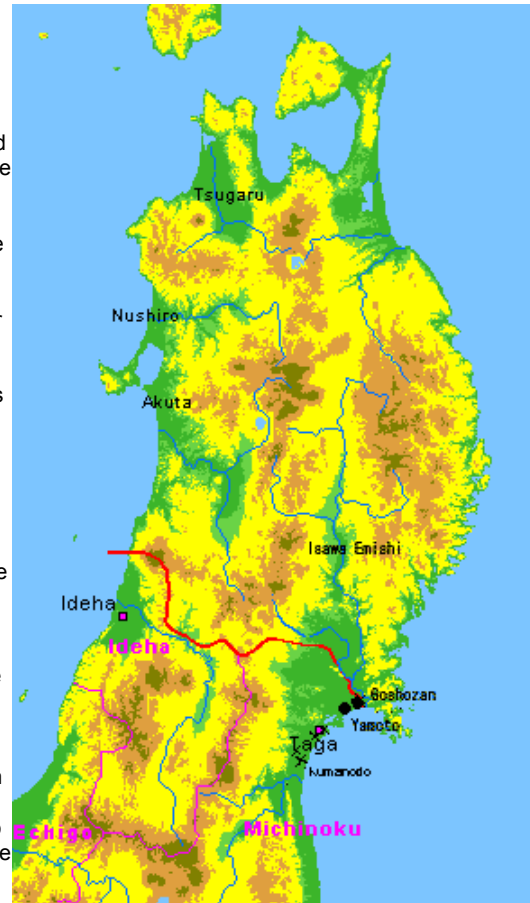


## Tohoku Kofun Population: sixth through eighth centuries AD

A recent study by Kawakubo, Sawada and Dodo (2009: 65-87) integrated more skeletal remains found in the burial sites (*yoko-ana-bogun*) of central Tohoku than studies done in the past. These remains are from the frontier areas where central control from Japan overlapped the Emishi controlled areas, and is a reflection of the population during the time of the conflicts between Japan and the Emishi in the Taga Castle and surrounding areas. This would be the population during the first phase of the Tohoku War that started in 774 involving Ukutsuhau and Korehari no kimi Azamaro. The map shows the burial sites mentioned in the text (the x's mark other burial sites included in the study), and the red line shows the frontier at about 728. Taga castle was built in 724. Their study confirms the Yamoto burials study in the main, that most of the population was similar to contemporary Japanese who lived in the Kanto, but that some of the people were closer in affinity to the Jomon (ancestors of the Ainu). Their study is limited to the transitional population that lived in central Tohoku, and did not include the northern Tohoku Kofun population, or those from the Kitakami valley where supposedly a larger population of Emishi lived.

One of the main issues of this study is stated by the authors clearly (2009:82). Just like the Yamoto burial study (not to be confused with Yamato) it is not clear who made these burial sites. Do they represent local Yayoi Japanese *gozoku* who lived in the area, or do they represent local Emishi chiefs? The answer to this question is important if we are to understand the nature of the Emishi population. The authors had the good fortune that these sites were early enough in time to be possible Emishi burials. The population from the sixth through seventh centuries reflects a time before the Yamato *ritsuryo* state had taken control over the region according to the historical sources.



In fact, just as in the [Yamato burials page](#), these tombs were most likely made by local *gozoku* of Yayoi/Japanese origin, like the Michishima. The central question that needs to be answered is did the Emishi include the people who made these burial sites? If so, then the Emishi may have included more of a non-Jomon Kofun type population than previously thought, or they could have had allies that were non-Jomon. These locals who had lived in the region in some cases for a century or two may have identified with the native population more than with the Japanese state. That they were mixed in their ethnic origin is apparent in this study. However, except for a minority who had Jomon traits, most of these remains are of a population that is clearly more related to contemporary Kofun Japanese of that time period than they are to the Jomon (2009:78-9).

The non-Jomon population may represent migrants who settled the land independent of any political ties with the Yamato state. They may have thought of themselves as natives particularly if they had moved into the area a century or more before the *ritsuryo* state took control of the area. This is natural as colonists eventually see themselves as natives of areas they colonize. The only aspect that is inconsistent is that according to the *Nihon-shoki* if these represent local Emishi they must have spoken a language unintelligible to contemporary Japanese. Even colonists a century or two removed should have retained their language with perhaps minor changes. Most likely then they could have been Emishi allies, non-Japanese Yayoi *gozoku* who fought with them (non-Japanese in the sense of not being a part of the Yamato state though ethnically related). Perhaps the remains found here are those who were known as *den-I* or "agrarian barbarians" by the Japanese going back to [Nagaoka's study](#). The conclusion according to Nagaoka is to see the Emishi as composed of two different groups: the *den-I*, settled Kofun builders who were mainly a Yayoi population who practiced agriculture, and the *san-I* who were mainly a Jomon population who lived by hunting and gathering and light agriculture. This study certainly reflects this view.

It does not fundamentally alter the picture of the Emishi, so far as the question of who made the kofun has always been controversial. It just adds one more piece to the puzzle of reconstructing the past and who these historical actors may have been. It has forced us back further in time to consider an age (sixth and seventh centuries) that historically was independent of political control by the Yamato Japanese state. We begin to see the possibility that the Emishi may have been far more mixed ethnically or at least composed

of different groups. Even before this study the findings at the Yamoto burials had already prepared scholars for this.

The Goshozan site (see above map) which is actually not a kofun or tunnel tomb burial, but a cave burial site from the latter half of the sixth century to the first half of the seventh, near present-day Ishinomaki shows that out of seven skeletal remains one shows clear affinities with the Jomon. However, Takigawa following Yamaguchi (2012:52) not only differs from this study, but goes into more detail by showing that the Goshozan site measurements show three male skulls display a closer affinity to eastern Japan Jomon and Ainu, while three female skulls show a closer affinity to Kanto Kofun. He interprets this as possible evidence of intermarriage between Emishi and Kofun era settlers (2012:58). If this interpretation is correct it would be the first evidence of inter-ethnic relations between the two groups. Together, both the Goshozan site and the nearby Yamoto site show a closer affinity to the Jomon and Ainu skull set than the Kumanodo site (see map) which is closer to the Kanto Kofun/Yayoi set. Key measurements include the depth of the eye socket, the height of the nose, overall head height and width. The Jomon/Ainu skulls show a deeper eye socket and higher nose bridge than the Kofun set (which includes Kanto Kofun and northern Kyushu Kofun).

What this does is to force some scholars who study the Emishi to concede that perhaps the majority-minority mix among these people is the opposite of what was believed particularly considering the early date of these burials. Perhaps instead of the view that the Jomon component among the Emishi as the majority and the Kofun (contemporary Yayoi) component as the minority needs to be switched around at least for the Taga Castle, Sendai plain area. As noted they may have included more Yayoi Kofun people than previously thought at least among what is looking more like a settled agrarian based population. However, were these Emishi? The Goshozan site may indeed be an Emishi *fushu* burial site. The Kumanodo site may reflect a Yayoi Kofun site that was independent of Japanese rule. More compelling for this case would be the [Yamoto burial site](#) where the mix is one-third Jomon and two-thirds Kofun Japanese. This may reflect an Emishi burial site as well.

Takigawa sees this population mixture as significant evidence for the *kaitaku* immigration (2012:58). This is the immigration from the Kanto and central Japan that took place in order to open new lands to agriculture and settlement in the Sendai plain. This is interesting as it may not simply reflect a *gozoku* settlement of country gentry as mentioned above, but rather a settlement of commoners and farmers. There are records of large numbers of peasant farmers who moved to the area from time to time. There were many disaffected elements in Japanese society who found the *ritsuryo* state and its burdens especially hard. These people included both disaffected peasant farmers and *gozoku* (local gentry). These people found a less structured social order in the Tohoku and moved there (like in the Old West in the United States even before Natives of the area were defeated, settlers moved because of the less structured and open environment, and vast tracts of open land). In these settlements there were Japanese from the Kanto area mainly. But there were also Emishi people left here as well, thus the Jomon skeletal remains.

The only problem with the *kaitaku* immigration is that it was encouraged by the Japanese government around the time of the building of Taga Castle in the Sendai plain in 724 as they were gaining control of the area. Part of this policy encouraged immigrant Japanese to open "new lands" for settlement and rice cultivation in the Tohoku. Japanese outcasts such as paupers and former prisoners were forcibly moved to settlements that developed around the forts and castles that were built to conquer Emishi territory. However, the evidence here suggests that the Sendai plain was settled by Japanese immigrants and related non-Japanese Yayoi way before Taga Castle was built. Taga was built in the first quarter of the eighth century. These burials were of people who lived in the area as early as the sixth and seventh century (AD 500-699).

This paints a very different picture from the one some scholars (and this website) have assumed. Rather than the view that had been advanced by Hanihara (1990) that there was a distinct population of Kofun Japanese that were half way between the Jomon and Yayoi Japanese, this picture is of a population mixture that includes both Japanese immigrants and Jomon in the same area. The Kofun population here is not too different from other contemporary Japanese populations. The evidence shows not a hybridization of the population, but rather separate groups living side by side. Hanihara interprets some of this data (mainly Kanto Kofun skulls) different from this current study (see [The Emishi and Physical Anthropology](#)). He sees the Kofun population as fundamentally different from modern Japanese, as halfway between the Jomon and the Yayoi. Unlike Hanihara the authors here see the Kofun population as a whole as being closer in their affiliation to the Japanese population, both ancient Yayoi and modern, rather than as midway between the Jomon and Japanese populations (1). That the Tohoku Kofun population included Jomon people in their midst is significant in the way this finding is interpreted. Rather than to find that the Tohoku Kofun skeletal remains were midway in their characteristics between Yayoi Japanese and the ancient Jomon, the authors find that the main reason why the Tohoku sample skews more towards the Jomon than to the Yayoi population is because the Tohoku sample includes more individuals who had Jomon characteristics interred in Tohoku burial sites than in the Kanto or Kyushu Kofun sites. Otherwise, the other skeletal remains show that the population was similar to Kanto and Kyushu Kofun remains. Through calculating the skull (particularly the facial) measurements statistically, the mean of those calculations skew the overall burial sites in the Tohoku closer to the Jomon than the mean of the skull measurements from the Kanto or northern Kyushu even if individual skulls may show that a majority of them are more similar to those from the Kanto.

This does solve one problem of interpreting the Emishi though. Clearly there were Jomon living side by side with the Yayoi Japanese. This means that pockets of Emishi settlements would probably have existed side by side with immigrant settlements. So the Emishi need not have included the Yayoi in their ranks necessarily when they attacked the Japanese. The other possibility as mentioned above is that they could

have formed alliances with Yayoi *gozoku* (local gentry) who were Kofun culturally, but did not identify with the Japanese. This group may have been represented by the likes of the *fushu* Michishima as opposed to Korehari no-kimi Azamaro who represented the native Jomon *fushu*. The cultural/ethnic tensions between the two may have lead to Azamaro's rebellion of 780 and subsequent murder of Michishima. Most likely, both of these were taking place at the same time. That is, non-native Yayoi Japanese immigrants were living side by side with not just native Jomon people, but also alongside long time Yayoi "non-Japanese" Kofun people who had moved into the Tohoku much earlier. This latter group was probably lumped together under the Emishi label along with the native Jomon people by the Yamato Japanese determined to bring the region under their control.

This does not alter the findings of the Epi-Jomon migration that was thought to have occurred earlier (4th -5th centuries AD), and in areas not covered by the present study, but it does impact the overall perspective regarding the make up of the population of the Emishi in this region. The biggest weakness of this study which the authors point out is that it does not include the northern Tohoku, including the areas where the Isawa and Shiwa Emishi held power till the ninth century as well as other northern areas such as present day Akita and Aomori prefectures where the Emishi remained independent even after the ninth century conquest. Because of this the authors write that Emishi ethnicity is still elusive, and unfortunately, as they point out may remain so as skeletons from the northern Tohoku during this time period are few in number.

Why is it that Hanihara's results differ so much from Dodo's group and Takigawa? The authors finding that Kanto Kofun people were by and large like other Yayoi Japanese rather than midway between Jomon and Yayoi differs from Hanihara. However, Hanihara's sample size (approximately a thousand Kofun individuals) is much larger than the studies here, so his conclusions about Kanto Kofun people holds more weight (2). But in terms of studies to bring together results from several burial sites on what is thought historically to be Emishi territory Dodo's group is the first. Hanihara's sample despite its size was limited geographically to the Kanto and southern Tohoku, not in areas definitely associated with the Emishi. This difference in interpretation aside, this study corroborates the evidence that seems to be accumulating that the Kofun cultural influence along with its bearers seem to have penetrated into the Tohoku region very early as pointed out elsewhere (see section on Kofun states of the Tohoku in [Emishi, Kofun Culture and the Expansion of Yamato](#)). It looks to be based more on migration rather than cultural diffusion. It points to a competing power center in central Tohoku that was independent of the Yamato Japanese as early as the sixth century. However, a definite conclusion about the Emishi cannot be drawn because the sample size is still limited both in numbers and geographical extent. The most that can be concluded is that the population in the Sendai plain in the sixth through the eighth centuries was a mixed population that included both Yayoi and earlier Jomon peoples living together.

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#### Notes:

1. Often in the journals regarding population studies of historical Japan, there is a dual population model that is used because these populations are distinctly different from each other: the Jomon and Yayoi. The skeletal remains found in areas where Jomon pottery and Yayoi pottery are found closely match those respective populations. What originally had to do with pottery styles made its way into studies on population. Unfortunately, it has been used to the point where the original distinction for pottery styles has become almost secondary. This is fine for the most part for the Jomon as Jomon style pots are closely associated with a Jomon population, however, this is not always true the other way around. Yayoi style pots came into usage among predominantly Jomon peoples such as the SatsumonHokkaido. On the other hand, Yayoi remains are closely associated with rice cultivation and the Japanese population, and thus modern Japanese are classified as mainly Yayoi descendants. However, as pointed out, the terms Japanese and Yayoi are not interchangeable.
2. For a study to supplant Hanihara's conclusion they would have to re-examine all the skeletal material that Hanihara had studied and show that these were closer in affinity to Yayoi Japanese and further from Jomon.

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[Main Menu](#)