

7. Initiation of rice cultivation

7.1 The arrival of rice cultivation from the continent

The agriculture based society of the Yayoi Period, which directly followed the Jomon Period, spanned 11 or 12 centuries, from the 9th or 10th centuries B.C. to the 3rd century. Even though agricultural cultivation had existed as early as the Jomon Period, the basic food acquiring procedure was hunting and gathering then. The Yayoi Period is characterized by rice cultivation and also the use of implements of metals such as bronze and iron.

During the Yayoi Period, new cultural elements imported from the continent coexisted with traditional cultural elements derived from the Jomon Period. This coexistence indicates that a new culture established by a newly arrived culture-importing group blended with the native Jomon culture.

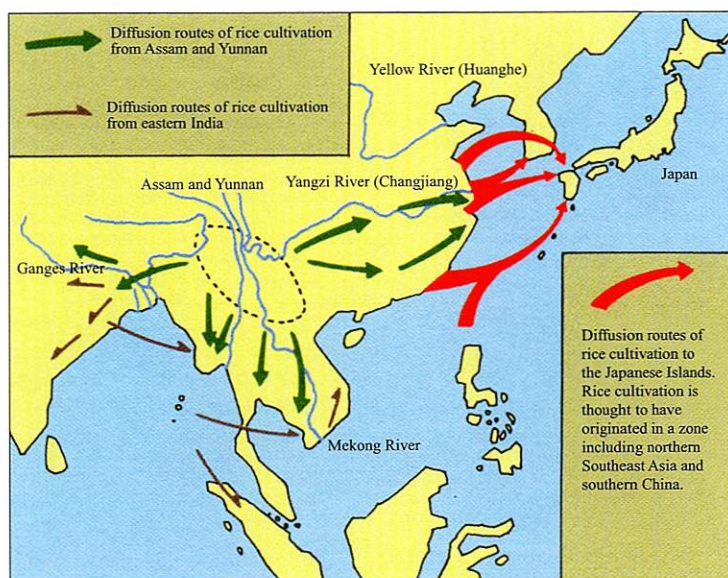


Fig. 57 Diffusion routes of rice cultivating culture in eastern Asia. There are several hypotheses on diffusion routes of rice to Japan: from Shandong Peninsula via the Korean Peninsula, from the lower Yangzi River (Changjiang) to Kyushu, or via the Okinawa and Amami islands. (Reference: Japanese History. Shueisha).

7.2 The development of society

The rice cultivation imported from the continent to northern Kyushu island quickly diffused through western Japan, then reached eastern Japan. With the establishment of rice cultivation and improvements in its productivity, the Yayoi people became better nourished than those of the Jomon Period. However, increasing prosperity brought regional and social stratification. This is indicated by the scale and shape of burials. Burials of the Jomon Period were simple pits. However, burials of the Yayoi Period became more complex. Larger square or rectangular tombs appeared. These structures are thought to have entombed leaders. Powerful persons with rule over regional groups began to appear as part of social stratification. Small groups absorbed neighboring small groups until gradually these integrated groups grew into *kuni*. (Kuni is often translated as “nation,” but Yayoi’s *kuni* were probably more like chiefdoms.). Such integrative processes are described in the Chinese chronicles on the people of *Wa* (Japan): the “Book of Han” (“Hanshu”), “Book of Later Han” (“Hou-Hanshu”) and “Records of the Three Kingdoms, Book of Wei” (“Sanguozhi”, “Weishu”).

An age of conflict began in the Yayoi Period, along with the establishment of agricultural society. Villages surrounded by circular moats emerged during this period. The circular moat is a defensive structure indicating the strained relations between *kuni* as Yayoi society moved toward becoming a true nation.



Fig. 58 Yoshinogari Site (Saga Prefecture). The Yoshinogari Site represents a typical village of the Yayoi Period. Pits for watchtower posts have been excavated, and a replica of such a watchtower has been built on the site.



Fig. 59 Traces of earthen walls at Yoshinogari Site. Evidence of a circular moat, a watchtower and earthen walls, all for fortification, remain at the Yoshinogari Site. They indicate typical village construction of the Yayoi Period.

7.3 The Yayoi Period in the Tama region

Rice cultivation had not yet begun during the early part of the Yayoi Period in the southern Kanto region, which includes the Tama River basin. People subsisted by hunting, fishing and gathering as in the Jomon Period. Rice farming villages began to develop in the Middle Yayoi Period (about 2,300 years ago), centered on the coastal areas of the Kanto Plain. However, the initiation of rice cultivation in hinterland areas such as the Tama region was further delayed until the very end of the Yayoi Period. The Utsugimukaihara, Funada and other sites, which center on the present day Hachioji City area, emerged from the end of the Yayoi Period into the Kofun Period.

Not one Yayoi village has been found along the left bank of the middle Tama River basin from Ome City, upstream from Fussa City, to Fuchu City downstream. It is thought that no settlers could cope with the frequent flooding of the Tama River due to inferior flood control and irrigation technologies of those times. Furthermore, because the stony riverbed sediment must have been unsuitable for rice cultivation, settlers might have avoided this area. Accordingly, many Yayoi villages in the Tama region arose on terraces neighboring small tributaries of the Tama River where there was no serious threat from flooding. Small scale cultivated plots arose in these areas.

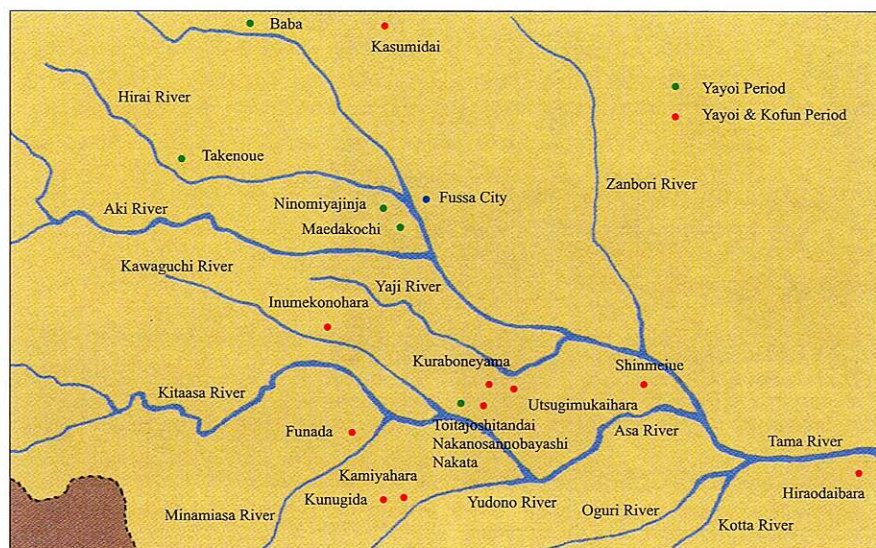


Fig.60 Figure showing the major sites in the Tama River basin during the Yayoi Period (Reference: 30,000 years of Tokyo).