

DEPARTMENT OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Established in 1966, the Department of Contemporary History is devoted to research and education about world history in the twentieth century. The contemporary period, which historians generally see as having begun circa the First World War, is distinguished from the earlier periods by the immensity and velocity of interactions of people, goods, money and information among countries and regions all over the world.

The period characterized by these phenomena, conventionally called globalization, cannot be fully comprehended within the traditional analytical framework of national histories. Predicated on this recognition, the department has focused on research and education about twentieth-century history from global perspectives. Students are urged to take into account, for example, global trends in thought and social movements or parallel developments in different countries and regions. Comparative and/or structural perspectives, as well as a transnational frame of analysis, will prove extremely fruitful even when students investigate historical

topics associated with a specific country. In these ways the department seeks to lead students to reflect on twentieth-century history as world history.

The department offers courses on various topics, thanks to the invaluable help provided by members of the Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies and the Institute for Research in Humanities. These usually include lectures and seminars on Japan, Korea, China, Europe, Americas, and Africa. In addition, the department encourages students to take classes offered by other departments and faculties in order to acquire further insights into the humanities and social sciences, which are necessary in dealing with topics or events that have taken place during such a multifaceted period.

Students are allowed to choose freely the topics of graduate and master theses, as long as they can be examined with the methodology of historical analysis, i.e. one based on primary sources that provide first-hand information. Taking a simple example, one cannot duly analyze the policymaking process of the George W. Bush administration leading up to the Iraqi War of 2003 before governmental documents are declassified. On the other hand, one can consider historically the popular reaction to the same war as in this case the relevant materials, including published sources, images and even broadcasts can be retrieved. This difference accrues from the availability of primary sources required to construct a historically sound argument.

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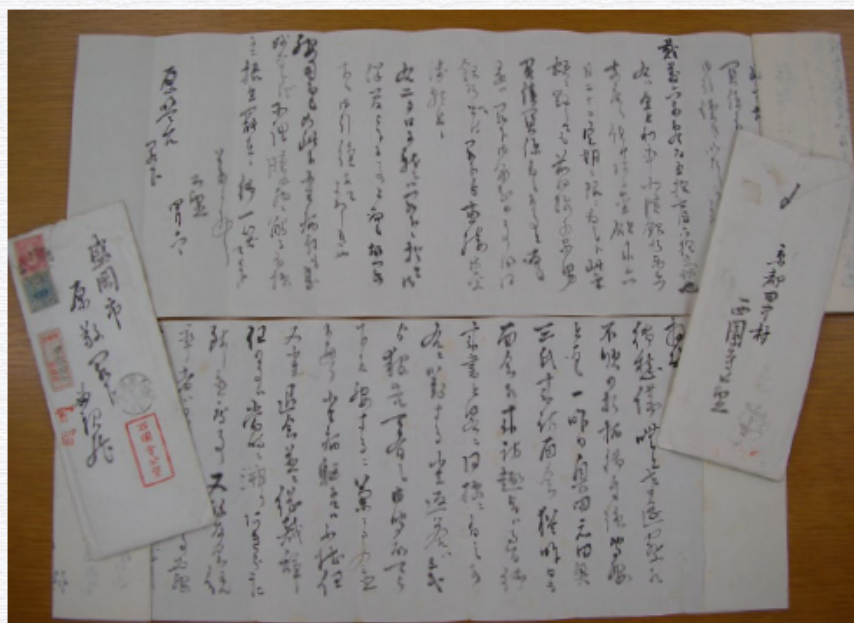


PHOTO: Original letters from Kinmochi Saionji to Takashi Hara, held by the Department of Contemporary History