

'Early Modern Period' in *Comprehensive History*

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Introduction

I was involved in Jikkyo Publishing's textbooks for the new subject *Comprehensive History*, which has been implemented in Japanese high schools since 2023, and contributed to the writing and editing of *Detailed Comprehensive History* and *Selected Comprehensive History*. In the field of history textbooks for Japanese high schools, Japanese history has long been divided into two separate courses, *Japanese History A* and *Japanese History B*. However, a recent revision to the curriculum introduced *Japanese History Inquiry*, which directly inherits the approach of *Japanese History A* and *Japanese History B*, along with *Comprehensive History*, which integrates world history beyond Japan. This second addition in particular represents an attitudinal shift from a separation between Japanese history (national history) and world history, which had previously been common practice, to an understanding of the two subjects as an inseparably interconnected whole. It is a new approach that has not been seen before in Japanese high school history education. For this reason, there are still few or no precedents accumulated for new textbooks for this course. In other words, this implies that the content of *Comprehensive History* textbooks over these next few years will establish precedents for future editions. It is important to note that *Comprehensive*

History is currently undergoing its first round of revisions.

A defining characteristic of the new *Comprehensive History* course is its coverage of various historical periods. The periods covered by *Comprehensive History* primarily span from the 19th century to the present day. This approach seeks to foster an understanding of the new global dynamic, in which diverse regions of the world, previously forming distinct unities and orders, have become interconnected, mutually influential, and inseparable. The adoption of a new framework integrating Japanese history and world history together serves this same purpose. But, even if this basic structure were to be maintained, it must be noted that there are other important periods beyond the modern era, including the 17th to 18th centuries. Although the course is designed to focus on the modern era, it cannot commence solely from that period, as this approach would impede the understanding of the various underlying premises or foundations of historical phenomena in the modern era.

This era, often referred to as the 'Early Modern Period,' largely corresponds to the Edo period (1603-1868) in Japanese history and is prominently featured at the beginning of *Comprehensive History* as a crucial precursor to the modern era. For example, of the 65 total chapters in Jikkyo Publishing's *Detailed Comprehensive History*, the first 20 chapters describe developments in each region leading up to the modern age. I was responsible for writing chapters 4, 5, 18, 19, and 20 in *Detailed Comprehensive History* and in charge of editing (supervision) for *Selected Comprehensive History*. In this report, I will address the following critical issues regarding *Detailed Comprehensive history* in particular, based on my experience contributing to it: (1) new historical content that were consciously and intentionally included in the textbook during the writing process, (2) issues and difficulties that were encountered during the work, and (3) unique problems that arose from the connection between Japan's early modern and modern periods, for which I was responsible, during the writing process.

New Content Included during the Writing Process

East Asian Network

While writing for the *Comprehensive History* textbook, which as previously explained integrates Japanese history and world history together, I was responsible for the sections on Japanese history, particularly focusing on the late Edo Period (Early Modern Era) and the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868). The Japanese foreign policy of the Edo period is generally characterized as closed, and is often referred to as 'Sakoku' or 'National Isolation.' Jikkyo Publishing's *Comprehensive History*, while acknowledging the 'Sakoku' policy of the late Edo Period, also discusses the 'Four Gateways' of Edo Japan (Matsumae, Tsushima, Nagasaki, Kagoshima), which served as significant external gateways for foreign trade with Chosŏn Korea at the Pusan trade post and diplomatic visits to Edo by ambassadors from Chosŏn Korea, the Kingdom of Ryukyu, the Netherlands, and Ainu. The gateways facilitated meetings between these states' envoys and local administration of Japan.

Development of transportation (distribution) infrastructure and population changes in Japan

During the Edo period, there was a certain level of ongoing exchange and interaction between Japan and the outside world. At the same time, it also featured a period of markedly improved social cohesion and unity in Japanese society as compared to earlier times. The existence of a dynastic political system in Japan and the people living there do not directly correlate with our current idea of 'Japan' or 'Japanese.' Still, in some regards, the Edo period saw the inception of a national identity closer to what we currently imagine as 'Japanese' (proto-citizens). Keeping in mind these characteristics of the Edo Period, the authors strove to show how the Japanese population changed over the long Edo period and to discuss the origins of the 'National Character' attributed to the modern Japanese people, such as diligence, frugality, and the pursuit of simplicity and self-discipline.

The Tokugawa Shogunate as a military government

The Edo period was characterized by long-term peace ('Pax Tokugawa'), a rarity even in world history. This era saw a centralized military government enduring for approximately 700 years, reaching the height of its prosperity in its final phase. From a global historical perspective, the persistence of the Japanese military government for centuries, outlasting contemporary literati states or dynasties, holds significant historical importance. I emphasized the continued importance of self-awareness of its identity as a military government in this regard. Additionally, I discussed the military parading aspect of 'Sankin Kotai,' which is typically explained in the context of the Tokugawa Shogunate's control over the Daimyo (Illustration 1).

The discussion of the 'Opening of Port' policy toward foreign powers by Late Bakufu Officials

The Meiji Restoration, considered the starting point of modern Japan, is often depicted as a process in which anti-shogunate factions like the Satsuma and Choshu clans toppled the Tokugawa Shogunate and ushered in a new era. It is also widely understood that Satsuma and Choshu initially advocated for 'Sonno Joi' (Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians), but they soon recognized the imprudence of this stance and subsequently evolved into anti-shogunate factions. However, during this period, some officials of the Tokugawa Shogunate had long advocated for a systematic 'Open Door' policy toward Western Powers and had effectively averted the crisis of external warfare just before the Western Powers reached their shores. In my chapters in the textbook, I described the origins and characteristics of the 'Open Door' policy promoted by these Tokugawa Shogunate officials, which had never been previously highlighted (Illustration 2).

Challenges and Difficulties during the Work Process

Distance from precedents of the history

Because high school history textbooks have a very high level of public

influence, their content and structure are carefully reviewed before completion. As a result, recent academic research or new scholarly theories are not immediately incorporated into their contents. This applies to the author's research as well. It is often said that it can take up to 30 years for the results of recent research, after undergoing rigorous verification, to become established theories and be reflected in textbook narratives. Meanwhile, numerous studies have emerged in recent years in the field of early modern and modern Japanese history, becoming increasingly refined and diversified. Consequently, I have encountered the following structural issues during the writing and editing process for the textbook.

The fact that *Comprehensive History* is a newly established history subject

Because *Comprehensive History* was a newly established subject and lacked any precedents, its structure and content had to be built up from the beginning. As a result, in the first year after the subject was commissioned, the differences in textbook style among publishers were particularly noticeable. One publisher, for example, boldly integrated and simplified the narratives of Japanese and world history pertaining to the Meiji Restoration period. However, this unique approach caused confusion in the educational field and led to low sales rates. On the other hand, Jikkyō Publishing Company took a relatively conservative approach in composing the textbook by adopting an alternating structure between Japanese and world history sections. But this approach limited the textbook's content to a mere transplantation and repetition of the existing narratives of 'Japanese history' and 'world history' respectively; despite covering a newly established history subject, the textbook merely reiterated existing narratives from other history subjects.

The situation of the textbook after the collapse of ambitious theories

Until the 1990s, the structure of Japanese historical studies was such that specific histories were depicted within the larger flow of a grand narrative. For example, regarding the Meiji Restoration period, there existed a common understanding, or grand theory, that served as the foundation for

specific research topics. However, with the clear decline of Marxist historiography, history research became more individualized and independent. In studies examining the Meiji Restoration, various different theories abound without any kind of theoretical coherence, resulting in the mere accumulation of individual observations and isolated studies. Because of the general consensus among the academic community that grand and overarching theories are no longer suitable, scholars have not been able to establish a new historical framework of similar scale and coherence. Currently, we are facing a dilemma in which we must decide whether to abandon the narrative aspect of history (causal relationships connecting eras and phenomena) or to continue propagating outdated understandings that no longer function as premises of the history.

The Unique Problems that Arose from the Connection between Japan's Early Modern and Modern Periods during the Writing Process

The independence of early modern Japanese history

Japan's 'modernization' can be broadly described as a transition from the early modern era (Edo period) to the modern era (after the Meiji Restoration), largely centered on the Meiji Restoration. It is important for *Comprehensive History*, which as mentioned before focuses mainly on the modern era, to explore the connections and developments from previous eras in order to investigate the characteristics of modernization in each country and region. Consequently, with regard to Japanese history, it is essential to elucidate the historical context in which Japanese modernization commenced, identify features that distinguish it from modernization in other countries—particularly neighboring ones—and examine the factors that contributed to these developments. However, there is a structural discontinuity between Japan's early modern history and modern history, formed over several decades, in history research and history education.

The main cause of this discontinuity is the 'independence of early modern history.' When modern historiography and systematic history ed-

ucation first emerged during the Meiji era, their main purpose was to elucidate how Japan had reached its current state at that point in time (which we now perceive as modern history), just like our own *Comprehensive History*. As a result, the Edo period was initially established as the most significant immediate precursor to the modern era in Japanese history. Of course, the 'developmental stages' theory in history research also backed the idea that the early modern period should be considered the prelude to the modern era in Japanese history.

But, around the 1960s, criticisms arose asserting that early modern history had become subordinate to modern history under this framework. As a result, scholars like Asao Naohiro began advocating for the 'independence of early modern history' in Japanese history research. This sparked a new movement towards redefining the early modern era as an independent subject worthy of being studied individually, rather than a mere prelude to the modern era. Since then, the study of Japanese early modern history has made significant advancements, uncovering previously unknown historical facts, exploring new issues and themes, and contributing greatly to the progress of history research as a whole.

The significant improvement in research standards following this 'independence of early modern Japanese history' has, on the other hand, led to issues in connecting the studies of early modern history and modern history. As the historical research regarding the two periods became more detailed and specialized, they gradually drifted apart as separate and independent subjects of study. This phenomenon has led to ambiguity in the connections between the early modern and modern eras, including modernization. Therefore, one of the significant challenges that *Comprehensive History* must address is not only to find a way integrate the research developments that have been made for each respective period since the separation, caused by 'the independence of early modern history,' but also to depict causal relationships between the two periods in such a way that does not merely subsume the early modern era into a simple prelude.

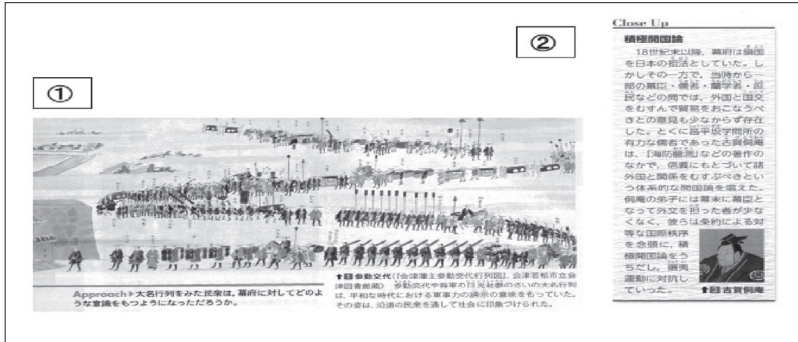


Illustration 1. ‘Sankin Kotai of the Lord of Aizu (Illustration from ‘Sankin Kotai Aizu Domain’), held in the Iizuwakamatsu City Library, Iizudou.’
 During ceremonies such as the Succession Procession or the Shogun’s Nikkousha Shrine visit, the grand procession symbolized demonstrating military power in times of peace. This spectacle image left a strong impression on the public through the years.

Illustration 2. Active ‘Open Door’ policy
 Since the late 18th century, the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan had maintained ‘national isolation’ as the country’s major foreign policy. However, during that period, there were many opinions among some Shogunate officials, scholars, dissenters, and commoners advocating establishing diplomatic relations with foreign countries and engaging in trade. In particular, Koga Doan, a prominent scholar from the Shōheizaka Academy, stood up for a systematic ‘Open Door’ policy based on the practical knowledge in his works like *Speculative Maritime Defense*, asserting that Japan should establish relations with all foreign imperial powers based on principles of goodwill. Among Doan’s disciples, there were many who served as Shogunate officials responsible for diplomacy during the late Tokugawa Period. These officials actively pursued an aggressive foreign policy, mindful of establishing an equal international relationship with Western Imperial Powers based on treaties, and opposed ideas of the anti-foreign movement.