

# Japanese “Northern History” and World History in High School Education: Commodities and Everyday Life in the Okhotsk Coastal Areas in the 1850s

Shigeki YOSHIMINE

(Hokkaido Sapporo Kita High School)

Mr. Ishibashi has just reported on the high school educational system in Japan including the relation between World History and Japanese History. Prof. Kondo has reported on the educational system in Japan and the problem of World History education. My report will consider how the “history of the Northern Area” (畹桜嚙), a frontier area of Japan, goes beyond Japanese history to connect with world history and global history, and how we teachers can develop it in class. First, I will show how “Northern Trade” is depicted in the history textbooks currently used in junior high and senior high schools. Second, I will introduce the primary sources called “*Soya Basho Shiryo-gun* 幕邕媯攝嚙栽黄” (“Historical Records of Soya District”), which I have been using in the classroom as a practical example to connect regional history with global history through historical records found in the Northern Area.

In Japan, students start to study history in elementary school, focusing specifically on the history of their local community (隈妣ワ榮嚙) in a subject called Town Exploration. The problem lies in how the class should be organized in order not to teach local history as merely a supplement to the main curriculum (what Ronald Takaki calls the ‘add-on-approach’).<sup>1</sup> In junior and senior high school, the history of the Hokkaido area is supplementary within the framework of both Japanese History and World History. Either course can be taught without referring to “Northern History,” which seldom appears in university entrance examinations. For example, students in Hokkaido have to memorize the volume of trade at the port of Yokohama, which was the center of foreign trade in Japan in the 1850s, in order to prepare for the exam. However, in class, they do not study what transactions were made in Hakodate, a vital port in Hokkaido. How is it possible for Hokkaido students to understand that the local history described in contemporary historical records was a critical part of Japanese history as an interface with world history?

---

1 Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, Little, Brown, 1993.

On this point, however, current textbooks of World History (and History in junior high school) are improved considerably.

Figure 1 shows a map of northern Japan that appears in a junior high school textbook.<sup>2</sup> The point labeled “Null gun” on the map is the site of a government office established by the Chinese Empire during the Ming-Qing Period to govern the local people. The fact that it appears in the textbook commonly arouses students’ curiosity and prompts them to ask questions.

Figure 2 is excerpted from a high school World History textbook.<sup>3</sup> This section notes the geographical location of Hokkaido and Sakhalin. Now I want to compare this map with the junior high school map on the previous slide. The photograph at upper right of the junior high map shows clothes worn by Chinese officials in a region near present-day Shanghai, which were known to the Shogunate Government of Edo as *Ezo Nishiki* (Ezo is the old name for the Northern Territory, and *nishiki* is a kind of silk fabric). According to the route shown on the textbook map, this fabric was carried from Shanghai to Hokkaido via the Silk Road, from where it was carried to Edo and Osaka. There, it was believed to have been a specialty of the Northerners of Ezo, and it was highly valued. Figure 3 shows a leather hat covered with *Ezo Nishiki* cloth found in Sakhalin.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, the history of the Northern Area can be taught in terms of how it relates to world history and global history. In particular, this approach tends to focus on the effects the region had on surrounding areas, in much the same way that Okinawa’s history is presented in the history textbook. This concept of global history reformulates the originally Euro-centric Modern World-System theory by reconsidering world systems from Asia. Japan’s Northern History cannot be taught separately from global history because the region was involved not only in broad Asian interactions but also in the World System (though not as a core constituent) through relations with European and American Great Powers.

As a history teacher, I believe that, even as early as in high school, students should encounter historical documents as a fundamental basis for understanding history. I believe a teacher should try to convey to students the fascination of historical records and the importance of discussing questions that do not have a “correct” answer. Use of primary sources may be an important means to convey to high school teachers and students alike the significance of studying World History other than in preparing for entrance exams.

One primary source that connects Northern History with world (global) history is

---

2 *History for Junior High School Students*, Teikoku Shoin, 2006, p.71.

3 *New Detailed World History B*, Teikoku Shoin, 2008, p.102.

4 The Sakhalin State Chronicle of Local History Museum (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk ).

“Historical Records of Soya District,” a series of documents on the history of the coastal area of the Sea of Okhotsk. Figure 4 shows an example of these materials, which include many that are not set in print. Covering only the six years from 1854 to 1859, these documents were all created by officials of the Shogunate Government in Edo rather than by the people who were ruled. However, they are valuable not only in providing a detailed and broad-ranging record of everyday life in the North at that time, but also in including examples that relate directly to world history.

One such example concerns the change in hairstyle (*hatsuyo aratame*) imposed on the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido. In the Northern Area, there had been military contact between the Russian Empire and Japan (Shogunate Government of Edo) over the unsettled question of their mutual national border. To strengthen its position in negotiations with Russia, the Shogunate Government forced the Ainu people adopt the peculiar Japanese hairstyle known as *sakayaki*, in which the front of the head is shaved, even though this style was alien to them. The government thereby hoped to claim that the Ainu were “Japanese” and the place they lived was Japan. Such a case is not unique to Japan. In world history, there have been many cases where dominant ruling forces, when negotiating with a foreign country, have forced an ethnic minority to conform to the rulers’ way of life.

The Soya documents refer to several items that are specifically connected to world history; items that students can touch and through them think about history. Figure 5 shows a historical record concerning coffee. In 1853, Hokkaido came under direct control of the Shogunate Government of Edo. The Shogunate sent officials and troops to Hokkaido, but many died of scurvy due to a lack of vegetables in winter. According to the Soya documents, coffee imported from Holland was distributed to officials in the coastal area of the Sea of Okhotsk as a high-grade antiscorbutic. Though its efficacy as such is doubtful, the recipe for infusion of coffee is interesting (Figure 6). It says that coffee prevents chills and eases joint pain. The beans should be roasted until they become black, then ground finely. About 2 spoonfuls of the powder should be placed into a linen bag to steep like a tea bag, and sugar should be added to the resulting brew. I brewed coffee in this way in a class, but the result was undrinkable.

During the same period the heating stove was also introduced to Japan. The smith in Hakodate was ordered to copy a stove carried on a British ship that anchored in Hakodate. According to the historical records, the chimney was an earthen pipe to which circular tiles were fixed with plaster.

Another item that appears in the Soya documents is the whaling gun. Before petroleum was widely available, whale oil was used for lighting and as machine oil (particularly for clocks and watches), and the North American whaling industry was active in the Northern

Pacific. The Soya documents record that the carcass of a whale, which had been discarded after abstracting its oil, drifted ashore to the Okhotsk coast. Inside the carcass was found a harpoon of a type unknown in Japan. Figure 7 shows a drawing of the harpoon that was submitted to the government office. I believe that this diagram shows the harpoon of cartridge-type whaling gun called the Bomb Lance, which was probably used for a short time in Northern America. Figure 8 shows a brochure from a whaling gun company of the mid-19th century. The cartridge in the center expands on entering the whale's body and is difficult to remove.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, I would like to review what I have discussed today.

First, high school and university students who aspire to become teachers should understand the need to acquire breadth and depth of knowledge as generalists. Traditional education centered on memorizing narrow and fixed set of details has produced teachers who can act independently as educators of history only at schools where they can force students to memorize. The university examination poses a problem since it mainly tests memorization.

Second, students tend to show an interest in their own region's history. The problem is to connect it to world history and global history; and I have suggested that use of local primary sources in the classroom is one way to do this. Being unrelated to entrance examinations, this approach escapes the need for memorization. Here, the teacher's role is not to instruct students how to view history, but instead to consider a problem together with them.

Third, World History course A, which is compulsory in high schools in Japan, is designed to briefly cover the whole of history from ancient times to the present. However, it is doubtful whether every school teaches a comprehensive history. What is taught in this "compulsory" course appears to vary widely from school to school. A general view of ancient history should be shown at the first stage to create a framework for understanding the rest of the world's history.

Fourth, I think the bold research and educational projects at Osaka University are a cutting-edge advance in Japan. The problems are many and varied, but it is important that we have for the first time a place where university researchers in history, high school history teachers and graduate students can discuss issues.

---

5 John R. Bockstoce, *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic*, University of Washington Press, 1995, p. 67.