

Post-Selection Review for the FY2025 “Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects”

Tomoo Marukawa (Selection Committee Member)

A total of 1,256 applications were received for the 2025 "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects." After an initial review by a panel of 14 specialist committee members, two selection committee members (Mako Yoshimura and Tomoo Marukawa) selected 65 projects for funding. In this post-selection review, based on my observations, I will summarize the reasoning behind the selections made by the 14 specialist committee members and the two selection committee members, with the aim of providing a reference for applicants in the coming years and beyond.

1. Application Status and Selection Process

The number of applications for FY2025, totaling 1,256, represents a 41% increase compared to the 891 applications received the previous year. Table 1 summarizes the number of applications by country/region over the past four years. In FY2025, applications from Indonesia increased nearly threefold compared to FY2024, and applications from Malaysia also increased by 74. The increase from these two countries is particularly notable, while China and Taiwan maintained application numbers close to the significantly increased levels seen in 2024.

FY	2022	2023	2024	2025
China	34	38	73	73
Taiwan	10	4	37	30
Korea	22	15	24	32
Thailand	40	31	57	45
Indonesia	78	254	155	434
Malaysia	350	426	449	523
Philippines	16	14	18	14
Singapore	3	2	3	5
Vietnam	15	24	28	35
Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia	3	6	12	9
Bangladesh	10	7	13	11
India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and others	19	32	22	45
Total	600	853	891	1256

The 1,256 applications were reviewed in a two-stage process. In the first stage, 14 specialist committee members, each with in-depth knowledge of their respective countries or regions, handled the selection of applications from China, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. For countries with a large number of applications, the selection work was shared among multiple specialists: three for Indonesia, four for Malaysia, and two for China. Through this process, the 1,198 applications from the aforementioned eight countries/regions were narrowed down to 99 by the specialist committee members. Each specialist then assigned a priority ranking within their assigned scope, and these applications were passed on to the selection committee members for the second-stage review. As for the 58 applications from 15 other countries, including those in South Asia and Southwest Asia outside the eight countries/regions, the two selection committee members conducted the review themselves.

The two selection committee members thoroughly reviewed the 99 applications that passed the first stage from the eight countries/regions, along with the 58 applications from other countries. They each created their own proposals for selection. Finally, in the selection committee meeting, the two members reconciled their opinions to select the final 65 projects and determine the grant amount for each application. The total grant amount was 50,296,000 yen, resulting in an average grant of slightly less than 774,000 yen per project.

2. Selection Results and Comments

Table 2 summarizes the number of accepted and non-accepted applications by the applicant's country/region. As is immediately apparent, the probability of acceptance varies significantly by country/region. This is not because different selection criteria are set for each applicant's country/region. Rather, it is because, unfortunately, many applications from countries/regions with low acceptance rates fail to meet the selection criteria. Particularly in FY2025, while the total number of applications increased by 41%, the number of accepted projects remained nearly the same as the previous year, resulting in a very low acceptance rate of 5.2%. This means that the majority of applications and the subsequent selection efforts ended in vain.

FY	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Accepted	Not accepted	Accepted	Not accepted	Accepted	Not accepted	Accepted	Not accepted
China	14	20	17	21	16	57	11	62
Taiwan	4	6	1	3	8	29	7	23
Korea	9	13	7	8	7	17	6	26
Thailand	6	34	7	24	4	53	5	40
Indonesia	13	65	12	242	11	144	11	423
Malaysia	9	341	12	414	10	439	12	511
Philippines	4	12	3	11	3	15	3	11
Singapore	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	4
Vietnam	4	11	4	20	3	25	3	32
Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia	1	2	2	4	2	10	1	8
Bangladesh	1	9	0	7	0	13	0	11
India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and others	2	17	3	29	1	21	5	40
Total	68	532	69	784	66	825	65	1191

While one would hope that the increase in applications reflects the growth of Japan-related research in Asian countries, examining the actual nature of the applications suggests this is not necessarily the case. Instead, it seems to be the result of an increase in applications that misunderstand the purpose of this "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects." Therefore, based on the selection results by the specialist committee members and the discussions within the selection committee, we believe it is useful to indicate what kind of applications are more likely to be accepted.

First, as this grant targets "Japan-related research," eligible research includes studies on Japan itself, Japan's relations with other countries, and comparative studies between Japan and other countries. What is most highly valued by the selection and specialist committee members is research that has the potential to offer new findings or interpretations for Japanese researchers or for the global Japanese studies community.

That said, there are also applications that aim to utilize Japan's experience or knowledge to address problems occurring in the applicant's home country. If such an application sheds light on aspects of Japanese society that Japanese researchers themselves may not be sufficiently aware of, it also has a chance of being accepted. On the other hand, applications that demonstrate a superficial or overestimated understanding of Japan's experience or knowledge are less likely to be accepted.

Second, please note that this grant is for research in the "social sciences and humanities." While we do not exclude applications based solely on the applicant belonging to an engineering or science faculty or institute, if the research objective is primarily aimed at solving engineering or medical issues in the applicant's home country, it is not considered to belong to the "social sciences and humanities," and its chances of acceptance are low.

Third, when calculating the requested grant amount, please estimate the funds necessary for conducting the research project as accurately as possible. In many applications, the research expenses appeared to be overestimated. What the selection side fears most is that grant funds might be diverted to other purposes after approving the research project. If the number of days for overseas travel seems excessive compared to the research content, if plans include presenting research at overseas conferences very early in the research period, or if the budget includes expenses for submitting papers to academic journals in the very early stage of the research period, selectors are likely to suspect potential misuse of funds. This can lead to a significant reduction in the approved amount or outright rejection.

Fourth, if the grant period is one year, it is understandable that the publication of research papers based on the project may not be achieved within that timeframe. However, if the applicant has previously received this Grant, we request that the application materials clearly state the research outputs of that past grant. If there are no corresponding research outcomes from previous grants, the likelihood of acceptance is low.