

ISSN: 1814-6961 (print)
ISSN: 2788-9718 (online)

Отан тарихы

Отечественная история

History of the Homeland

Үш айда бір рет шығатын ғылыми журнал
2025. № 28 (3)

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Published in the Kazakhstan
Otan tarikhyy
Has been issued as a journal
since 1998
ISSN: 1814-6961 (Print)
ISSN: 2788-9718 (Online)
2025. Vol. 28. Is. 3. Pp. 601-616
Journal homepage:
<https://otan.history.iie.kz>



FTAXP / MPHTI / IRSTI 03.20

https://doi.org/10.51943/2788-9718_2025_28_3_601-616

JAPANESE HISTORIOGRAPHY FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO 1912: EVOLUTION OF HISTORICAL THOUGHT AND SOURCES

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This article examines the development of Japanese historiography from ancient times to 1912, highlighting the evolution of historical thought and sources. The study addresses early mythological and official chronicles, medieval monastic records, scholarly works of the Edo period, and the emergence of modern historical writings during the Meiji era. *Purpose and Objectives.* To identify the universal features of Japanese historiography that can be applied to the analysis of historiographies of other peoples (Central Asia) who developed under conditions of limited external influence. *Materials and Methods.* The study is based on archival documents from the National Archives of Japan (国立公文書館) and other sources. The research employs historical-comparative and critical methods of historiographical analysis, combined with content an interdisciplinary approach, in order to trace the evolution of Japanese historical thought from mythological narratives to modern academic historiography. *Results.* The analysis reveals a gradual evolution in Japanese historiography: ancient period's histories such as Kojiki and Nihon Shoki combined mythology with official chronicles to legitimize imperial authority. In Medieval period monastic records, warrior genealogies, and regional chronicles reflected social and political fragmentation while preserving cultural memory. In the Edo period rise of Kokugaku and Confucian-influenced scholarship emphasized Japan-centric interpretations and critical study of ancient texts. Modern historical methodologies in Meiji period were adopted under the influence of Western historiography, promoting empirical research. *Conclusion.* Japanese historiography demonstrates a dynamic trajectory, reflecting shifts in political authority, social structures, and intellectual currents. Early chronicles and monastic records laid the

foundation for historical consciousness, Edo-period scholarship reinforced cultural identity, and Meiji-era reforms introduced modern methodologies.

Keywords: Japan, historiography, Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Kokugaku School, Kojiki, Nihon Shoki, Marxist historiography, liberal historiography

Acknowledgements. This article was prepared within the framework of implementation of the project of program-targeted financing of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, through the Ch.Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology. The project is titled “New sources on the history and geography of Kazakhstan: analysis, translation and introduction into scientific circulation” (registration number: BR28713777).

For citation: Kabuldinov Z.E., Kuanbay O.B., Ibraev U.S. Japanese historiography from ancient times to 1912: evolution of historical thought and sources // Otan Tarihy. 2025. Vol. 28. № 3. Pp. 601-616. [in Eng.]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2025_28_3_601-616

ЕЖЕЛГІ ДӘУІРДЕН 1912 ЖЫЛҒА ДЕЙІНГІ ЖАПОН ТАРИХНАМАСЫ: ТАРИХИ САНАНЫҢ ЭВОЛЮЦИЯСЫ МЕН ДЕРЕККӨЗДЕР

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Аңдатпа. *Kirişne.* Мақала ежелгі дәуірден 1912 жылға дейінгі жапон тарихнамасының дамуын сараптап, тарихи ойдың эволюциясы мен дереккөздерін зерттейді. Ерте мифологиялық және ресми хроникаларды, ортағасырлық монастырлық жазбаларды, Эдо кезеңіндегі зерттеулерді және Мэйджи дәуіріндегі заманауи тарихи жазбаларды қарастырады. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Ұзақ уақыт сыртқы ықпалдан тыс болған халықтардың (Орталық Азия) тарихнамаларын талдауда қолдануға болатын жапон тарихнамасының әмбебап ерекшеліктерін анықтау. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеу Жапонияның ұлттық архиві (国立公文書館) дереккөздері мен басқа да материалдарға негізделген. Зерттеуде мифологиялық әңгімелерден қазіргі академиялық тарихнамаға дейінгі жапондық тарихи ойдың эволюциясына шолу жасау үшін мазмұнды пәнаралық тәсілмен үйлестірілген тарихнамалық талдаудың тарихи-салыстырмалы және сыни әдістері қолданылды. *Нәтижелер.* Ғылыми сараптама жапон тарихнамасының эволюциясын көрсетеді: Коджикі және Нихон Щоки сияқты ежелгі дәуірдің тарихи императорлық билікті заңдастыру үшін мифологияны ресми жылнамалармен біріктірді. Орта ғасырлардағы монастырлық жазбалар, жауынгер шежірелері және аймақтық шежірелер мәдени жадты сақтай отырып, әлеуметтік және саяси бөлшектенуді көрсетті. Эдо дәуірінде Кокугаку мен Конфуцийдің ықпалының артуы ежелгі мәтіндерді сыни зерттеуге баса назар аудартты. Мэйджи кезеңіндегі заманауи тарихи әдістемелер эмпирикалық зерттеулерді алға тарта отырып, батыс тарихнамасының әсерімен өрбіді. *Қорытынды.* Жапон тарихнамасы саяси биліктегі, әлеуметтік құрылымдардағы және интеллектуалдық ағымдардағы өзгерістерді көрсететін динамикалық траекторияны көрсетеді. Ерте шежірелер мен монастырлық жазбалар тарихи сананың негізін қалады, Эдо кезеңіндегі жетістіктер мәдени бірегейлікті нығайтты, ал Мэйдзи дәуіріндегі реформалар заманауи әдістемелерді енгізді.

Түйін сөздер: Жапония, тарихнама, Ежелгі дәуір және Ортағасыр, Кокугаку мектебі, Кодзики, Нихон сёки, марксистік тарихнама, либералдық тарихнама

Алғыс. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институтының «Қазақстан тарихы мен географиясы бойынша жаңа дереккөздер: талдау, аудару және ғылыми айналымға енгізу» тақырыбындағы бағдарламалық-мақсатты қаржыландыру жобасын жүзеге асыру аясында орындалды (жеке тіркеу нөмірі: BR28713777).

Дәйексөз үшін: Кабылдинов З.Е., Куанбай О.Б., Ибраев У.С. Ежелгі дәуірден 1912 жылға дейінгі жапон тарихнамасы: тарихи сананың эволюциясы мен дереккөздер // Отан тарихы. 2025. Т. 28. № 3. 601-616-бб. [Ағыл.]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2025_28_3_601-616

ЯПОНСКАЯ ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ С ДРЕВНЕЙШИХ ВРЕМЕН ДО 1912 ГОДА: ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ МЫСЛИ И ИСТОЧНИКОВ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В этой научной статье рассматривается развитие японской историографии с древнейших времён до 1912 года, освещается эволюция исторической мысли и источников. В статье рассматриваются ранние мифологические и официальные хроники, средневековые монастырские записи, научные труды периода Эдо и становление современной исторической письменности в эпоху Мэйдзи. *Цель исследования.* Выявить универсальные черты японской историографии, которые можно применить к анализу историографий других народов (Центральной Азии), развивавшихся в условиях ограниченного внешнего влияния. *Материалы и методы.* Исследование основано на архивных документах Национального архива Японии (国立公文書館) и других источниках. В исследовании используются историко-сравнительный и критический методы историографического анализа в сочетании с междисциплинарным содержательным подходом, чтобы проследить эволюцию японской исторической мысли от мифологических нарративов до современной академической историографии. *Результаты.* Анализ показывает постепенную эволюцию японской историографии: исторические сочинения древнего периода, такие как «Кодзики» и «Нихон сёки» сочетали мифологию с официальными хрониками для легитимации императорской власти. В средневековый период монастырские записи, воинские генеалогии и региональные хроники отражали социальную и политическую раздробленность, сохраняя при этом культурную память. В период Эдо рост Кокугакуха и конфуцианской науки подчеркивал японоцентричные интерпретации и критическое изучение древних текстов. Современные исторические методологии в период Мэйдзи были приняты под влиянием западной историографии, способствовавшей эмпирическим исследованиям. *Заключение.* Японская историография демонстрирует динамичную траекторию развития, отражающую изменения политической власти, социальных структур и интеллектуальных течений. Ранние хроники и монастырские записи заложили основу исторического сознания, научные

достижения периода Эдо укрепили культурную идентичность, а реформы эпохи Мэйдзи ввели современные методологии.

Ключевые слова: Япония, историография, античность и средневековье, школа Кокугаку, Кодзики, Нихон Сёки, марксистская историография, либеральная историография

Благодарность. Статья подготовлена в рамках реализации проекта программно-целевого финансирования Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан РГП на ПХВ института Истории и этнологий имени Ч.Ч. Валиханова «Новые источники по истории и географии Казахстана: анализ, перевод и ввод в научный оборот» (регистрационный номер: BR28713777).

Для цитирования: Кабульдинов З.Е., Куанбай О.Б., Ибраев У.С. Японское историография с древнейших времен до 1912 года: эволюция исторической мысли и источников // Отан тарихы. 2025. Т. 28. № 3. С. 601-616. [на англ.]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2025_28_3_601-616

Introduction. The article “Japanese Historiography from Ancient Times to 1912: Evolution of Historical Thought and Sources” directly corresponds to the aims and objectives of the project “New Sources on the History and Geography of Kazakhstan: Analysis, Translation, and Introduction into Scholarly Circulation” (BR28713777) through several key aspects: Generally within the project, particular emphasis is placed on source studies – identifying, translating, and introducing into scholarly circulation previously underexplored documents on the history of Kazakhstan. The article on Japanese historiography demonstrates a comparative approach to sources, employing methods of textual criticism, interdisciplinary analysis, and historiographical interpretation. These methodological approaches can be productively applied to the study of Kazakh historical sources. One of the project’s objectives is to broaden scholarly understanding of how national historiographical traditions were formed. The analysis of the Japanese experience – from mythological chronicles to Meiji academic historiography—reveals universal mechanisms in the construction of historical narratives, ranging from the legitimization of political authority to the modernization of scientific methods. This provides a methodological basis for comparison with the historiographical processes in Kazakhstan. The project envisions not only the study of Kazakh sources but also their contextualization within the broader Eurasian and global historical space. The article’s exploration of Japanese historiography illustrates how national traditions adapted to external cultural and intellectual influences (Chinese, Western). This experience is comparable to the processes in Kazakhstan, where sources and historiography likewise evolved under the combined impact of indigenous traditions and external centers (Russia, the Islamic world, the West). The article broadens the academic agenda of the project by showcasing the participation of Kazakh researchers in the global historiographical discourse. In doing so, it advances one of the project’s central objectives: not only to introduce new sources into scholarly circulation but also to strengthen the position of Kazakhstani historical studies within the international academic context.

The article on Japanese historiography contributes to the project’s aims and objectives by advancing source-critical and historiographical methodology, facilitating comparative analysis of national historical traditions, and reinforcing international scholarly integration.

Materials and Research Methods. The study is based on archival documents from the National Archives of Japan [国立公文書館] such as archival documents: 「国立公文書館。歴史と物語。古事記と六国史・古事記・[請求番号：特 058-0001] National Archives of Japan. History and Stories. Kojiki and the Six National Histories: Kojiki 712. (Inv.N: Toku 058-0001). Original doc.; 国立公文書館。将軍のアーカイブズ・家康の出版事業・古事記（慶長御写本）[請求番号：特 058-0001] 公文 4 枚。National Archives of Japan. Shogun Archives, Ieyasu's Publishing Project, Kojiki [Keicho Manuscript. Inv.N: 058-0001]4 Official doc. 1-2 doc. Original doc.; 国立公文書館。歴史と物語。古事記と六国史・日本書紀 [請求番号：特 055-0010] National Archives of Japan. History and Stories. Kojiki and Six National Histories, Nihon Shoki [Inv. N: Toku 055-0010]. Original doc.; 国立公文書館。江戸幕府・幕末の「文式」二条摂政記。請求番号: 1 6 3 – 0 1 7 7. 慶応 03 年 10 月 - 慶応 03 年 12 月 National Archives of Japan. “Bunshiki” of the Edo Shogunate and the end of the Edo period. Vol. 13. Nijo Regent's Chronicle. Inv.N: 163-0177. October 1868 - December 1868 Original doc.

Medieval sources, including monastic chronicles (Mikagura to Engi), warrior genealogies, and regional records, are examined to trace the diversification of historical writing in response to political decentralization and religious influences. Edo-period scholarship is represented through works of Kokugaku

scholars such as Motoori Norinaga and Confucian historians who critically reinterpreted classical texts. The Meiji era is analyzed through official state histories, government-sponsored historiographical projects, and academic works that reflect the reception of Western methodologies.

The methodological approach employed in this research is interdisciplinary, combining elements of historical criticism, textual analysis, and comparative historiography. Historical criticism is applied to evaluate the authenticity, reliability, and ideological purpose of primary texts, while textual analysis is used to investigate narrative structures, linguistic features, and interpretative strategies within different historiographical traditions. Comparative analysis allows for the examination of the interaction between Japanese, Chinese, and Western historiographical models, particularly in the Meiji period, when Western academic practices were systematically incorporated into Japanese scholarship.

This methodological framework enables the study to trace not only the continuity and transformation of historical thought in Japan but also the ways in which historiography was employed as a tool of political legitimation, cultural identity formation, and intellectual exchange.

Discussion. The state of research on Japanese historiography demonstrates the diversity of interpretative frameworks employed by scholars. Early studies of the [Kojiki 古事記, 712] and [Nihon Shoki 日本書紀, 720] emphasized their dual function as mythological narratives and instruments of imperial legitimation [Matsumoto, 2019], [Kojiki. Keene Ancient, 2013], [Yamaguchi, 2007]. Recent scholarship has advanced this view, highlighting how these texts fused cosmological myth and political ideology to construct a coherent narrative of state origins [Bentley, 2015]. Studies such as “Kojiki no Shinwa to Naritachi” [2013] and analyses by the Sankei Shimbun [2014] further underscore the cultural and regional significance of these chronicles in shaping Japan’s historical consciousness.

Medieval historiography has received significant scholarly attention, particularly in relation to its religious and ideological foundations. Works such as the Gukanshō and Jinnō Shōtōki have been examined as texts embedding Buddhist and Shinto worldviews into historical interpretation [Mehl, 1998]; [Nakamoto, 2011]. These studies demonstrate that medieval Japanese historiography was neither a mere continuation of official chronicles nor a detached scholarly pursuit, but a dynamic interplay of political legitimation, religious cosmology, and social memory.

The Edo period witnessed a methodological transformation of historiography. Neo-Confucian historians institutionalized moralistic approaches to history, emphasizing exemplary lessons for governance [Boot, 1982]; [Haruo, Suzuki, David, 2016]; [Howell, 2023]. At the same time, Kokugaku scholars such as Motoori Norinaga sought to recover the authenticity of Japan’s past through philological exegesis of classical texts Kojikiden [Haruo, 2002]. This dual trajectory – Confucian universalism on the one hand and nativist philology on the other—laid the intellectual groundwork for modern historiographical debates.

The Meiji era marked a decisive shift toward modern academic historiography, strongly influenced by Western methodologies. German-trained scholars such as Ludwig Riess introduced Rankean principles of source criticism, which fundamentally reoriented Japanese historical studies [Dusinberre, Facius, 2021]. At the same time, conflicts between academic freedom and ideological control, exemplified by the Kume Kunitake incident, underscored the political dimensions of Meiji historiography [Brownlee, 1997]. Scholars such as Yoshikawa [2017] have demonstrated how historiography became a tool for constructing imperial ideology and national identity during this transformative period. Comparative perspectives also illuminate broader theoretical concerns. Tanaka [1993] and Tang [2018] emphasize that Japanese historiography cannot be fully understood without situating it within global intellectual currents and East Asian exchanges. Similarly, Nishiyama and Katsuyama [2021] provide comprehensive syntheses of ancient and medieval historiography that highlight both indigenous development and foreign influences.

The state of research reflects a consensus that Japanese historiography evolved through successive stages – mythological, religious, moral-philosophical, and modern empirical – while retaining a continuous function as a medium of political legitimation and cultural identity. The contribution of contemporary scholars lies in uncovering the methodological innovations of each period, contextualizing them within global historiography, and problematizing the tension between historical scholarship and political authority [Reeve & Cribb, 2011] and [Kamachi, 1990]. This study builds upon these contributions by providing an integrated analysis of the evolution of Japanese historiographical traditions from antiquity to the early twentieth century.

Research results. *Ancient and Medieval Historiography (VII–XVI centuries).* Japan's ancient and medieval periods (VII to XVI centuries), from the establishment of the Ritsuryō 律令国家天皇制 state to the turbulent Muromachi and Sengoku periods, saw the formation of diverse historical narratives and

academic perspectives. This section provides an overview from three perspectives: 1) the compilation of ancient national historiography, 2) medieval historical narratives and ideological interpretations, and 3) modern and contemporary reevaluations.

The Six National Histories (Shoku Nihongi, Nihon Koki, Shoku Nihongi, Nihon Montoku Tenno Jitsuroku, Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku, etc.) compiled by the 9th century recorded the political and social conditions under the Ritsuryo system and played a role in reinforcing the view of the nation [Mehl, 1998: 6].

Ancient historiography prominently featured the compilation of historical documents by state institutions. History books of the Yamato dynasty, born in the 8th century: “The Kojiki 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters), compiled in 712 (Wadō 5), and the Nihon Shoki 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), compiled in 720 (Yōrō 4), are works that chronicle the history of the state created by the Yamato dynasty. What was the background and purpose behind the creation of these national histories? Two historical factors can be cited. One is the changing position of Japan in East Asia (the country was officially named Japan around 700), and the other is a renewal of domestic politics” [Matsumoto, 2019: 1]. Records of Ancient Matters and Chronicles of Japan “were composed primarily of imperial dynasties and lineages, incorporating myths and legends, with the purpose of legitimizing the national system” [Ito, 2014: 15, 17]. While imitating the style of Chinese historiography, these works are notable for recounting Japan's unique mythology and the origins of royal authority. The Nihon Shoki, in particular, was compiled in a style inspired by the official Chinese history, and was intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of the imperial court both domestically and internationally.

The origins of Japanese historiography are deeply rooted in the compilation of early chronicles. These texts, while containing mythological and legendary elements, were political projects of imperial authority and establish a coherent narrative of Japan's origins. The “Kojiki is Japan's oldest surviving historical record, covering history from the creation myths of the Age of the Gods to the reign of Empress Suiko (reigned 592-628). The compilation of the Kojiki began when Emperor Tenmu (673-686), concerned about the many errors in the “Tei-ki” (Imperial family genealogies and traditions) and “Kyoji” (myths, tales, folk songs, etc.) handed down among various clans, commissioned Hieda no Are to recite the correct records. The project was halted with Emperor Tenmu's death, but later, at the command of Emperor Genmei (707-715), Ono Yasumaro transcribed the contents that Hieda no Are had recited. This was presented to the emperor in 712 during the 5th year of the Wadō era” (Yamaguchi, Takamitsu 2007: 3). Comprised of three volumes: “the first volume tells the story of the Age of the Gods, beginning with the creation of the world; the second volume covers the reigns of Emperor Jimmu through Emperor Ojin; and the third volume covers the reigns of Emperor Nintoku through Empress Suiko. The three volumes chronicle the origins of the nation's founding and the events and stories of successive generations” [National Archives of Japan, Kojiki. Inv. N: Toku 058-0001].

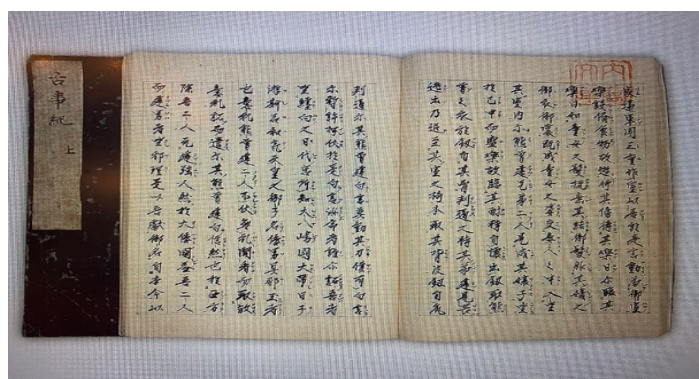


Figure 1. National Archives of Japan. History and Stories. Kojiki and the Six National Histories: Kojiki [Inv. Number: Toku 058-0001]
Kojiki 712

During the medieval period (VII-XVI centuries), historical thought diversified in accordance with the rise of warrior elites, Buddhist institutions, and local chronicles (Kōki, Engi). While official state chronicles declined, historiography shifted toward temple records, genealogical writings, and war tales (Gunki Monogatari), reflecting the decentralization of power and the intellectual dominance of Buddhist thought. These texts often combined didactic moral lessons with records of warfare, placing history within a karmic

and religious framework rather than within a purely political narrative. The exhibited material is a copy from 1614 (Keicho 19). It is one of 32 copies of the so-called “Keicho Manuscripts” (hereafter referred to as “Keicho Manuscripts”), which Tokugawa Ieyasu commissioned monks from the Five Mountains of Kyoto to transcribe ancient books and records held secretly by nobles, temples, and shrines between 1614 and the following year. It is a copy of the Kojiki owned by Shinryuin Bonshun (1553-1632). It was formerly part of the Momijiyama Bunko, the Shogun's library and a repository of valuable documents for the shogunate. There are three volumes in total [National Archives of Japan, Inv.N: Toku 058-0001].

In 710, the capital was moved from Fujiwara-kyo (Kashihara City, Nara Prefecture) to Heijo-kyo in Nara. Two years later, in 712, Oono Yasumaro compiled the Kojiki. This is a record of the history that Hieda no Are had memorized, written down by Oono Yasumaro at the command of Emperor Tenmu in the late 7th century”. It is the oldest surviving written account of Japanese history, and is an indispensable fundamental historical source when discussing Japan's ancient history. The Teiki are the genealogies of successive emperors. The Kyūji are various traditions that were passed down orally to clans in various regions in ancient times. These genealogies and traditions were systematized into a single, large narrative around the second half of the 7th century, after Emperor Tenmu's accession to the throne. This systematic story was recorded in writing as the “history” of Japan and presented to Emperor Genmei in 712. The Kojiki was completed in 712 (Wadō 5) 和銅 5” [“Kojiki” no Shinwa to Naritachi].

The “Kojiki and Ō no Yasumaro” (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 206 pages) has been published, offering an examination of Japan's oldest extant historical text, the Kojiki, alongside an exploration of the history and cultural heritage of Tawaramoto Town, the birthplace of Ō no Yasumaro, the compiler of the Kojiki. Produced under the supervision of the Town Chronicles and Man'yō Project Executive Committee, the work provides, in particular, a detailed introduction to Tawaramoto Town, with special emphasis on the Ō no clan and the Ō no Shrine, both closely associated with the origins and legacy of Ō no Yasumaro [The Sankei Shimbun, 2014: 3].

The integration of Chinese historiographical models and Confucian moral frameworks shaped the intellectual foundation of early Japanese historical writing, embedding the past within a cosmological and political order. During the medieval period, historiography diversified as new actors—Buddhist clerics, court aristocrats, and warrior elites – produced chronicles, temple records, and genealogies that reflected the fragmentation of political power and the growing influence of religious institutions. This period witnessed a transition from centralized narratives of legitimacy to pluralized accounts of regional, sectarian, and social memory.

In contrast to the Kojiki, the Nihon Shoki incorporates a considerably broader range of source materials. These include the Teiki and Kuji, in addition to court records, personal memoirs, Chinese historical texts, and, with regard to the Korean peninsula, the Kajara-ki. From Volume 28 (Tenmu-ki and Jitō-ki), the narrative increasingly incorporates descriptions derived from daily court records, thereby enhancing the historical reliability of the text: “The Nihon Shoki, regarded as Japan's first official national history (kokusho), was compiled under imperial commission during the reign of Empress Genshō. The principal compiler was Prince Toneri Shinnō, son of Emperor Tenmu, although contributions were also made by other scholars, including Ki no Kiyohito and Miyake Fujimaro. Comprising thirty volumes, the work is organized chronologically in classical Chinese prose. The first two volumes, collectively termed Kamiyo-ki, are characterized by their mythological content. Volume 3 (Jinmu-ki) through Volume 30 (Jitō-ki) record the reigns of successive emperors and related historical events” [National Archives of Japan, Inv.N: Toku 055-0010].

Research on court Mikagura was first initiated with Ichijō Kaneyoshi's Ryōjinguansha, which included annotations on the lyrics of kagura songs. Concerning the origins of court Mikagura, Orikuchi Shinobu, “in the early Shōwa period, advanced the hypothesis that it derived from a sacred performance of the Azumi clan. According to his view, this ritual later developed into the Hachiman-style kagura, with the kagura of the Iwashimizu Hachiman-gū being integrated into the tradition, eventually forming the basis of court kagura. Orikuchi's argument appears to rest on a simplified interpretation found in sources such as the Hitobata Gudōkun (vol. 1), which recounts those deities performed kagura to summon Azumi no Giryō” [Nakamoto 2011: 78]. Although this proposition remains hypothetical, it has been influential, enjoying wide acceptance among specialists and retaining significant support to the present day. Nonetheless, fundamental research on the kagura of Iwashimizu Hachiman-gū remains limited, and its precise performative details and structural characteristics are still insufficiently understood.

From the mid-Heian period onward, the waning authority of the central government was accompanied by a shift in historical writing toward a more personal and narrative mode of expression. Representative

works of this genre, “commonly referred to as historical tales (*rekishi monogatari*), include the so-called “Four Mirrors” (*Ōkagami*, *Imakagami*, *Mizukagami*, and *Masukagami*), composed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. These texts, conveyed through the voices of narrators, depict the rise and decline of aristocratic society and combine historiographical concerns with pronounced literary qualities” [Bentley, 2015: 73].

Furthermore, war tales such as “The Tale of Heiji” and “The Tale of Hogen” depicted the exploits of a new class of warriors, and while the narrator added direction, they were written against the backdrop of decentralized power relations. The most famous epic poem is “The Tale of the Heike” [Bentley, 2015: 74], which speaks of the transience of the fate of warriors from the Buddhist perspective of impermanence.

Moreover, medieval historical interpretation was deeply intertwined with religious and ideological frameworks: “The *Gukanshō* (1220) interprets the course of history through a Buddhist lens, whereas the *Jinnō Shōtōki* (1339) sacralizes the Japanese imperial lineage within a Shinto cosmological framework” [Mehl, 1998: 7]. The latter, in particular, constitutes a seminal work that exerted a profound influence on the development of later nationalist thought.

From the standpoint of religious and intellectual history, Toshio Kuroda’s theory of the “Formation of Shinto in the Middle Ages” represents a seminal contribution: Kuroda contended that, although Shinto emerged as a distinct and institutionalized religion in the modern period, its medieval origins were inseparably connected to Buddhism rather than existing as an independent tradition. This argument significantly reshaped the structural understanding of medieval Japanese religious history [BBC. Shinto, 2009: 10-30].

For the study of Japanese historiography, several major scholarly works provide comprehensive coverage of ancient and medieval history. Among them is Ryōhei Nishiyama and Seiji Katsuyama’s *History of Japan: Ancient and Medieval Japan* (Minerva Shobō), which presents an extensive synthesis of Japan’s history from antiquity through the medieval period, incorporating recent research as well as cultural and intellectual developments [Nishiyama, Katsuyama, 2021:2-3]. In Japan, Yamakawa Publishing serves as a leading academic publisher of historical works and textbooks. An illustrative example is the liberal arts textbook *University History of Japan 2: The Middle Ages – From the Liberal Arts to Reflections on History* (ed. Fumihiko Gomi et al., Yamakawa Publishing), which addresses a broad range of topics from the Insei era to the Kamakura, Muromachi, and Sengoku periods.

From international scholarship, *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 3: Medieval Japan* (Cambridge University Press) offers a comprehensive treatment of the period in English, providing expert analysis from the Kamakura shogunate through the Sengoku era. In addition, Marxist historiography has made significant contributions to the reinterpretation of medieval history. Notable works include Yoshihiko Amino’s *Rethinking Japanese History* and Toshio Kuroda’s seminal essay “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” both of which advanced critical perspectives on medieval society and the religious landscape. In particular, Kuroda’s work on the development of Shinto in the Middle Ages marked a turning point in the study of Japanese religious history.

Ancient Japanese historiography was formulated with the primary objective of legitimizing the *ritsuryō* state and consolidating the authority of the imperial institution. The compilation of the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Six National Histories* served as instruments to affirm the legitimacy of the imperial lineage and the national polity, and are thus characterized by their intimate association with political power.

In this period, historical writing frequently combined myth and folklore with historical fact, while interpretive frameworks drew upon both Shinto and Buddhist perspectives. Texts such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* employed mythological narratives not only to record the past but also to convey political authority and moral instruction.

From the mid-Heian period onward, historiography increasingly adopted literary and narrative forms. Works such as the *Four Mirrors* (*Ōkagami*, *Imakagami*, *Mizukagami*, *Masukagami*) and the warrior tales (*Heike monogatari*, *Taiheiki*) depict the rise and decline of aristocrats and samurai. These texts reflect an evolution from annalistic record-keeping toward narrative histories that imbued events with emotional resonance and ethical significance.

Throughout the medieval period, historical interpretation became progressively embedded within ideological frameworks informed by Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism. The *Gukanshō* and *Jinnō Shōtōki*, for example, explained historical events in terms of religious cosmologies and moral value judgments, thereby integrating political history with theological worldviews. From the Muromachi period onward, historiographical attention expanded to include the activities of warriors, regional clans, and commoners, in an effort to conceptualize the multilayered structures of society. Modern scholarship, most notably that of

Amino Yoshihiko, has reappraised medieval history not merely as the history of centralized authority, but as a field encompassing the dynamics of diverse social strata and local communities.

Historiography of the Edo period (1603–1868). The Edo period marked a new stage in the professionalization and scholarly reorientation of historiography. Neo-Confucian intellectuals and Kokugaku scholars engaged in critical philological study of ancient texts, seeking to restore an “authentic” understanding of Japan’s past. Historical studies became more systematic, producing works such as Hayashi Razan’s state-centered histories and Motoori Norinaga’s reinterpretations of Shinto myths. Simultaneously, domainal schools and private scholars preserved local records, genealogies, and economic data, broadening the documentary base. Thus, historiography in the Edo era functioned both as a moral-political instrument of Tokugawa rule and as a proto-modern scholarly pursuit emphasizing empirical textual criticism. By the early modern period under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), historiography became both a scholarly and ideological enterprise. Neo-Confucianism provided a normative framework for historical interpretation, while Kokugaku (National Learning) 国学, 和学, 皇学, 古学 scholars sought to rediscover and reinterpret classical Japanese texts in an effort to construct a distinctive cultural identity independent of Chinese intellectual dominance. Historical writing was not limited to academic circles but extended to domain schools, popular encyclopedias, and local histories, indicating a widening audience for historical knowledge. This diversification of historical discourse reflected broader social and cultural changes, including the rise of an educated urban class and the growing importance of print culture.

In addition to commissioning the publication of significant works, Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered monks from the Five Mountains (Gozan) to transcribe ancient books and records that had been privately preserved by aristocrats, temples, and shrines between 1614 and 1615. These transcriptions were carefully retained in his possession. This initiative not only represented a cultural enterprise aimed at transmitting valuable textual materials to future generations, but also reflected Ieyasu’s political intention to assert authority over traditions and records that had hitherto been monopolized by the imperial court, Buddhist temples, and other established authorities. Kondo Jūzō (1771–1829), who later held the office of Shomotsu Bugyō (magistrate of books), proposed that the manuscripts transcribed under Ieyasu’s direction be classified as “Keichō manuscripts” (Keichō-bon) and accorded the status of valuable works” [National Archives of Japan, Kojiki. Keicho Manuscript. Inv. N: 058-0001].

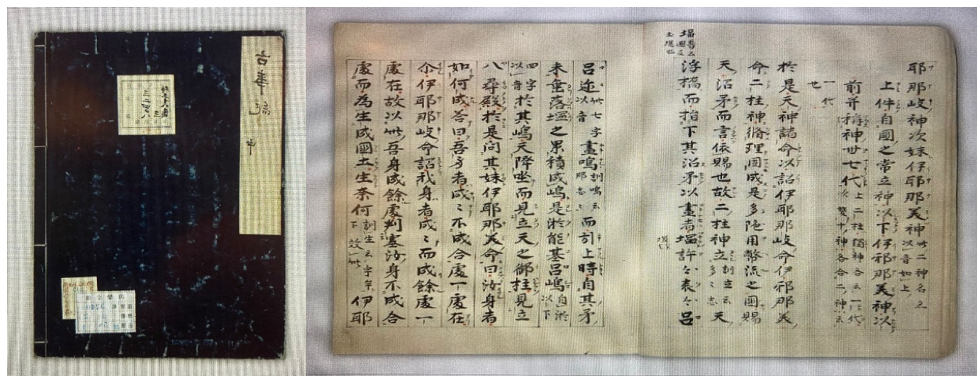


Figure 2. National Archives of Japan. Shogun Archives, Ieyasu's Publishing Project, Kojiki [Keicho Manuscript. Inv.N: 058-0001]- 4 Official doc.1-2 p.

The item on display is one such Keichō manuscript: a copy of the Kojiki originally preserved at Kyoto’s Shinryūin Temple, which was transferred from Sunpu Castle to Edo Castle following Ieyasu’s death. Ieyasu’s collection comprised thirty-two Keichō-era manuscripts, including the Sendai Kujiki and the Shaku Nihongi. Five of these texts were lost in the fire that destroyed part of the Imperial Palace in May 1873 (VIth year of the Meiji period). The three surviving volumes were subsequently incorporated into the holdings of the Momijiyama Bunko Library.

Edo-period historical writing emerged at the intersection of statecraft, philology, and moral philosophy. Early Tokugawa rulers patronized Neo-Confucian scholars who framed history as a guide for orderly governance. Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) helped institutionalize Zhu-Xi learning at shogunal academies and cast past events as exempla for political ethics, a template that linked historical judgment to legitimacy and social hierarchy [Boot, 1982: 25]. His corpus also redeployed anti-Christian polemic in historical argument, situating Japan’s past within a Confucian moral cosmos.

Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) advanced a more empirical statecraft historiography. In Tokushi yoron (1712–24), he synthesized chronicles and documents to derive lessons on dynastic stability and fiscal reform; his autobiography Oritaku shiba no ki records how policy experience shaped historical evaluation. In particular, the first half touches on the relationship with historical perspective and policy experience [Ackroyd, 1979: 50]. Hakuseki's method combined careful source collation with explicit "use of history" (Keiko) for governance, anticipating later "practical learning" (Jitsugaku). [Ackroyd, 1982: 31]. Modern translations and critical studies have made these works key entry points for Edo historiography. "Tokugawa Philosophy" provides an explanation of early Edo Confucianism and historical understanding, including Razan (Howell, 2023:85). From mid-eighteenth century, Kokugaku (nativist studies) reoriented historical inquiry toward Japan's ancient texts and language. Motoori Norinaga's Kojikiden fused rigorous philology with a theory of historical affect (mono no aware), arguing that authentic antiquity predated Buddhist and Confucian overlays. This agenda reframed history as recovery of a native way (michi) through linguistic exegesis, thereby challenging Confucian universalism and creating a powerful methodological alternative within Edo intellectual life [Haruo, 2002: 879].

In the late Edo, Rai Sanyō (1780–1832) popularized a dramatic, narrative history in Nihon gaishi (1827). Although not official, it reached a broad reading public and supplied a heroic, restorationist arc that later resonated during Bakumatsu politics. Sanyō's blend of classical prose, moral evaluation, and national storytelling exemplifies how Edo historiography crossed scholarly and popular spheres while shaping political imaginaries on the eve of 1868 [Haruo, Suzuki, David, 2016: 508]. Modern annotated edition: The Iwanami Bunko edition (Vol. 1) includes the introduction and early descriptions. Across these currents, Edo historians shared techniques that modern scholarship recognizes as formative: compilation and comparison of chronicles; textual criticism and commentary; ethical evaluation of rulers; and language-centered approaches that treated philology as historical method. Confucian statecraft, Kokugaku philology, and public-oriented narrative thus constituted a plural historiographical ecosystem whose legacies – source criticism, moralized narrative, and linguistic historicism – continued to inform Meiji historical thought [Tang, 2018: 9, 30]. History was not simply an academic discipline; it was positioned as a means of supporting the political justification and governing ideals of the Shogunate and feudal domains. For example, historical documents were collected and compiled to aid in policymaking after Tokugawa Ieyasu.

The characteristics of historiography in the Edo period (1603–1868) can be summarized as follows: Ethical judgment based on Neo-Confucianism was emphasized, and past examples of politics and governance were valued as "models" and "negative examples." Scholars such as Hayashi Razan wrote history with the primary aim of presenting political lessons. Historical narratives incorporating narrative and literary elements, such as the Four Mirrors and the Tale of the Heike, developed. These works also served as educational and entertaining opportunities for samurai and commoners alike, emphasizing not only the critique of historical documents but also the transmission of "lessons and emotions". As with medieval historical interpretation, Buddhist and Shinto perspectives were incorporated into history, and works such as the Jinnō Shōtōki were used to explain the divinity of the imperial lineage and the state. In the late Edo period, historical training was institutionalized through temple schools, domain schools, and schools directly under the shogunate, creating a bridge to modern historiography. Techniques for organizing, annotating, and transcribing historical documents were also systematized.

Meiji and modern historiography (1868–1912). The Meiji era (1868–1912) introduced modern historical science under the influence of Western historiography, particularly German methodologies. History was institutionalized as an academic discipline within universities, with scholars such as Kume Kunitake and Shigeno Yasutsugu pioneering critical, source-based approaches. At the same time, historiography remained politically charged: the state promoted narratives that legitimized the restoration of imperial power, emphasized national unity, and justified Japan's modernization and imperial expansion. The Nihon Shoki and other ancient texts were reinterpreted within the framework of national history (Kokushi), while the compilation of official histories, such as the Dainihonshi, reinforced the ideological centrality of the emperor. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 ushered in a new era in which historiography became closely intertwined with nation-building and modernization. As Japan confronted Western imperialism and embarked on rapid reforms, the study of history acquired unprecedented political and educational significance. The establishment of the Shiryō Hensanjo (Historical Records Compilation Office) and the promotion of Western methodologies introduced critical source analysis, periodization, and professional standards of historical scholarship. Yet, this adoption of Western academic practices did not erase traditional historiographical legacies; rather, it produced a hybrid discourse that combined positivist historical science with enduring ideological imperatives, particularly the sanctification of the imperial institution. By 1912,

Japanese historiography had achieved a complex synthesis of indigenous traditions and modern academic frameworks, laying the foundation for the subsequent development of historical studies in the Taishō and Shōwa periods.

Examining Japanese historiography up to 1912 thus provides valuable insights into the intellectual mechanisms through which Japan conceptualized its past, legitimized authority, and negotiated its cultural position in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, it highlights the ways in which historiography functioned as both a scholarly pursuit and a political instrument, shaped by domestic needs and external pressures alike. The evolution of historical thought in Japan, therefore, cannot be understood solely as an internal intellectual trajectory but must be situated within the broader contexts of East Asian cultural exchange and global historiographical developments.

With the establishment of the Meiji state, modern historiography was restructured as a tool for measuring “National Time”. The first approach to be introduced was Rankeism (rigorous criticism of source materials), a decisive factor being the teaching of historical criticism and practice techniques by German professor Ludwig Riess at Tokyo Imperial University [Dusinberre, Facius, 2021: 220-232]. The establishment of this methodological approach was inextricably linked to the institutionalization of the Dai Nihon Shiryo (Great Japanese Historical Materials) 「大日本史料」・古文書集成事業「収集・編成・刊行」 and the project to compile ancient documents by the Historiographical Institute (later affiliated with Tokyo Imperial University, now the University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute). By the end of the 19th century, a system for the collection, organization, and publication of historical materials on a national scale was in place [Reeve, Cribb, 2011: 5,6]. Meanwhile, the Historical Society of Japan/Shigaku Zasshi 「史学会」・「史学雑誌」 (Society of Historical Studies Journal) provided a forum for academic journals and circulated professional standards through methodologies and book reviews [Reeve, Cribb, 2011: 5, 7].

Methodicism alone, however, did not fully occupy the historical space of modern Japan. The 1891 Kume Kunitake Incident 久米邦武事件, in which Kume was dismissed after asserting that “Shinto is nothing more than an ancient form of nature worship,” revealed the tensions between academic autonomy and the political mobilization of State Shinto [Brownlee, 1997: 106]. By the early twentieth century, the imperial imagination of history expanded in tandem with the growth of the empire. Historians sought to visualize the past through the reconfiguration of “national history” (Kokutai Shikan / Kokoku Shikan) and through their involvement in textbooks, expositions, and commemorative projects [Yoshikawa, 2017: 150-198].

Simultaneously, the reorganization of Asian perspectives and processes of “Orientalization” functioned as intellectual mechanisms that reinforced temporal divisions and regional hierarchies. Japan’s historical trajectory was inscribed on the imperial map as a “civilizing force,” while the histories of East Asian nations were framed primarily as objects of comparison [Tanaka, 1993: 31-67]. In the 1920s and 1930s, Marxist historiography gained considerable momentum in conjunction with the institutional rise of the social sciences. The establishment of the Society for Historical Studies in 1932 and its journal Historical Studies introduced analytical frameworks grounded in concepts of “feudalism” and class structure [Kamachi, 1990: 332].

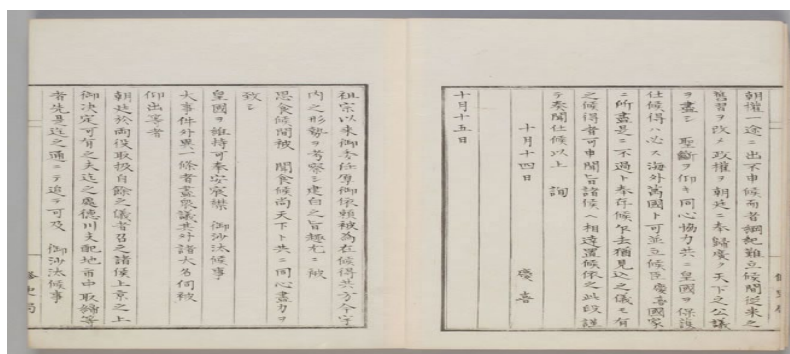


Figure 3. 二条摂政記 Nijo Regent's Chronicle

The diary of Nijō Nariyuki, a nobleman of the late Edo period and head of the Nijō family, a regent family.

It records Tokugawa Yoshinobu's petition for the restoration of imperial rule

[National Archives of Japan, Nijo Regent's Chronicle.

Inv.N: 163-0177. October 1868 - December 1868]

The historiography of the late Edo and early Meiji periods is closely intertwined with the process of legitimizing imperial authority, which, after long centuries of Tokugawa shogunate rule, regained political relevance. One of the most important sources for studying this transitional moment is the *Nijō Sesshōki* (Diary of Regent Nijō Nariyuki), authored by the head of the Nijō house – one of the most influential regent aristocratic families. This diary not only records the events preceding the restoration of imperial power but also reflects the political reasoning through which the Kyoto court elite sought to consolidate the legitimacy of the new state order. Particular significance is the entry documenting Tokugawa Yoshinobu's petition to return supreme governing authority to the imperial court. In historiographical terms, this act symbolized not merely the voluntary renunciation of power by the shogunate but also the establishment of a new political model grounded in the idea of the “restoration of ancient imperial rule” (*ōsei fukko*). In the official history of the Meiji period, written by Professors Fujii Jintarō and Moriya Hideosuke, it is categorically asserted that the uprisings did not possess a revolutionary character; rather, through sacrality, morality, and ritual, they did not oppose the idea of harmony (*wa*) and moral order [Jintarō, Hideosuke, 1934: 524]. The insurgents were not opposed to the emperor; instead, their concerns lay in the preservation of sacred and cultural legacies [Honjō, 1930: 712].

In summary, historiography during the Meiji period was characterized by the dual processes of nation-state formation and the institutionalization of historical studies. The discipline of history was formally established in response to the imperatives of modern nation-building. The creation of the Department of History at Tokyo Imperial University and the founding of the Historiographic Institute (1888) exemplified this development, positioning history as a distinct academic field while simultaneously embedding it within the framework of national politics. The reception of Western historiography and methodological innovations further stimulated new directions in Japanese historical scholarship. Positivist methodologies, particularly those influenced by Leopold von Ranke introduced rigorous source criticism as a scholarly foundation, thereby transforming Japanese historiography from a primarily chronological record into a discipline grounded in empirical analysis of historical sources. Concurrently, a nationalistic interpretation of history began to gain ascendancy. In the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, and increasingly from the Taishō era into the pre-war Shōwa period, discourses such as the theory of the national polity (国体論) and the imperial view of history (皇国史観) were consolidated, positioning history as an ideological instrument to legitimate the state. Nationalist narratives became particularly prominent in Ministry of Education – approved textbooks and in history education. At the same time, diversification within the discipline expanded its scope. Building on the traditions of classical Japanese scholarship and Confucian learning, but increasingly influenced by Western historical philosophy and the social sciences, historiography developed specialized subfields such as economic history, legal history, and Oriental history, thereby consolidating history as an autonomous discipline.

Since this article aims to identify universal features of Japanese historiography applicable to other peoples, it is notable that Kazakh historiography shares similar traits. Both traditions emphasize state formation, political authority, and the cultural legitimation of power, despite differences in geography, social structure, and external influences. Kazakh historiography highlights the emergence of the state from nomadic tribal confederations, legitimized through lineage and heroic histories, while Japanese historiography traces the state to the mythological descent of the imperial line from the sun goddess Amaterasu. In both cases, sacred and mythological foundations underpin legitimate authority and remain stable despite external contacts. Kazakh chronicles depict the khan as possessing both sacred and practical authority, reinforced by military skill and tribal obligations. Japanese historiography maintains the sacred status of the emperor, even when *de facto* power lay with shoguns or daimyo. In both, narratives preserve the sacralized nature of political authority regardless of practical governance structures. Cultural practices further reinforce legitimacy. Kazakh historiography relies on oral tradition, epic poetry, and ancestor veneration to emphasize justice, wisdom, and tribal protection. Japanese historiography stresses ceremonial practice, moral virtue, and harmony “*wa*” (和), incorporating selective external influences without undermining the sacred center of power. Finally, the sacralization of power shows a clear parallel. Both historiographies consistently reflect these principles, demonstrating continuity of political and cultural norms. Thus, Kazakh and Japanese historiographies share universal features in conceptualizing the state, authority, and sacral power, maintaining internal coherence even under limited external influence.

Conclusion. The article employs historiographical and source-critical approaches, with a particular emphasis on the analysis of mythological chronicles (*Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*), medieval monastic records, scholarly works of the Edo period, and the institutionalization of academic historiography in the Meiji era.

The novelty of the study lies in the fact that the author does not limit the scope to a narrow chronological framework or a single genre, but instead traces the evolution of historical thought in Japan as an integrated process – from mytho-political texts to a scholarly discipline embedded within state institutions. Furthermore, the article introduces into scholarly circulation a comparative-historical perspective, juxtaposing the Japanese experience with global trends in the development of historiography.

The extensive chronological framework is determined by the task of demonstrating the continuity and transformation of historical thought. The examination of a single period (such as Edo or Meiji) alone would not reveal the underlying mechanisms of the evolution of Japanese historiography. A diachronic scope extending from antiquity to the twentieth century makes it possible to trace how mythological explanations of the past were transformed into religious and philosophical interpretations; how Confucian and nativist (Kokugaku) thought prepared the ground for modernization; and how Western methodologies were incorporated into Japanese scholarship by the late nineteenth century. Thus, such a broad temporal horizon is necessary to reveal the staged development and overall coherence of Japanese historiography.

The decision to conclude the analysis in 1912 is directly linked to the end of the Meiji era, which represented a turning point in the development of Japanese historiography. During this period, history was institutionalized as an academic discipline through the establishment of university chairs and scholarly associations; methodological foundations were consolidated on the basis of Western, particularly German, models; and history continued to serve an ideological function by reinforcing the imperial system. From 1912 onward, with the beginning of the Taishō era, a new stage commenced, marked by democratic tendencies and shifting political contexts, which requires separate treatment. Consequently, the year 1912 serves as a logical boundary, concluding the formative phase of Japanese historiography as a modern scholarly discipline.

The evolution of Japanese historiography from antiquity to the end of the Meiji era (1912) demonstrates a dynamic interplay between political power, cultural transformation, and the methodologies of historical writing. From its earliest stage, historiography functioned as a tool of legitimacy: texts such as the *Nihon Shoki* (720) and the Six National Histories were compiled under imperial patronage to affirm the divine origin of the imperial line and to embed political authority within a cosmological and religious framework. Ancient historiography thus blended mythology, Shinto-Buddhist cosmologies, and Confucian principles with statecraft, producing a model where historical narrative was inseparable from political ideology.

The article reveals universal features of Japanese historiography that can be applied to the analysis of historiographies of other peoples that developed under conditions of limited external influences: the use of mythological and sacred narratives as the basis of historical consciousness; the fusion of religious and historical discourse in the formation of national memory; reliance on moral and ethical categories as criteria for interpreting the past; a gradual transition from oral and sacred forms of explanation to more rationalized and scientific ones; preservation of the function of history as an instrument of political and cultural legitimation. The Japanese experience can serve as a methodological model for the analysis of the historiography of other cultures, including Central Asia, which also developed under conditions of long-term autonomy from external influences.

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Редакцияның мекен-жайы:

050100, Қазақстан Республикасы, Алматы қ., Шевченко көшесі, 28
Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты
«Отан тарихы» журналының редакциясы

Сайтқа сілтеме: <https://otan.history.iie.kz>

Тел.: +7 (727) 272-46-54.

E-mail: otanhistory@gmail.com.

Журнал Қазақстан Республикасының Ақпарат және қоғамдық келісім министрлігінде
1998 ж. 9 наурызда тіркеліп, N 158-ж кезегіне ие болды.

Мақалаларды қайта бастырып жариялағанда, микрофильмге және басқа да көшірмелерге түсіргенде
міндетті түрде журналға сілтеме жасау қажет.