合した。こうして領は滅亡した。新羅は、この問題に日本が介入することをさけるため、日本に新羅の産物を贈って友好的な姿勢をとった。

さらに6世紀後半には長く対立していた高句麗も、百済・新羅に対抗して日本に使節を派遣し、修好を結ぶようになった。

---

(1) This refers to the Tohoku Region of Japan.  
(2) This refers to the Kyushu Region.  
(3) This seems to refer to the Korean Peninsula.
The Yamato State paid tribute to the Liu Song Dynasty as a means of countering Koguryo, which was an ally of the Northern Wei, and preserve its military foothold in southern Korea. The King of Japan successfully petitioned the Liu Song Emperor for a title recognizing Japan’s right to exert military control over the southern portion of the Korean Peninsula. Nevertheless, this title was largely symbolic. Japan ultimately reversed its diplomatic strategy and, after the reign of King Bu, ceased to send any further envoys to China.

**The rise of Silla and the fall of Mimana**

By the sixth century, not only Koguryo, but Silla also was expanding its power in the Korean Peninsula. Paekche found itself in the difficult situation of being pressured from two sides. Paekche asked Japan for reinforcements while also sending its own engineers and intellectuals to Japan.

Meanwhile, Silla and Paekche were competing for control of Mimana, which was eventually annexed by Silla in 562. Mimana thus ceased to exist. In order to avert a Japanese intervention, Silla adopted a friendly stance and gave Japan goods produced in Mimana as gifts.

By the second half of the sixth century, even Koguryo, which had been hostile to Japan for centuries, was forging friendly ties with Japan and sending envoys there in the hopes of gaining an edge over Paekche and Silla.

*Topic 9 Recap Challenge!* - Using bullet points, write about the exchanges that took place between China, Korea, and Japan from the fourth century to the sixth century.
Topic 10 - The introduction of Buddhism

What international conditions led to the introduction of Buddhism to Japan and what effects did it have?

The background of Buddhism's introduction

Buddhism started in India around the sixth century BC and was transmitted across Asia in two directions. The Buddhism that diffused along the southern route into Southeast Asia was Theravada Buddhism,1 which teaches that individual humans can be saved through rigorous personal discipline. The Buddhism that was brought northward to China along the Silk Road was Mahayana Buddhism,2 which teaches that the masses can be saved and whole nations protected through Buddha's power. Buddhism grew dramatically between the fifth and sixth centuries AD, during China's Northern and Southern Dynasties period, as it spread from Liu Song China to the state of Paekche in the Korean Peninsula.

*1=The word "Theravada" means "the school of the elder monks", referring to the monks who wrote down the earliest Buddhist scriptures. According to Theravada Buddhism, individual adherents can save themselves only through practicing religious discipline. In the past, this branch of Buddhism was sometimes called Hinayana, meaning "the lesser vehicle", but this term was deemed to have derogatory connotations and was abolished in 1950 by a world council of Buddhists.

*2=The word "Mahayana" means "the greater vehicle". The central tenet of Mahayana Buddhism is that all ordinary people can be saved without needing to become monks. Powerful political figures converted to Mahayana Buddhism in the hopes that it would confer divine protection upon their nations.

In the first half of the sixth century, when Paekche's very survival was at stake by invasions launched from Koguryo and Silla, Paekche repeatedly asked Japan for military support. To cope with the crisis, King Sŏngmyŏng of Paekche solidified his alliance with Japan. In 552, he presented Buddhist scriptures and a gilded bronze Buddha statue to the Imperial Court. This was the introduction of Buddhism to Japan.3

*3=There are other historians who put the year of Buddhism's introduction to Japan at 538.
The Soga-Mononobe Conflict

Buddhism arrived in Japan during the reign of Emperor Kimmei. Emperor Kimmei asked the country’s most powerful clans whether or not Japan should adopt the Buddhist faith. The members of the Soga clan, who were knowledgeable about international affairs, strongly supported the adoption of Buddhism, noting that “Every other foreign nation has already embraced Buddhism.” By contrast, the members of the Mononobe clan, who were in charge of Japan’s military affairs and religious rites, opposed Buddhism, arguing that the worship of the deities of foreign nations would incur the wrath of Japan’s indigenous deities. This religious dispute is known as the Soga-Mononobe Conflict. At that time, Emperor Kimmei declined to embrace Buddhism, but he did permit the Soga clan to accept the new religion independently.

Later, a plague swept through Japan. The Mononobe clan believed this to be punishment from Japan’s deities, and so they threw a statue of Buddha into a river. Incidents such as this soon escalated the antagonism between the Soga and Mononobe into a full-scale war in which the Soga annihilated the Mononobe. Following their victory, the Soga constructed Asuka-dera Temple, Japan’s first Buddhist temple.

The Soga and the Mononobe were not fighting over any specific Buddhist teachings, but rather were merely divided over whether the acceptance of Buddha, who they considered to be a foreign deity, would bring fortune or misfortune upon Japan. The war was also a political struggle for control of the Yamato State.

The role of the kikajin

A great number of refugees, fleeing the wars that had engulfed much of East Asia, moved to Japan in large groups or even as whole clans. These people were known as the kikajin, meaning “naturalized citizens”, or alternatively as the toraijin, meaning “the people who crossed the sea”. The kikajin brought Confucianism to Japan, as well as new skills and techniques in architecture, civil engineering, metallurgy, and pottery. The style of pottery brought to Japan by the kikajin is called Sue-ware.4 They also played important roles in producing written documents in Chinese characters for the Yamato State.

4=Until this point, all Japanese pottery was either baked on an open fire or bisque-fired. By contrast, Sue-ware was shaped with a potter’s wheel and then fired at high temperature in a multi-chambered kiln built into a mountainside.
Following the introduction of Buddhism, Japan welcomed sculptors of Buddhist altars and statues and laborers skilled in the construction of temples who came overseas from Paekche. These immigrants laid the foundation for the development of Buddhist art in Japan.

**The Hata Clan and the Introduction of Sericulture and Weaving**

One of the influential kikajin clans responsible for transmitting new technologies to Japan was the Hata. It was said that around the fifth century the Hata clan crossed over to Japan from the Korean Peninsula, carrying with them the art of silkworm cultivation and silk weaving.

Later, a member of this powerful clan, Hata no Kawakatsu, worked as an advisor to Prince Shotoku. Kawakatsu established Koryu-ji Temple in Uzumasa, Kyoto, as the headquarters of his clan. Here he enshrined a statue of Maitreya Buddha bestowed upon him by Prince Shotoku. This statue, known as the "Crown-Coiffed Maitreya", has become Japan's National Treasure #1 in the field of sculpture.

*Topic 10 Recap Challenge! - Concerning the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, explain the arguments of the Soga clan, the arguments of the Mononobe clan, and the decision reached by Emperor Kimmei.*