Japanese 570H/Fall 2002
Week 7
Creating a proposal for your
Final Project: Research Topic Guide

OVERVIEW
Here we assist you in narrowing down the topic and range of your Research Topic Guide, or Pathfinder, that you will be creating as your final project. The guide is a reference tool, rather like a travel guide, that will accompany a future scholar or reader who wants to know more about your chosen topic. For this person you will have blazed the trail, identifying all the good books, articles, scholars, and websites that you can find out about, and even pointing out avenues and byways likely to be of interest where there is either no scholarship available or where the scholarship is fundamentally limited (e.g. to coverage only in Japanese, or only in scattered articles, or only in very dated sources, etc.). You offer background on the topic, explaining why further investigation is warranted, clarifying what is known and not known already. With your guide in hand the future scholar can sit down and get straight to writing the paper/article/book you would have done had there been just a little more time.

A. The Proposal
‡ for this stage, you only need to identify a topic that looks promising (not exhaustively covered in English sources, but not completely lacking in advanced research articles/tools in Japanese sources) based on your research thus far and instructor approval.

Your first task is to find within your allocated field (Meiji costume, etc.) a topic for research that seems interesting to you and that you feel prepared to investigate further. If the topic is too broad or vague, you will find too much information and not be able to complete your project in a timely manner. If your topic is too narrow, you will be frustrated by a lack of information. Trial and error will lead to a balance.

B.
Next, ask yourself questions about your topic:
what do you already know about your topic?
What don't you know?
What aspects of the topic interest you?
   (people, events, motivations)
Is there a specific time period that interests you?
Is there a specific geographic region that interests you?
Do you have comparative knowledge/experience (of a similar phenomenon in another culture) that may be useful?

C.

Then a further question as you begin to use the library: is there a sufficient body of material available to support the proposed research topic?
‡ Go back and look at encyclopedias, bibliographies, guides to the literature, etc. Locate articles related to your topic,
   (While you're there, note why each article is relevant and record any new information. Be sure to copy down the citations for any useful articles, and check for cross-references or any list of further readings)

D.

After posing various questions and looking for answers, eliminate the easy questions that can be answered using standard sources. You are looking for a question that appears not to be addressed, at least not to your satisfaction.

E.

Once you are sure you have identified a gap in the sources that new research might fill,‡ go back to your original topic statement and rewrite it to focus on this. Work in the information you have learnt (from standard sources) in order to highlight what you feel needs to be found out. A good proposal gives some information and yet at the same time asks questions that are not answered. It may even offer a hypothetical answer to a specific problem.

Thus the whole process takes place in two parts: a draft topic statement/proposal, based on what you know so far, and then a revision based on double checking once you feel confident you have identified a gap in the sources.

The revised version then becomes the basis for your introductory essay for the Research Topic Guide.