

Yasuhiko Torigoe

THE CHALLENGES OF JAPANESE HISTORY TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

1. OUTLINE OF THE JAPANESE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM AND HISTORY TEACHING

1.1 The Education System and History Teaching in Japan

In this section, I would first like to give an outline of the Japanese secondary education system and history teaching for my foreign colleagues.

Elementary school (6 years) and middle school (3 years) are compulsory education. Middle school and high school (3 years) are secondary education in Japan.

Almost every graduate from middle school enters high school (according to the official statistics in 2012, the rate is 98.3%). Of those who graduate from high school, 56.2% enter university (4 years) or junior college (2 years).

We have “Social Studies” as one of the subjects in middle school, which consists of the fields of Geography, History and Civics.

We have the subject of “Geography & History (地理歴史科)” in high school. Within “Geography & History”, we have “Japanese History A (日本史A)”; “Japanese History B (日本史B)”; “World History A (世界史A)”; and “World History B (世界史B)”; “Geography A (地理A)” and “Geography B (地理B)”. Students must learn “World History A” or “World History B” to graduate from high school.

In addition, they must also learn one of the other four subjects. Students focus on modern history in “Japanese History A” and “World History A”, mainly from the 19th century onwards. They can learn history from ancient times to the present in “Japanese History B” and “World History B”. “Geography A” mainly deals with contemporary global issues, such as climate change, environmental problems and problems of nuclear proliferation. In “Geography B”, students learn topography, systematic geography and how to use maps in addition to the content studied in “Geography A”.

1.2 “The Course of Study”

The Ministry of Education and Science (MEXT) (文部科学省) decides everything that students should learn in secondary education in the “Course of Study (学習指導要領)”.¹ (The MEXT claims that the “Course of Study” has the force of law.) It first set down the “Course of Study” for middle school in 1947 and revised it in 1951, 1955, 1958, 1969, 1977, 1989, 1998, 2003 and 2008. The “Course of Study” for high school was first published in 1947 and revised in 1951, 1956, 1960, 1970, 1978, 1989, 1999, 2003 and 2009. The Ministry will put the latest “Course of Study” into effect from 2012 in middle school and from 2013 in high school.

History textbooks for middle school and high school must be written in accordance with the “Course of Study”. We cannot use the textbooks formally until the MEXT has screened and approved them.

In middle school, students are issued textbooks for free. In high school, students must purchase textbooks. You can purchase each textbook of “Japanese History” and “World History” for 800 Japanese Yen (ca. 7 Euros) because the

1 About the “Course of Study”, see the following web page.

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/index.htm

Unfortunately, only the Japanese version of “Course of Study” is available at the moment. Even though the “Course of Study” for English, Math and Science for middle school has been translated into English, we don’t have any “Course of Study” for the subjects of Social Studies, World History and Japanese History in English.

Ministry orders textbook publishers to sell textbooks cheaply to make them easy for students to obtain.

But cheap textbooks result in limitations to pages and size. So, many teachers recommend that students buy a historical atlas or source book as supplementary learning materials.

We have history teaching for 6th grade students in elementary school. In elementary school, students learn Japanese history focusing on “important historical figures and important heritage”. Students also learn Japanese history in middle school from ancient times to the present. So, they learn Japanese history three times, if they choose “Japanese History” in high school.

In Japan, textbooks are completely revised in agreement with a new “Course of Study”. Even though the “Course of Study” is usually valid for 10 years, textbooks are partly revised roughly every 3 years.

We have 7 “History” textbooks to choose from for middle school and about 20 “Japanese History” textbooks for high school. We also have about 20 “World History” textbooks to choose from for high school. District School Boards choose textbooks for public middle schools. Teachers of private middle schools and all high schools choose textbooks by themselves.

According to the “Course of Study”, the aims of Social Studies in middle school are as follows:

- Teachers educate students in order that they may become citizens who have:
 - A wide perspective.
 - A deep concern for society.
 - The ability to analyze documents and materials from multiple perspectives.
 - A deep understanding and affection for our land and history.
 - The capacity for living in a globalized society and building a democratic and peaceful nation and society.

In the field of history within middle school social studies, the MEXT sets out four goals as follows.

1. Teachers enable students to:
 - Have concern for historical affairs and understanding of the course of our nation’s history, including the relationship of each era’s characteristics to world history.
 - Think about our nation’s culture and tradition in a broad perspective.
 - Deepen their affection for our nation’s history.
 - Develop their awareness as Japanese nationals.

2. Teachers enable students to:
 - Understand cultural heritage and historical figures who served the development of our nation, society and culture and the improvement of living standards, with relation to the era and the region.
 - Nurture an attitude of respect for such heritage and people.

3. Teachers enable students to:
 - Understand the course of the history of international relations and cultural exchange.
 - Think about how our nation has had deep historical relations with foreign nations politically, economically and culturally.
 - Have an interest in other nations' ways of life and cultures.
 - Develop a spirit of international partnership.

4. By learning local history and concrete historical issues, teachers enable students to:
 - Deepen their interest in history.
 - Develop the ability and attitude that lets them analyze historical issues from multiple perspectives by using various kinds of documents; make fair judgments and express these appropriately.

The general aims of "Geography and History" in high school are as follows.

Teachers enable students to:

- Deepen their understanding and awareness of the course of national and world history and of the regional characteristics of ways of life and cultures in the world.
- Develop the awareness and ability needed as a member of a democratic and peaceful nation and society and to live actively in international society.

The aims of "Japanese History B" are as follows.

Teachers enable students to:

- Analyze synthetically the course of our nation's history in relation to world history.
- Develop the ability to think historically by deepening their awareness of the characteristics of our culture and tradition.
- Develop awareness as Japanese nationals and the ability to live as active Japanese nationals in international society.

The aims of “World History B” are as follows.

Teachers enable students to:

- Understand the course of world history in relation to our nation’s history.
- Develop the ability to think historically by analyzing cultural diversity and features of the modern world in a broad perspective.
- Develop awareness as Japanese nationals and the ability to live as active Japanese nationals in international society.

The Japanese “Course of Study” for History has several characteristics.

First, it does not see students as the main subjects in the educational process, because in every sentence of the “Course of Study”, the MEXT uses the expression “Teachers enable students to ...” (which more literally means ‘teachers cause students to ...’).

Secondly, the “Course of Study” is only interested in diversity in the world outside Japan. It has no interest in diversity in Japan.

Thirdly, students must learn history in order to live actively in international society and to be a member of a democratic and peaceful nation and society. These are particularly distinctive features, I think, because, for example, citizens in the USA NEVER consider history learning to be “for the sake of peace”.

Finally, the “Course of Study” aims to have students become good Japanese. As regards foreigners, it doesn’t show any kind of interest.

By analyzing all history textbooks for middle school and high school, I can find several distinctive features in the textbooks too.

1. Key words in the textbooks are written in bold. Students have to learn key words by heart.
2. We have few questions or tasks in our history textbooks, especially those for high school students.
3. The textbooks contain many graphs, statistics, maps and pictures, but these are only aids for understanding the text. Unlike European textbooks, in Japan these are not considered as objects of analysis in themselves.

2. POST-WAR HISTORY TEACHING IN JAPANESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND “JAPANESE HISTORY”, “WORLD HISTORY” AND “EAST ASIAN HISTORY (東アジア史)”

2.1 Changes in History Teaching in Post-War Japan

The overall objectives in the “Course of Study” have been dramatically changed since just after WWII. According to the first “Course of Study” which was put into effect in 1947, integrated learning and issue-focused or problem-solving learning was considered important in the overall objectives of “Social Studies” for junior and high schools.

Why were integrated learning and issue-focused or problem-solving learning considered so important? Because many thought social studies must contribute to establishing a democratic society. Just after WWII, people hoped that we would never cause war again. People thought that war would never occur if we could succeed in abolishing the rule of the emperor and establishing a democratic society. That’s why learning social studies and history were considered important.

As I’ve already mentioned, just after WWII, history learning was considered important for establishing a democratic society. Therefore, the titles of every unit in the “Course of Study” were written in question form because educators thought that students must learn actively. For example, “What is imperialism? Why did it come about? And what kinds of results did it cause?”²

But many teachers criticized this kind of issue-focused learning. Some teachers protested that issue-focused learning took too much time and that as a result, there were many things that students did not learn.

Others argued that in reality, the problems posed were too difficult for students to solve, and therefore, issue-focused or problem-solving learning was not realistic.

In addition, more and more educators criticized issue-focused learning because they insisted that students must memorize a lot of key words and historical knowledge. Japanese economic development in the 1960s and 70s led to increasing numbers of students who could and would like to enter and study at high schools and universities. Subsequently, many students and teachers demanded history teaching that would help them pass the entrance examinations.

2 Ministry of Education (ed.), *Course of Study (proposal)*, published in 1947 for “Western History” in high school (文部省編『高等学校 学習指導要領 西洋史編 (試案) 昭和22年度』). Unit 6 (単元六): 「帝国主義とは何か。それはどんな原因によって形成され、世界史の上でどんな結果を生んだか。」

Thus, history learning in Japanese middle and high schools has gradually changed from issue-focused learning to rote learning.

Meanwhile, changes in the contents of history teaching had a considerable effect on changes in how history was learned. Many professors and teachers thought that history must be learned in a world-wide perspective. Thus, the subject of World History, they argued, should aim to include not only the history of Europe and China, but also the history of South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania and the American Continent. Even in middle school, students must learn Japanese history in relation to world history. Ironically, this led to an increase in the historical content that students had to learn. This was another reason why so many teachers claimed that they didn't have enough time for issue-focused learning in their classrooms.

In the 1990s we experienced a dramatic change in history teaching. In high school, the subject of Social Studies was divided into "Geography & History" and "Civics". "Geography & History" was considered to be suitable for a globalized society. The MEXT considered history learning for international understanding to be important because of the increasingly prominent position of Japan in global society. For this reason, World History became a compulsory subject.

I think it is very rare around the world for world history rather than national history to be a compulsory subject.

Meanwhile, in middle school, history learning came to focus not on Japanese history in relation to world history, but on Japanese history itself. This change was because all students had to learn world history in high school, and also because of reductions in the historical content that students had to learn in high school.

Even now, rote learning continues in Japanese history classrooms. Strangely enough, no one today recommends rote learning, nor is it recommended in the "Course of Study" either, which instead proposes thinking historically. In this sense, we can say there is a considerable difference between the "Course of Study" and the reality of the way history is learned.

However, we must pay attention to what kinds of references there are in the "Course of Study" about thinking historically. Actually the "Course of Study" says nothing about what thinking historically is, or how to develop it, nor has it ever done so. We can only find guidelines on content, not method, in the "Course of Study".

Therefore, I'm afraid the MEXT might tolerate rote memorization in history learning, in practice.

2.2 “EAST ASIA” IN CURRENT JAPANESE HISTORY TEACHING

2.2-a The Image of “East Asia” in the “Course of Study”

Recently, it is said that history should be taught to overcome nationalism and get multi-perspective. Thus, it is important for us to have a wider perspective in history teaching and to teach Japanese history in the context of East Asia.

That's why we must answer the question: What kind of image do we have of “East Asia” in the “Course of Study”? In the current high school “Course of Study”, which was published in 1999 and was put into force starting from 2003, we find the following description:

“The East Asian World

When educators teach East Asian history, they should refer to climate, ethnic groups, the culture of Chinese characters (Kanji 漢字) and Sino-centric international relations and let student understand features of East Asia including Japan”³

We can conclude from this description that East Asia is the area where Chinese characters (Kanji) were or are used and there are distinctive international relations which are supported by Sino-centrism. So, we have an image of “East Asia” from the political and cultural points of view. There is no description of “East Asia” economically or geographically in the “Course of Study”.

2.2-b The Image of “East Asia” in World History Textbooks

In this section, we will examine the image of “East Asia” in current Japanese high school history textbooks. First, we investigate the World History textbooks, and then the Japanese History textbooks. At this time, we have 11 available “World History A” textbooks and also 11 available “World History B” textbooks. (As I've already mentioned, World History A deals mainly with modern history and World History B deals with history from ancient to modern.) By examining all these textbooks, we will pick up some characteristics of the image.

First of all, I would like to focus on a particular textbook which was published by the publisher Teikoku Shoin.⁴ In the textbook, it is said that Chinese characters (Kanji) have united East Asia by means of a common writing system.

3 Ministry of Education (ed.), *Course of Study*, published in 1999 for “World History A” in high school (文部省 『高等学校学習指導要領 (平成11年3月)』第二章、第二節 地理歴史、第二款 各科目、第一 世界史A) .

4 *World History B*. Tokyo: Teikoku-Shoin (『新詳 世界史B』帝国書院), 2011.

In another textbook which was published by Yamakawa Shuppan, we can find a similar explanation. However, this textbook includes a further explanation and a persuasive description as follows:

“The culture created by Kanji is the base of East Asia. Kanji expresses not only sounds, but also meanings. This is why people were able to communicate with foreigners even though they spoke different languages, if they all used Kanji”⁵

We can also find some other World History textbooks in which the image of East Asia is based on Kanji.

However, Kanji is not the only characteristic of East Asia put forward in the textbooks. Another characteristic is the distinctive international relations in East Asia, which are also referred to in the “Course of Study”. In East Asia, there exists a Sino-centrism the fundamentals of which have been accepted even by the Koreans and the Japanese. According to Sino-centrism, only China has an emperor because only China is sufficiently civilized. On the other hand, in the periphery of East Asia, they have, at best, a king because they are not civilized; so the Emperor of China is the so called “king of kings”. Even in the second half of the 19th century, the Korean king was formally appointed by the Chinese emperor. This characteristic is referred to as part of the image of East Asia in some textbooks.

Can we find other images of “East Asia” in textbooks? If you examine all the textbooks, you can find a few more characteristics as follows:

1. Confucianism.

Confucianism is a system of thought and a kind of religion which was born in Ancient China. In the textbook published by Hitotsubashi Shuppan, it is said that Confucianism is a system of thought in which people must hold a ceremony for the repose of their ancestors, respect older people and obey their parents.⁶

In this textbook, it is also said that Confucianism offered a common value standard in East Asia, where people had different habits and conflicting interests. It is true that Confucianism was widely accepted and even now we have traditional values which are affected by this school of thought.

2. Bureaucracy supported by examinations (Kakyo 科挙) and the centralization of power.

In China, officials were selected by examination from the end of the 6th century onwards. Chinese dynasties maintained the centralization of power. If

5 *World History* (a textbook for World History A). Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha (『世界の歴史』山川出版社), 2011, p. 10.

6 *World History A*. Tokyo: Hitotsubashi-Shuppan (『世界史A』一橋出版), 2008, p. 12.

you compare China with Europe, you are struck by the fact that China has had a centralized government system for a long time. The examination system was put into effect in Korea and Vietnam and many East Asian countries aimed to establish centralized government.

3. A unique legal code (Ritsu-ryou 律令).

China and many East Asian countries adopted a distinctive legal code, called the Ritsu-ryou in Japanese. This legal code consists of criminal law and administrative law. In Japan, from the 7th century on, the emperor and nobles tried to codify laws and govern according to the legal code. Other East Asian countries have also tried to codify their laws many times.

4. Sinified Buddhism (Mahayana Buddhism).

It is true that Buddhism is one of the characteristics of “East Asia”, even though Buddhism was born in India. Buddhism was dramatically changed in China and we in Japan imported Buddhism from China. Even now we use Buddhist scriptures which were translated into Chinese.

5. Certain attitudes such as respecting history and regarding children’s education and learning as important.

In the textbook published by Yamakawa Shuppan,⁷ it is mentioned that people in East Asia have characteristic attitudes such as respecting history, and regarding children’s education and learning as important. It is true that emperors and kings ordered that history books be edited and preserved.

So, we can say that we have much respect for history. In addition, we regard children’s education and learning as important in East Asia because we are much affected by Confucianism and the examination system.

In Confucianism, it is often said that only learning helps people to gain virtue, and learning Confucianism was the best way to success in life, because it helped people pass the examination in which people were judged not by whether they were nobles or not, but by whether they understood Confucianism or not. That is why people in East Asia regard children’s education and learning as important.

Subsequently, it is true that we can find various characteristics of “East Asia” in high school textbooks. But we can conclude from this examination that we also have a lot of images of “East Asia” from the political and cultural perspectives alone. Unfortunately, in this examination we cannot find any economic characteristics in these descriptions.

7 *New World History* (a textbook of World History B). Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha (『新世界史』山川出版社), 2011, p. 65.

As far as geographical perspectives are concerned, many textbooks mention that there is much variety in East Asia and that the region has no geographical unity. In just one textbook, however, we find the following unique description:

“East Asia is an isolated area which is surrounded by deserts in the north, by seas in the east, by jungles in the south, and by mountains in the west”⁸

This is very interesting. If we have a common image of “East Asia” from the geographical perspective, students can easily understand this. However, on the other hand, students may understand East Asia as a fixed area, and as a result, they cannot understand the dynamism through which East Asia becomes enlarged or reduced.

2.2-c The Image of “East Asia” in Japanese History Textbooks

What about the image of “East Asia” in Japanese History textbooks? Unfortunately, we cannot find any description of the characteristics of “East Asia” in Japanese History textbooks.

As I’ve already pointed out, it is true that “East Asia” is used many times in chapter titles, but we can conclude that the term is used without any definition.

Even in the “Course of Study” for Japanese History, nothing is indicated about the characteristics of East Asia. In this sense, we must come to the conclusion that “East Asia” has no clear image in education related to Japanese history. As a result, it is possible that someday the notion of East Asia will vanish from the textbooks for Japanese History entirely.

3 CONSIDERING A SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTBOOK ENTITLED “HISTORY OF RYUKYU AND OKINAWA (『琉球・沖縄史』)”

In this section, I would like to deal with a supplementary history textbook for high school. The theme of the supplementary textbook is the history of Okinawa, which consists of a chain of islands that are part of Japan and extend to the southwest of the main Japanese islands, down to Taiwan. As I’ve already noted, the educational system in Japan is centralized. This means that we have only subjects that are common nationwide, for example “Japanese History” or “World History” in high school. Unlike in the USA or Canada, subjects cannot differ according to region. However, as an exception to the rule, we have some supplementary textbooks concerning regional history for high school.

⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

I would now like to take a closer look at a supplementary textbook entitled “Ryukyu Okinawa Shi”,⁹ which means “The History of Ryukyu and Okinawa” (Ryukyu is an old name for Okinawa) and discuss the possibilities and challenges surrounding this book, because I think that focusing on such supplementary textbooks could reveal some problems in Japanese history teaching.

This section consists of three parts. First of all, I will briefly introduce the unique characteristics of the history and culture of Okinawa. Secondly, I will present the supplementary textbook entitled “History of Ryukyu and Okinawa”. Finally, I would like to discuss the possibilities and challenges surrounding supplementary textbooks.

3.1 On the History and Culture of Okinawa

The Ryukyu Islands or Okinawan Islands are located in the extreme southwest of Japan. The prefectural capital of Okinawa is Naha, which is about 1,600 km from Tokyo. Actually, Naha is farther away than Seoul, which is 1,150 km from Tokyo. In contrast, from Naha, it is only about 640 km to Taipei and about 850 km to Shanghai.

Even though Okinawa had deep contact with the Japanese mainland, Okinawa experienced a distinctive history until 1872, when it officially became Japanese territory. Before that, as the Ryukyu Kingdom, Okinawa had been formally independent until 1872 and had been considered as one of the satellite states of the Chinese Empire.

Its deep and long-established cultural ties with China made Okinawa’s culture unique within Japan. For example, as far as traditional clothes are concerned, Okinawa’s traditional clothes, called “Ryu-sou (琉装)” are distinctive, with the men wearing characteristic hats and belts, and women’s clothes often featuring bright colors such as red or yellow.

In the field of architecture, Shuri Castle (首里城), which was rebuilt in 1992, is very impressive because many buildings in the castle, including the main palace, are colored red. In contrast, we can seldom find a red painted castle on the Japanese mainland.

And you can also find beautifully curved stone walls in Nakagusuku Castle (中城城), which was World Heritage listed in 2000. On the Japanese mainland, the corners of stone walls are sharp, as at Himeji Castle (姫路城), which is very famous around the world. People in Okinawa are also well known for their unique songs and dances. It is said that everyone in Okinawa likes song

9 Toshiaki Arashiro, *History of Ryukyu and Okinawa*. Itoman (Okinawa): Toyoplan (新城俊昭『琉球・沖縄史』東洋企画), 2001.

and dance. In fact, you can encounter unique dances and songs in many places in Okinawa.

After the Meiji Revolution of 1868, Okinawa also experienced a specific history. Poverty made it necessary for many people in Okinawa to emigrate to Hawaii, the USA, South America and Oceania. In WWII, the US army landed on Okinawa and fought fiercely against the Japanese army. Many Japanese soldiers and civilians in Okinawa were killed. (It is said that 180,000 people were killed and more than half were civilians.) After the war, Okinawa was occupied by the USA until 1972, while the rest of Japan restored its independence in 1952. In addition, Okinawa has played an important role as a major base for the US Navy and Air Force in East Asia. Even now, many large US bases remain in Okinawa, which has been a contentious issue in Japanese domestic and foreign policy.

3.2 On the Supplementary Textbook Entitled “The History of Ryukyu and Okinawa”

Next, I will introduce a supplementary textbook on the history of Okinawa. The title of the supplementary textbook is “A History of Ryukyu and Okinawa for High School Students, revised and enlarged edition” and it was published in 2001 by Toyo-Kikaku publishers. As I’ve already pointed out, “Okinawan History” is not an official subject in Japanese high schools. As a result, this book is produced as a supplementary textbook for “Japanese History”. It is said this book is used in many Okinawan high schools, but unfortunately it is not so popular on the mainland, even among history teachers.

The editor of this book is Mr. Arashiro, who was a high school teacher and retired in March 2011. He has written many books on the history of Okinawa. Examples include: “The History and Culture of Ryukyu and Okinawa for High School Students, revised edition”, “The History of Ryukyu and Okinawa for Middle School Students”, “The Historical Landscape Seen from Okinawa”.¹⁰ Surprisingly, he has written, edited and revised these books almost all by himself, so I must say here that the passion and effort he has put into this work is highly commendable.

Everyone would like to ask Mr. Arashiro the question, “Why would you want to write a textbook on the history of Okinawa?” When I met him with

10 Cf. Toshiaki Arashiro, *History and Culture in Rykyu and Okinawa*, revised ed. Itoman: Toyoplan (新城俊昭『改訂版 高等学校 琉球沖縄の歴史と文化』東洋企画), 2009; Toshiaki Arashiro, *History of Ryukyu and Okinawa for Middle School Students*. Itoman: Toyoplan (新城俊昭『ジュニア版 琉球・沖縄史』東洋企画), 2008; Toshiaki Arashiro, *From the Historical Perspectives of Okinawa*. Itoman: Toyoplan (新城俊昭『沖縄から見える歴史風景』東洋企画), 2010. All these books are published by Toyoplan (東洋企画). <http://www.toyo-plan.co.jp/books/index.html#ryukyu>

my colleagues in Okinawa in 2011 and posed this question to him, this was the answer he gave me:

“When I was a high school student, I had the chance to go to the mainland. Although few people in Okinawa could go to the mainland at that time because of the US occupation, I was able to attend the interscholastic athletic competition which was held in Hiroshima, because I was an athletic champion in Okinawa. Students in Hiroshima were very kind and often asked me ‘We experienced severe damage from the atomic bomb, and we’ve heard Okinawa also experienced serious damage because of the battle against the U.S. Army, so we would like to know about the Battle of Okinawa and the history of Okinawa. Could you tell us the history of Okinawa?’ But I was not able to answer at all, because I had no idea of the history of Okinawa. In my classroom, not the history of Okinawa, but Japanese History was taught. At that moment, I wanted to know the history of Okinawa and had to tell this history for young people in Okinawa. That feeling drives me to write these books.”

It is true that several accounts about Okinawa can be found recently in Japanese History textbooks, but I must say that I feel this is not enough. The problems have not been solved yet.

Mr. Arashiro’s “History of Ryukyu and Okinawa” is of A4 size and comprises about 300 pages. The contents are as follows:

1. The Prehistoric Age: The beginning of Ryukyu/Okinawa’s culture.
2. Ancient Ryukyu: The formation of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Ryukyu in the Great Trade Age of the 15th and 16th centuries.
3. Ryukyu in the Early Modern Period: From Shimazu’s Invasion to the end of the Ryukyu Kingdom.¹¹
4. Okinawa in the Modern Age: From the beginning of modern rule to WWII in Okinawa.
5. Contemporary Okinawa: From the US occupation and the movement for its return to the homeland to Okinawa under Japanese rule.

The contents show that this book deals with the history of Okinawa from the distant past to the present. It makes it easy to understand many things about Okinawa’s history which are not written in textbooks of Japanese History, such as the prosperity of the Ryukyu Kingdom in the 15th Century, Okinawa under Japanese rule in the Meiji period, the many emigrants from Okinawa, the sufferings of Okinawa in WWII and the origin of the U.S. base problems in Okinawa.

¹¹ Shimazu is the family name of a feudal lord who ruled the southern part of Kyushu. They had a powerful impact on the Ryukyu Kingdom until 1872.

3.3 Possibilities and Challenges Related to “History of Ryukyu and Okinawa”

Mr. Arashiro’s “History of Ryukyu and Okinawa” is challenging teaching material and also gives us a different perspective from that provided in Japanese national history. Students in my classroom often say that world history is very difficult because world history consists of many national histories, whereas Japanese history is easy to understand because Japanese history consists of only one history. Of course, this is a misunderstanding, but I think that such misunderstandings are widespread in Japan. In this sense, it would be of value for Mr. Arashiro’s book to be used not only in Okinawa but everywhere in Japan.

In addition, the textbook shows how deeply he understands history and history teaching. He makes efforts to narrate history from multiple perspectives. I’ll give you two examples from the book.

First, in the textbook, people in Okinawa are described not only as victims but also as guilty parties. People in Okinawa are often considered to be victims in WWII, because of the battle against the U.S. forces. But in the section entitled “How Did People in Okinawa Regard Korean Workers?”, the author points out that people in Okinawa discriminated against the Korean workers around them even though (or because) they themselves suffered discrimination from people on the mainland.

The second example is in the section entitled “Was June 23rd the End of the Battle of Okinawa?”. June 23rd is widely known as the day when the Battle of Okinawa ended, so it is a memorial day in Okinawa. But the author is skeptical about this viewpoint because this day was just the day when the Japanese Commander in Chief in Okinawa committed suicide in 1945. In fact, battles continued even after that, so the author gives a different perspective from the official interpretation which considers June 23rd the memorial day. That is why I must conclude that his “History of Ryukyu and Okinawa” has considerable potential to assist in the improvement of history teaching in Japan.

However, I must also say that the book has many challenges to consider as well. To illustrate, I shall point out four problems which the book has.

First, this textbook focuses only on the main island of Okinawa. Okinawa (or Ryukyu) is a long archipelago, and consists of many islands. It is about 1,000 km from the east end to the west end of the Okinawa island chain. From south to north, it is about 400 km. (In comparison, it is about 500 km from Kyoto to Tokyo.) Granted, it is not so easy to write the history of Okinawa, but unfortunately the histories of Miyako Island and Ishigaki Island, which are both located on the western end of the Okinawa chain – very near to Taiwan, are not referred to enough in his book.

Secondly, you can find many words in bold font in the textbook. Subsequently, many students think that even in Okinawan history, many words must be memorized. Because the history of Okinawa is not an official subject, the Ministry of Education in Japan provides no guidelines on how to learn the "History of Okinawa" and a knowledge of the history of Okinawa is not necessary to pass the entrance exams to university. Still, the author has adopted the Japanese traditional style in his history textbooks.

Thirdly, even though there are many columns in the textbook which are very useful for providing multiple perspectives, unfortunately the author answers every question he raises in the columns. In this way, he deprives the students of a chance to hone their thinking skills.

Finally, in this textbook, the history of Okinawa is presented as a part of Japanese History. Thus, as always in Japan, the history of Okinawa is considered as a peripheral history. The history of Okinawa must be written using wider perspectives; that is to say with the perspectives of East Asian history. Only thus will Okinawa regain its central position in history. Regional history is valuable precisely when it provides different perspectives from those given by national history.

Having said this, Mr. Arashiro has already identified some of the problems I've pointed out, and has improved his accounts. In the book titled "The History of Ryukyu and Okinawa for Middle School Students", he has produced a book with color photos and maps. Also, in the revised versions, one can find that the number of words in bold font has decreased. The histories of Miyako and Ishigaki have also been added. In the book entitled "The Historical Landscape Seen from Okinawa", he stresses the comparative method of historical description, by comparing his description with descriptions in Japanese history textbooks.

Unfortunately some problems have not yet been solved. It would be desirable not to have all the questions in the textbooks answered in advance, and to encourage students to find the answers by themselves instead. The number of words in bold font must also still be reduced. And I find it would be good if the author were to show how the history of Okinawa were to appear if we were to interpret it not in a national perspective but in an East Asian perspective. That is also why real questions must be set in the book, by which I mean questions which are answered by the students themselves. For this purpose, the textbook should also give some resources and pictures and information about how to find further reading material or collect evidence by using the internet.

If no real questions have been posed in the "History of Ryukyu and Okinawa", it offers only another normative history to memorize in place of national history. If so, fundamental problems have not yet been solved. While the author himself particularly wishes to see such problems tackled and solved, examining his

“History of Ryukyu and Okinawa” shows how difficult it is to solve the problems we face now in Japanese history teaching.

4 CONCLUSION

We consider it very important to understand Japanese history in the context of East Asian history in the courses of “History” for middle schools, and “Japanese History” and “World History” for high schools.

The reasons why we think it is important are as follows:

Firstly, it becomes easy to compare Japanese history with the history of the Korean Peninsula and of China. Thus, we can also easily judge to what extent what we call Japanese historical traditions are unique to Japan or common to other parts of East Asia.

For example, Japanese is written with three types of characters: Kanji (Chinese ideograms), Hiragana, and Katakana (characters mainly used today for foreign loanwords). Hiragana and Katakana were created only in Japan by simplifying Chinese characters. Although Chinese characters were used jointly throughout East Asia in the past, nowadays people in the Korean Peninsula write their language almost entirely using their unique letters, Hangeul, which they invented in the 15th century, and rarely use Chinese characters. In China (except Taiwan and Hong Kong), people use Chinese characters in the simplified forms devised after World War II.

Secondly, we can understand clearly that borders drawn in the modern age are meaningless in the pre-modern age. For example, it is not until the second half of the 19th century that Japanese ruled over the whole island that we now call “Hokkaido”. The Okinawan Islands were a tributary state of China in formal terms until the second half of the 19th century. As we will state later, many people were active in the East China Sea beyond the current national borders, which were drawn in the 19th century.

Finally, places that we now regard as peripheries are such as a result of modern national borders, and were not necessarily peripheral in the past. Indeed, they may even have been core areas, as Okinawa was a major international trade center in the 15th century.

As far as our investigations of textbooks for “History” and “Japanese History” have shown, it became usual in the 1990s to write about Japanese history in the context of East Asian history. In the last 20 years, we have always written textbooks with an awareness of the commercial, cultural and human connections between Japan, the Korean Peninsula and China. At the same time, debates on history

teaching have been going on actively in East Asia, and some books have been published in the 21st century which do deal with the conclusions of these debates on history teaching and which contain common material for history teaching in East Asia. On the other hand, ultra-nationalistic textbooks of “history” have been published as a reaction against such discussions in East Asia (e.g. Fujioka Nobukatsu ed. “New History Textbook” for middle school, and more recently, the “History Textbook for Japanese Nationals”).¹² However, only a few schools have adopted such textbooks.

We still face many challenges in enabling students to learn Japanese history that is free from a national perspective and consists of multi-cultural and multi-traditional views. For example:

1. We must respect the cultural and historical diversity in Japanese history. It is still important how we deal with the History of the Ainu (aboriginal people in the Northern Japanese Islands) and of Okinawa (the Japanese Southwestern Islands) in textbooks. The Ainu and the people on the Okinawan Islands have a unique history and culture. Even though we consider that people in Okinawa have played a very important role in the East Asian world, we do not yet have an appropriate interest in the history of the Ainu, especially the relation between the Ainu and the people in Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands and East Siberia. In addition, we must think how we deal with the histories of the people living in Japan with other cultural traditions, such as the Korean-Japanese or the Koreans living in Japan. And it must also be considered how we deal with the history of Japanese emigrants (especially to Hawaii and the northern & southern Americas).
2. Many educators in Japan consider that memorizing key words is very important in history teaching (or learning), and this is a barrier to respecting the diversity in Japanese history. In the “Japanese History” high school textbooks of the last 20 years, we can rarely find questions or activity corners. By contrast, we can find as many as 3,500 key words which are considered important enough to be learned by heart in high school. That is why almost every student in high school believes that history is a boring subject and only something to be learned by rote. We must learn more from the multi-cultural teaching in the USA, Canada and Australia, the common historical textbook between Germany and France, and common learning materials among the Balkan countries, because currently, every student and many teachers believe

12 Cf. *New History Textbook*, revised ed. Tokyo: Fusosha (『改訂版 新しい歴史教科書』扶桑社), 2005; *New Social Studies for Middle School - New History Textbook*. Tokyo: Jiyusha (『中学社会 新しい歴史教科書』自由社), 2011.

in normative accounts of history and the importance of memorization in history teaching (or learning).

On the other hand, many people may find it strange that I have not spoken at all about entrance exams, even though I deal with history teaching in Japan. It is true that nowadays many students in middle school learn “Social Studies” including History, as a subject for the entrance exams in high school, and history teaching and learning is greatly influenced by entrance exams to universities.

But I don't completely agree with the opinion which states that entrance exams cause problems in Japanese history teaching and learning and there are two reasons why I disagree with this theory.

1. Only a minority of students take “World History” or “Japanese History” as a subject in the university entrance exams. For example, in the national central examination, which was held in January 2012, only about 90,000 students took the “World History” exam and about 160,000 students took the “Japanese History” exam, from among about 520,000 applicants. In other words, less than half the applicants took “Japanese History” and “World History”. In addition, only half of all students learn history as a subject for university entrance exams, considering that the number of all graduates in high school was about 1,010,000 in 2012.
2. It is true that many students in middle school take the social studies examination for high school. However, some middle school students who attend a 6 year secondary school (including Azabu High School), have no high school entrance exam to take. Unfortunately, even in the 6 year secondary schools, students have to suffer the process of memorizing thousands of key words in history learning. That's why I don't think only entrance exams cause challenges in Japanese history teaching. Many teachers consider history learning synonymous with rote memorizing. In the “Course of Study”, you cannot find many references to “thinking historically”. That gives an image of history teaching as memorizing. Which is why I dare not deal with the entrance exams in this article entitled “Challenges of Japanese History Teaching in Secondary Schools”.

