Unlike those who adopted the progressive view of history, Yamaji Aizan concerned himself with the life of people who had been engaged in commerce and trade. From this new historical viewpoint, one could recognize the existence of different races with non-agricultural occupations in the Japanese islands, together with Japan’s commercial links with neighbouring countries. This open-minded point of view was also opposed to the imperial view of history that was gaining ground at that time.

The basis for the imperial view of history, which justified Japan’s ‘mission’ in East Asia before and during the Second World War, was the idea that the Japanese people were composed of a single ‘superior’ people. According to this view, the core Japanese, who were distinct from other peoples, had inhabited the Japanese islands since the Jōmon period (10,000 BC–300 BC). They adopted the culture of rice farming that had been introduced into western Japan from the Asian continent during the Yayoi period (300 BC–AD 300), and in the fourth century established a state called ‘Nihon’ with the emperor at the top of the social hierarchy. Despite of various political changes, this state has existed up to the present day, and the Japanese people have not suffered from any foreign invasions and conquests.

In the post-war period, most Japanese historians have criticized the imperial view of history, but have not doubted the view that the Japanese were composed of a single people. In opposition to this widely accepted theory, the historian Amino Yoshihiko has suggested that historians should not neglect the existence of the Ainu people in northern Tōhoku and Hokkaidō and the development of the kingdom of Ryūkyū in the Okinawa Islands. Moreover, Amino asserted that historians should not ignore the fact that, in the past, eminent powers in northern Kyūshū and Eastern Japan, including the Tōhoku and Kantō regions had attempted to establish their own independent countries.
The view that the Japanese people were racially homogeneous has been repeatedly expounded since the Meiji period. During the Meiji period, two conflicting opinions emerged among intellectuals on the origin of the Japanese people. Some intellectuals believed that the Japanese people were of mixed blood while scholars of the National Learning School, who attempted to maintain the dignity of Japan’s national polity, insisted that the Japanese were pure-blooded. In this chapter, I consider how both Yamaji Aizan and his lifetime opponent Inoue Tetsujirō were involved in a controversy over the origin of the Japanese people and suggest that Yamaji’s argument could be seen as a reaction against the Japan-centred view of history. Yamaji and Inoue opposed each other’s view of the birthplace of the core Japanese people. While Inoue believed that the ancestors of the core Japanese had been people from the South Sea Islands, Yamaji asserted that they had come from the Asian continent. Both of them argued that the Japanese came from foreign countries, but as far as the periods following the foundation of Japan were concerned, Inoue’s argument was identical to the view that the Japanese were homogeneous because he emphasized the national unity of Japan after its foundation and neglected foreign influences. On the other hand, unlike Inoue, Yamaji showed interest in the variation and conflict within Japanese society in both ancient times and the medieval period.

**DEBATING THE ORIGINS OF THE JAPANESE PEOPLE**

It has been suggested that the question of the origin of the Japanese people attracted the attention of foreign scholars who were employed by the Japanese government during the early Meiji period. It was commonly argued among them that the Japanese were composed of those who had conquered and those who had been conquered. In 1877, Edward S. Morse (1838–1925), a biologist at Harvard University, came to Japan to take up a chair at the Imperial University by invitation of the Ministry of Education. Soon after his arrival, Morse began investigating a shell mound in Ōmori, Tokyo, and argued that the ancient aboriginal inhabitants who had lived in that area had been neither Japanese nor Ainu. He believed that the Japanese had come to the Japanese islands from elsewhere and had conquered the aboriginal inhabitants there. Morse’s view of the origin of the Japanese people was based on Japanese mythology, which says that the ancestors of the emperor conquered the aboriginal inhabitants such as the Kumaso and the Ezo. In 1883, Erwin von Belz (1849–1913), a German physician who taught at the Imperial University, also asserted that besides the Ainu, there were two types of peoples, namely the continental type and the