An Approach to History

It was an important task for state-centred nationalists, who attempted to establish education based on the Imperial Rescript on Education, to clarify the essence of Japan's national polity (kokutai) through the study of Japanese history. The concept of Japan's national polity was elaborated by the Mito scholar Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863) and then adopted in the Imperial Rescript on Education. This concept was used to affirm the basic traditionalist principles of education in pre-war Japan and to discuss the fundamental character of the Japanese state. During the Meiji period, some state-centred nationalists attempted to confirm the unique national polity of Japan by historical evidence in order to unify the nation. Included among these state-centred nationalists were professors such as Inoue Tetsujirō, scholars of the Mito School (Mitogaku) and the National Learning School (Kokugaku) at the Imperial University.

Yamaji Aizan's approach to the study of history, which was based on his belief in common humanity, was completely different from that of scholars like Inoue Tetsujirō, who searched for the Japanese national spirit of times past. Yamaji also criticized the state-centred imperial view of history held by scholars of the Mito School and the National Learning School on the grounds that they made a sharp distinction between Japanese history and the history of other countries. It should be noted that Yamaji's arguments against these state-centred nationalists about the methodology of history reflected his strong objection to their narrow-minded view of history and his deep interest in common humanity. In this chapter, I first discuss the rise of the new 'scientific' kōshōgaku (the study of historical documents) approach to history, which both Yamaji Aizan and Inoue Tetsujirō criticized as 'insipid' on the grounds that it did not make history interesting and meaningful to life.
THE KÔSHÔGAKU TRADITION AND THE STUDY OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

When the Tokugawa shogunate was established in the early-seventeenth century, the new government ordered Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), an official historian, to write a history of Japan on the basis of Confucian morals. Other historical works written in the Edo period such as Arai Hakuseki’s *The History of Japan* (*Tokushi yoron*, 1712–24), and Rai Sanyo’s *An Unofficial History of Japan* (*Nihon gaishi*, 1844), and the Mito School’s *The History of Great Japan* (*Dai Nihonshi*, 1657–1906) were certainly not free of this Confucian ideology. In these works, historical figures were divided into two categories; one was the royalist, and the other was the rebel. Thus, the contents of these histories conformed to the Confucian morals of the Tokugawa regime.

In the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate, Japan officially opened the country to the world and transformed itself into a new society through the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The drastic social change was accompanied by a change in the view of history held by historians. Along with the decline of Confucian morals in the early Meiji period, scholars of the Enlightenment established the kôshôgaku tradition and attempted to collect and examine historical documents in order to write accurate histories that were free from moral teachings. In 1882, Shigeno Yasutsugu (1827–1910), Kume Kunitake (1839–1931) and Hoshino Hisashi, who were leading historians at the College of Historiography (Shu¯ shikan), began a project for compiling *The Great Chronological History of Japan* (*Dai Nihon hennenshi*). Shigeno and his colleagues did not slavishly follow its style, but adopted a critical method based on the kôshôgaku tradition. In his paper published in 1890, Shigeno asserted that the kôshôgaku tradition was the foundation of all studies.

During the years 1886–88, Shigeno and his colleagues travelled throughout Japan in order to collect historical documents, which were then examined and compared to accepted historical accounts in order to correct any mistakes therein. Thus, *The History of Great Japan* (*Dai Nihonshi*) and other historical works came to be scrutinized by historians at the College of Historiography (Shu¯shikan). The historians of the kôshôgaku tradition adopted an objective approach and rejected the moralistic history of the previous periods. They separated history from politics and morals, and attempted to establish the independence of the study of history in a scientific spirit of the Enlightenment movement. The dissemination of this new methodology of history was ensured by the establishment of the Department of History at the Imperial University in 1887 and the appointment of the German historian Ludwig Riess (1861–1928) to the chair of History. As a student of