

## ***Introduction***

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The editors of this book met in 1997, as first-year students at the Japanese Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest. This detail is significant because it represents the moment when our journey within the field of Japanese studies began. Besides personal academic achievements, we managed to establish in 2011 an international conference of Japanese studies, *Japan: Pre-modern, Modern, Contemporary. A Return Trip from the East to the West. Learning in, about, and from Japan* - a long title which attempted to explain how our colleagues and we had grown from undergraduate students who struggled with their first hiragana lessons, into young scholars and conference organizers. The conference, held annually (with a brief interruption) at “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University in Bucharest, has become a tradition, one of the major events in the field of Japanese studies in Eastern

Europe. In 2014, however, we realized that the transition from research to pedagogy, from scholar to instructor was not necessarily an easy one, which is why in June 2015, together with our American colleague, Dr. Erin L. Brightwell (currently assistant professor of pre-modern Japanese literature at the University of Michigan) we held the first “Japan in the World, the World in Japan: A Methodological Approach” workshop at Okayama University. This was a small-scale event, involving mainly our friends (of various nationalities, and teaching at various universities in Japan), who shared our dilemmas: we had been told that we could teach “whatever we wanted,” with no clear guidelines as to what would be necessary or useful for the students, which made content selection for our classes quite a difficult task. Sharing our troubles as young educators, as well as exchanging information on methods that yielded if not the best, at least fairly good results, turned to be such a positive experience that we decided to continue the project.

In December 2016 we organized an international symposium at Otemae University, with the support of Kobe University, Kyoto University, and with an internal grant from Otemae University, the proceedings (as peer-reviewed papers) of which were published in the Otemae University repository (<http://tinyurl.com/y27fq6y8>). In March 2017 the third iteration of the symposium was held at the Center for Japanese Language and Literature, Osaka University, while the latest event took place in February 2019 at the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures,

University of East Anglia; on both occasions, we received support and generous funding from the hosting institutions. We mentioned this brief history here in order to show that our project is an ongoing one, intended to offer practical solutions to those involved in the teaching of Japanese studies at a tertiary level.

One of the most important features of this volume is that, although most chapters are concerned with the teaching of Japanese studies in Japan, the volume itself is not focused on a single geographical zone. Japan or Western Europe are not the only areas where Japanese studies as both research and pedagogical field developed, and we include here papers that present cases from India, Romania, and Thailand. As stated above, this is an ongoing project, and it was not our intention to offer an exhaustive survey of how Japanese studies are taught around world. We simply wanted to offer a selection of case studies, from various research fields, that might benefit educators finding themselves in methodological quandaries.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the University of Hyogo for funding the publication of this volume, Professor Hitoshi Kato for his continuous support of our project, and Dr. Simone Livieri, who has designed our posters since 2015.



## ***Internationalizing the Modern Japanese History Course***

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### **Abstract**

This article contains a discussion on how the author, an instructor who teaches a “History of Modern Japan” university course, has taken steps to internationalize the Japan history course, in order to implement a world history or global/ comparative historical approach. By taking such an approach, a survey course in modern Japanese history can be understood from a comparative historical point of view. It is further argued that this can provide an entryway for international, non-Japanese undergraduate students to better understand the history of modern Japan, by offering them examples from other national histories

which are comparable to the processes in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese history. The author also provides examples of source materials, including literary sources, which are used in the teaching of this course, and how sources are interpreted in a global or comparative historical context, rather than treating the sources as in an historical isolation.

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explore how I am incorporating a world history approach in my teaching of two university courses referred to as “History of Modern Japan.” The courses cover Japanese history from ca. 1600 CE until the Heisei era, with emphasis and more class time devoted to post-1850 history. These periods are crucial to the course, as Japan underwent a profound globalizing transformation in all aspects of the society, and there was a tremendous increase in Japan’s reputation as a global and colonial and economic power. The paper will also discuss some of the benefits and challenges of pursuing a world history approach in the teaching of these courses, and the methodology employed. I have taught versions of “History of Modern Japan” for both international student classes and for Japanese student courses. I contend that applying a world history approach to the teaching of the “History of Modern Japan” course has many benefits both to the students and the educator, while it also poses a lot of challenges that are not inherent to the more traditional, approach to teaching “History of Modern Japan” as an isolated case study.

## **Defining the World History Approach**

First I would like to define what is meant by a world history approach, which is what I am attempting to do in my teaching of “History of Modern Japan.” World history has developed into a discrete field of historical inquiry, particularly over the course of the past 30 or so years with the development of the World History Association (WHA<sup>1</sup>), and the institutional backing from a number of higher education institutions worldwide. The WHA is the largest academic organization in the world for the promotion of world historical scholarship. Other academic organizations devoted to world history study include the Network of Global and World History Organizations (NOGWHISTO<sup>2</sup>) in Germany, and the Asian Association of World Historians (AAWH<sup>3</sup>) in Japan, South Korea, and China.

A world history approach is a method for exploring the past by searching for the connecting points between what we may traditionally label as “national history” and historical processes which extend beyond borders. World historians focus on global interactions including: trade and economic relations, political ideology and the spread of ideas, cultural transfusions, the history of human global mobility and migration, environmental conditions, and biological exchange. The WHA contends that “world historians use a wide spatial lens, though they do not always take the entire world as their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thewha.org>, accessed April 10, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> <http://research.uni-leipzig.de/~gwhisto/home/>, accessed April 15, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theaawh.com>, accessed April 8, 2018.