

**The Impact of Changing Times and Changing Contexts  
on *Shashi*:  
A Comparison of  
the JTB's 50-Year and 70-Year Histories**

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Abstract

*Shashi*, or company histories, are published periodically by Japanese corporations to commemorate landmark years in a company's history. Since landmark years are a recurring phenomenon—e.g., the 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of a company's founding, the 25<sup>th</sup> year—over their lifespan corporations will typically publish multiple *shashi*, with subsequent *shashi* retracing events and developments covered in earlier versions. Does it therefore matter which version a researcher uses?

The proposed paper argues that although differences can be subtle, the time of publication more often than not does have a significant impact on the treatment of historical events and it is important for researchers to be cognizant of such differences in the treatment of identical events in differing *shashi* editions. The paper demonstrates this point through a concrete deconstruction of the treatments of identical time periods in two different editions of *shashi* published by the Japan Travel Bureau (JTB). It then explains how the differing historical contexts in which the two versions were published explain the differences noted. Finally, the paper uses these examples to draw out broadly applicable pointers regarding the utilization of *shashi* in academic research.

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The following paper compares the treatment of the 50-year period from 1912 to 1961 in two different editions of *shashi* published by the Japan Travel Bureau (JTB). Specifically, it looks at the coverage of the period in the JTB's *gojūnen shi*, or 50-year history published in 1962 and the coverage of the same years in the company's *nanajūnen shi*, or 70-year history, published twenty years later in 1982. It begins with a broad overview of JTB's development during these years. It then moves to a comparison of the general structural features of the respective volumes. It then zeroes in on the differing treatments of the so-called Pacific War years between 1941 and 1945 as a way to highlight how sociopolitical context can affect the content of a *shashi*. Finally, the paper attempts to draw out of the preceding discussion some pointers regarding the utilization of different versions of *shashi* in academic research.

**Table 1 Chronology of JTB Operational Areas**

	Inbound Tourism Promotion	Inbound Tourist Services	Domestic Market Travel Services	Travel Education
1912		guide, assistance		
1913				
1914				
1915		ticket sales		
1916				
1917				
1918				
1919				
1920				
1921				
1922				
1923				
1924				
1925			ticket sales	
1926				
1927				
1928	New York office est.			
1929				
1930				
1931	Kokusai Kanko Kyokai			
1932			major expansion	
1933				
1934				Absorbs NRK
1935				
1936				
1937				
1938				
1939				
1940				
1941				
1942			Reconstituted as Toa Ryokosha	
1943	propaganda in Coprosperity Sphere	almost no activity		
1944			Renamed Nihon Kotsu Kosha	
1945				
1946				
1947		primarily Occupation Forces		
1948				
1949				
1950	govt subsidy		overseas travel resumes	
1951				
1952				
1953				
1954				
1955	JNTO est.			
1956				
1957				
1958				
1959				
1960				
1961				
1962				

## ***Background on JTB***

JTB, or the Japan Travel Bureau (Nihon Kōtsū Kōsha in Japanese), is known today for being the largest travel agency in Japan. It employs around 10,000 people and oversees a network of 160 subsidiary and associated companies worldwide. The company has gone through a number of transformations and name changes since it was established in 1912. Arguably the most drastic instance of the latter was the adoption of the name, Tōa Kōtsū Kōsha or East Asia Transportation Company in 1942. The major organizational transformations for the period that is the focus of analysis in this paper are roughly outlined in Table 1. One of the interesting features of JTB is that historically, it has had a kind of semi-governmental status, and in fact when the company was originally set up it was set up as a nonprofit organization for providing complimentary guide services to foreign visitors in Japan under the supervision of Japan's Railway Ministry. It subsequently expanded to take on inbound tourism promotion. It was only later that it began to provide services to Japanese travelers, mainly those traveling to and from different parts of the Japanese empire. Another distinctive function taken up by JTB was that of traveler education—that is, overseeing campaigns designed to promote “good” travel habits among the Japanese and to bring Japanese accommodations and travel services—particularly those that foreigners might utilize—up to international standards. Nowhere is the “public” nature of JTB revealed more succinctly than in the Inbound Tourism Promotion column where one can see operations being transferred back and forth between JTB and other governmental and semi-governmental agencies. Arguably, it wasn't until the mid-1960s, that JTB became a full-fledged private company, and even

then it maintained a certain “public” cachet by virtue of its close association with the Japan National Railways. As Figure 1 indicates it was really not until the 1930s, when JTB began to focus heavily on selling services to Japanese clients that the company began to grow dramatically in size and really takes off only during the war years. The number of employees dropped dramatically after the end of World War II and it is not until the early 1960s that the number of employees recovers to the level attained during the wartime peak. In terms of branch offices (Figure 2), those outside of Japan proper played a key role in JTB’s early history and in fact surpassed those in Japan in number during the war years. Right after the end of World War II (not depicted in the chart) the number of offices outside Japan proper was zero and recovered only gradually thereafter. And it was only in the 1980s, as part of a boom in overseas package tours, that outbound Japanese tourists became the largest source of revenue for the company.

**Figure 1**

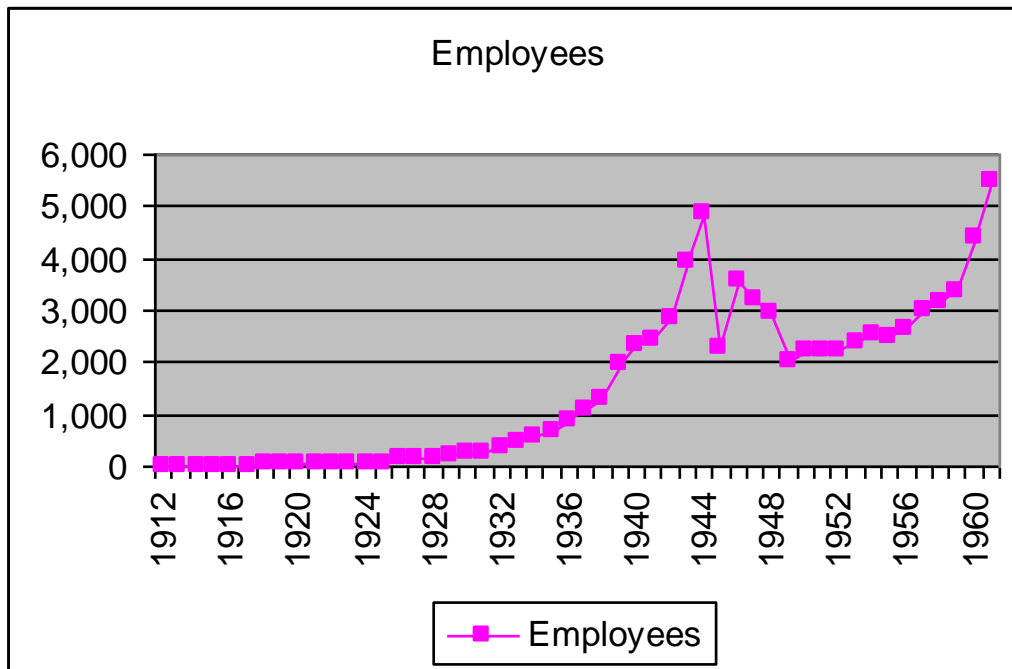


Figure 2

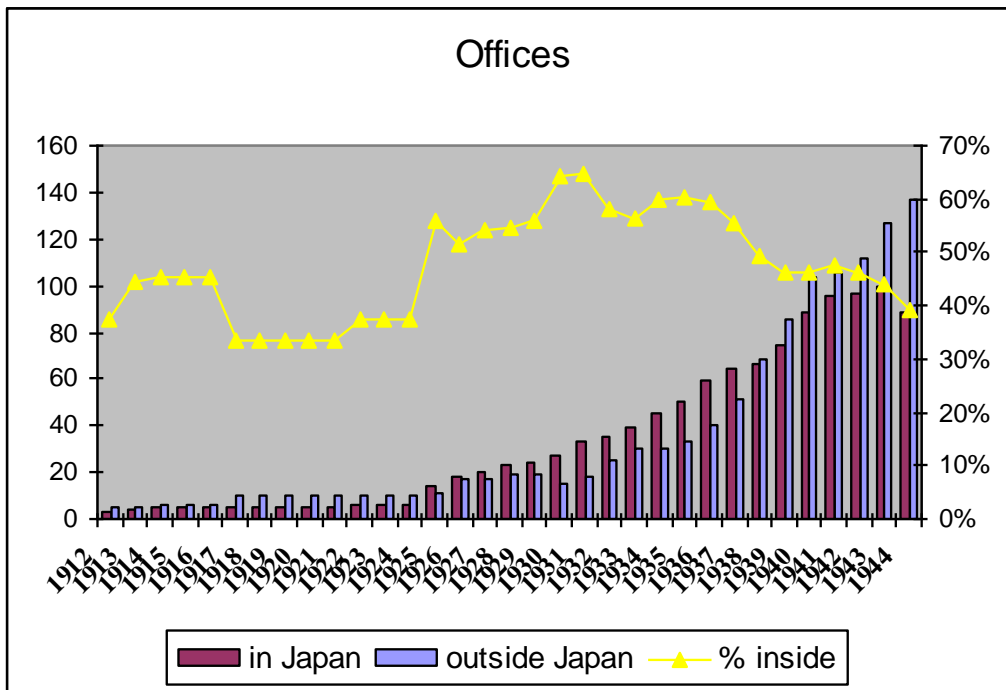
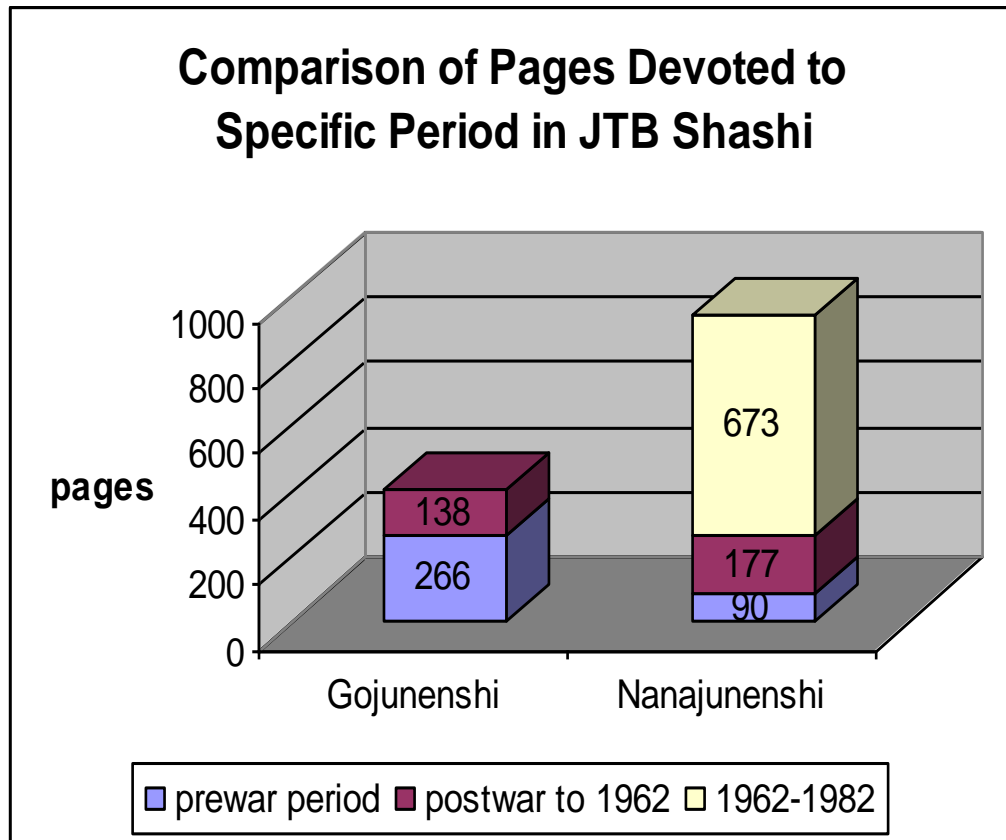


Figure 3



## Comparing Versions: General Overview

Figure 3 graphs the number of pages devoted to specific time periods in the two editions. Since both versions are published using the same size paper with roughly the same size font and spacing, the figures provide a reasonable indication of the relative amount of space utilized in covering a given time period. Several observations can be made. First, the earlier history devoted considerably more space to the first 33 years than does the later 70-year history. Conversely, the 70-year history devotes considerably more space to the first 17 years of the post war period than does the 50-year history. Obviously, only the 70-year history covers the period between 1962 and 1982.

**Table 2 Content Comparison**

	<i>Gojūnen-shi</i> (1962)	<i>Nanajūnen-shi</i> (1982)
Focus	Key leaders and changes in formal organizational structure—i.e., who was in charge and organization chart type changes	More emphasis on functional processes—i.e., how and why things were done the way they were
Presentation	Linear progression combined with “zoom in”	Narrative
Documents	As a rule, inserted in text	Key documents placed in appendix
Statistical Data	Limited in appendix, scattered in text	Systematically presented in appendix
Language		<i>Furigana</i> on non-obvious names

Insight into the reasons behind this differing quantitative distribution of coverage can be divined when we consider it in light of the information in Table 2. As noted in the first row of the chart, the focus in the earlier 50-year history is on the formal organizational structure and on key leaders. This focus is particularly suited to coverage of the prewar years when the “public” character of the JTB was dominant and changes in government policy led to major organizational reconstitutions. Furthermore, the war years aside, JTB was a relatively small organization—closer to a network of individuals than a mass institution—and in this context the focus on individuals is perhaps much more a *propos*. By contrast, when we consider JTB after 1960, we are talking about a rather different organization. By that time, JTB had shed much of its “public organ” character and, particularly following the listing of the company on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 1964, the organization was transformed into something much closer to the model of a private, for-profit corporation. It was also a much larger organization in the early 1980s when the 70-year history was being written, both in terms of personnel and the sheer number of clients serviced. At the time JTB was in the process of developing a state-of-the-art mainframe-based, global reservation system that took advantage of developments in microelectronics during the 1970s. Systems and managerial process were thus very much on the minds of the company’s leadership and employees. It is therefore quite understandable that the coverage in the 70-year history would be very much about managerial systems—or about *how* the company operated. In historical terms this is a concern that really did not begin to emerge until the 1950s, and it is therefore consistent with this interpretation that the 70-year history should pay greater attention to

the period between 1945 and 1962 when these concerns were beginning to be systematically addressed within the company.

As for presentation, the respective volumes clearly contextualize company history differently, but there are some structural commonalities as well. Both *shashi* are structured using a linear, if not teleological, trajectory of development. In the earlier version we have a sequence of parts that unfolds as follows, with the last part presenting the postwar years as a kind of denouement:

- prehistory (*sōgyō zenshi*), to 1912
- → establishment period (*sōgyō jidai*), 1912-1919
- → period of trial (*shiren jidai*), 1919-1927
- → expansion period (*shinten jidai*), 1927-1942
- → great leap period (*yakushin jidai*), 1942-45
- → postwar period (*sengo kara konnichi made*), 1945-1962

Although the specifics differ, it is not hard to detect a linearity in the sequence of parts that make up the 70-year history, as well, in this case with the prewar and immediate postwar years presented as a set of false starts:

- From Establishment to the East Asia Travel Company (to 1945)
- Restarting as the Nihon Kotsu Kosha (1945-55)
- Aiming for Financial Reconstruction (1955-1960)
- The Road to a Modern Enterprise: Reorganization as a Stock Company (1960-64)
- Gaining Strength as a Stock Company (1965-1970)
- The Advance to Full-Fledged Commercial Product Development (1971-1974)
- Reforms of Operational Systems under Stable Growth (1975-1979)
- The Challenge of Being a 1 Trillion Yen Company (1980-1982)

Interestingly, both versions utilize what might be termed a “zoom in” approach in which the historical period being covered is introduced with a broad overview of developments during the period in question, that is then followed by sections which deal with specific aspects—e.g., inbound travelers, ticket sales, travel education, publication,

etc. In the case of the 70-year history, the prewar chapter functions as an introduction to the postwar years, and is presented as a chronological narrative. This presentation style is, not doubt, less a reflection of the peculiarities of the writers of these particular *shashi* than it is of generic and largely static convention in the writing of self-published company histories. Detailed coverage of developments in large, complex organizations demand functional differentiation in coverage to make the task of writing manageable. By contrast, it is much easier to package developments in a chronological narrative when the period being written about serves as a prehistory to the main historical subject.

As for the placement of documents, statistical data, and language, the differences between the two volumes are a reflection of evolving conventions in *shashi* writing. Although still common even now, the earlier convention of a sequence of documents and snippets of statistical data interspersed among narrative text is gradually being replaced by a preference for greater segregation between documents and statistical data, on the one hand, and the narrative text, on the other. Needless to say, other things being equal, the latter is clearly more preferable to the contemporary researcher. It is much, much easier to refer to documents when they are sequentially housed in an appendix.

### ***A Case: The Pacific War Years***

As preceding charts make clear the war years, and in particular the Pacific War years, represent a critical period for JTB from the standpoint of organizational development. As is true of the war years in any number of Japanese government agencies, semigovernmental organizations, and corporations, JTB's wartime activities constitute a politically sensitive and potentially controversial subject. Under such conditions,

selectivity and framing in the presentation of historical events are more readily apparent, and for this reason the Pacific War years serve as a useful case study of the consequences of different approaches to the presentation of *shashi* material.

The 1962 50-year history, written at a time when the war experiences were still a matter of recent memory, gives the Pacific War years much more prominent treatment—quantitatively, 58 pages versus 23 pages, or about 2.5 times the amount of space allotted for the same period in the later 70-year history. The 50-year history provides great detail in the form of a large number of document reproductions, organizational charts, and statistics on branch sales, travelers handled, and printed material distributed. A historian intent on quantifying JTB's activities during this period would have to go to the company's archives and sift through the original documents to do better than what is offered here. The 70-year history, by contrast, barely summarizes what is presented in the earlier volume and instead zeroes in on several specific developments. Here I would like to highlight the following: an example of an item covered differently in the two *shashi*, three items missing from the earlier volume, and one that is mentioned in neither.

The first item, the one that is covered in both but treated rather differently, is the role of Ōkura Kinmochi, a prominent political figure active in the formulation of Japan's Manchuria policy. During the war years, Japan's leading corporations and public entities were encouraged to reorganize themselves in accordance with the so-called *fuhrer* principle modeled after that in Nazi Germany—that is, in a manner that would facilitate centralized dictatorial control in the hands of a single leader. JTB was reorganized along such lines in 1941 with Ōkura placed at the apex. The earlier volume (pp. 217-219) presents Ōkura as adopting the *form* of the *fuhrer* principle of leadership but in day to day

practice actually undermining the principle through regular and systematic behind-the-scenes consultation with subordinates. In light of the times in which it was written, what we have is a presentation that is probably intended to exonerate Ōkura from the charge that he assisted in the spread of fascism. If you read only the later history (pp. 80-82), however, you would miss this entirely, as the presentation of Ōkura's role is restricted to describing official, public pronouncements, or the *tatema*, if you will.

An example of a subject ignored in the 1962 volume but given focused treatment in the 1982 volume is the role and status of foreign and female employees. A perusal of the statistics and discussion in the earlier volume makes it easily evident that the number of foreign employees (and women) grew dramatically during these years. What is not presented in the 50-year history is the reason for this increase, something which is addressed directly in the 1982 history. The later version explains how the inability of salaries to keep up with accelerating inflation on the Chinese mainland, along with losses to the draft, made it extremely difficult for the company to hire and keep Japanese male employees. To quote directly from the text (p. 68): "Because the hiring of new Japanese employees became increasingly difficult, the switch was made to a policy of hiring locally in Manchuria and Northern China and it was decided that numerous Manchus, Chinese, Russians and women would be hired in place of Japanese male branch employees." The later history thus exhibits a greater willingness to acknowledge the ethnic and gender hierarchies that were exploited by the company during the war years.

A similar willingness to adopt a more open and critical look at the war years can be seen in a second development that is missing from the 50-year history but given considerable space in the 70-year history. The 70-year history (pp. 70-75) explains how

the Manchurian office used operational autonomy given to it earlier to expand aggressively in Northern China, so much so that by the early 1940s the Manchurian branch had more offices and more employees than the rest of the company. This eventually leads to a confrontation between the Manchurian branch and JTB central's staff in Tokyo that ends in an organizational reform that reins in the Manchurian branch. What is interesting and illustrative of a willingness to acknowledge the problematic character of the historical period is the way in which the actions of the Manchurian branch are likened to the actions of the Japanese Kwangtung Army, or Kantōgun, with which the JTB Manchurian branch had close associations, and which engaged in subterfuges and ultimately an invasion of Manchuria without direction from Tokyo in the Manchurian Incident of 1932. Along the same lines, in a third instance of a section dealing with a topic that is missing from the earlier version, the 70-year history (pp. 88-89) details JTB's role in the transport of Korean *rōmusha* to Japan. On the other hand, the 50-year history written in 1962 (pp. 259-266) takes great effort into describing the post-Surrender situation, among other ways, by taking the trouble to insert a special reference section in smaller and more densely packed print that provides vivid, interview-based descriptions of what happened in each of the colonial branches of the company just after Japan surrendered. The emphasis here is on the way in which the company lost its very substantial overseas assets and how employees suffered or were lost during chaotic evacuations from the far reaches of the empire.

It is not hard to see the connection between this differential treatment of the Pacific War years and the sociopolitical circumstances in which the respective *shashi* were written. The earlier 50-year history was written in a period when JTB's activities

were still largely domestic in orientation and memories of wartime suffering were still fresh in the minds of the Japanese population. As such, it is not surprising that there should be an emphasis on the “victimization” aspect of the period. By contrast, by 1982 there was a much greater span of time separating the time of writing from the war years. JTB, furthermore, was riding a phenomenal wave of exponential growth in overseas travel on the part of the Japanese, and Japan itself was experiencing a process of internationalization in which the population was growing increasingly conscious of the nation’s expanded role in the world. Taken together, it is not surprising to find a greater willingness on the part of the writers of the later JTB *shashi* to take up the matter of its wartime operations in East Asia.

Before ending this discussion of the Pacific War years it is useful to point to one other development. Missing from both versions is discussion of the way in which JTB’s monopoly during the war years was forcibly imposed through the state-mandated dissolution of competing firms in the early 1940s (Nishikawa 1998). By the time the two histories were written, JTB had evolved into a private travel agency in a market in which it competed with other Japanese travel agencies for the spending of the same Japanese traveler pool. At the same time, however, JTB continued to maintain a dominant position in the industry not simply in terms of sales, but also in terms of maintaining its executive in the top positions of various industry associations and forums. This leadership position was clearly a product of the advantage and higher status that JTB was able to garner as a consequence of its history of serving as a semi-governmental agency, and this in turn gave rise to festering resentments on the part of other firms in the industry. The apparent reluctance of JTB to address its state-enforced monopoly status during the war years was

no doubt closely related to the company's own sensitivity and ambivalence about this legacy.

## ***Conclusion***

What, then, does this comparison suggest about how the researcher might approach the problem of utilizing *shashi* under circumstances where multiple *shashi* cover the time period that the researcher is interested in? Perhaps the key is to keep in mind the very basic point that differing contextual circumstances tend to produce differing perspectives and approaches. While it is not unknown for a section on a particular era in a later *shashi* to be a virtual carbon copy of an earlier treatment, this is usually not the case. If at all possible, it is best to first study the respective table of contents and try to get a sense of where the various versions are “coming from.” The titles of chapters and section heads listed in the table of contents are often indicators of the particular “slant” of a given edition. It is also helpful to compare and contrast the content of the appendices and through this to ascertain which version provides the longest usable data set or has organized key documents in a manner that can be utilized most efficiently. I personally find it most effective to begin by reading the shortest treatment of a given time period, as the summational character of these treatments allows one to identify right off the bat the larger historical context and historical trends that shape developments. It is all too easy to miss this larger picture when one is inundated with mountains of facts, figures and minutiae that one encounters in more detailed and extensive treatments. And, as highlighted in the preceding examples, more detail does not in and of itself mean more complete coverage, as earlier histories often leave out—or perhaps their authors are simply not aware of—developments that subsequently prove to

be historically significant. History is constantly being reconstituted by historians, and this is certainly true of the practicing historians who write *shashi*.

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