Sumitomo Foundation, FY2025 Outsourcing Report

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The Sumitomo Foundation

Japanese Studies in Asia:

An Analysis of Applications for the Sumitomo Foundation's "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects" 1992-2024

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Introduction

According to the latest survey results from the Japan Foundation (2022), as of 2021, the global population of Japanese-language learners was 3,794,714. Of these, 1,744,110 (45.2%) were in East Asia and 215,835 (31.2%) were in Southeast Asia, meaning that East Asia and Southeast Asia account for 76.4% of the global total. It's fair to say that Asia has a significant presence when it comes to Japanese language learning.

Then, what about Japanese studies? Many Japanese people probably feel that Asia (outside of Japan) doesn't have much of a presence—or, frankly, they're not entirely sure. In fact, in a booklet titled "My Vision" published by the National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA, 2020), Professor Taniguchi Masanori of the University of Tokyo, citing interviews with leading researchers in Japanese studies in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, and South Korea, warns that "Japanese studies overseas are *stagnating"* (italics added). However, the only Asian researcher featured in the article is Seoul National University Professor Park Cheol-hee, who holds a PhD from Columbia University, suggesting that Asia does not fall within Taniguchi's definition of "overseas.[1]"

However, according to a 2018 survey of Japanese studies in China conducted by the Nankai University Institute of Japanese Studies, the number of researchers who could be identified as Japanese studies specialists was 1,609 (Sonoda, 2021), which is higher than the number of Japanese studies specialists in the United States (1,434) revealed in a 2012 survey conducted by University of Hawaii Professor Patricia Steinhoff (Steinhoff, 2013). With 118 specialized research institutes specializing in Japanese studies, China is already one of the world's leading powers in Japanese studies. Despite this, it seems that Asia, including China, is not receiving enough attention when it comes to "Japanese studies overseas." Why? The reason lies in the complex circumstances surrounding the production of knowledge related to Japanese studies.

The first thing to be pointed out is the influence of language. When Japanese people think of "Japanese studies overseas," they likely conjure up images of intellectual activity mediated through English[2]. As will be discussed later, Japanese-language-based

[1] However, evaluations may differ depending on the academic field people have in mind. The fact that Professor Taniguchi interviewed a large number of social scientists, with no humanities researchers, who have been at the core of Japanese studies, is likely to have led to a pessimistic evaluation.

[2] The concept of "Global Japanese Studies" has become popular in Japan over the past decade. While the actual content and motivations for its promotion might vary from one case to another, one

Japanese studies are well advanced in East Asia, including South Korea and Taiwan, and considerable in-depth research has been conducted on the colonial period in particular. However, this is a field in which it is difficult to discern any distinct differences from conventional Japanese history, and it does not fit the image of "Japanese studies overseas" that many Japanese researchers have. On the other hand, as Okazaki (2014) shows, with regard to English-language Japanese studies, most of the non-Japanese researchers invited to serve on the editorial boards or advisory committees of international academic journals hold degrees from British or American universities, and researchers trained within Asia are rarely invited. Researchers from countries such as China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam who are reproducing Japanese studies domestically and primarily use their native language for their research have low visibility in English-language international academic journals, which means their research receives less attention and interest.

Related to this point, the second reason is that Japanese studies within Asia is hindered by language and other barriers, and scholars are often unfamiliar with the research situation in each other's countries -- making it almost impossible to get an overview of Japanese studies in Asia.

In many parts of Asia, Japanese studies is a "new area of research" (The Japan Foundation, 2021). It was not until the 1960s that Japanese language and Japanese studies-related programs were launched in South Korea (1961: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies), the Philippines (1962: University of the Philippines), China (1964: Liaoning Institute of Japanese Studies, Jilin University, Northeast Normal University), Taiwan (1963: Chinese Culture Institute), Indonesia (1963: Padjadjaran University), Thailand (1965: Thammasat University), Malaysia (1966: University of Malaya), and India (1969: University of Delhi). As decolonization progressed and knowledge production became increasingly localized in Asia, Japanese studies has come to play an important role. However, this trend has received little attention in Japan, except from researchers interested in knowledge production within the Asian region[3].

The most fundamental difficulty is how to define Japanese studies and how to identify Japanese studies scholars. In both the American and Chinese surveys mentioned above,

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of the main focuses is the dissemination of the results of Japanese researchers to the world in English. In fact, when people talk about "disseminating information to the world," it is rare that they are thinking of languages other than English.

[3] Asian studies in Japan have a long history, but the Asian studies referred to here excludes Japanese studies, and unfortunately, it is difficult to say that Asian researchers in Japan have been interested in Japanese studies in Asia.

there are academic organizations related to Japanese studies, and their membership has been used to estimate the approximate number of Japanese studies scholars. However, unlike the United States and Europe, Asia does not have an Asia-wide academic organization related to Japanese studies. While there are Japanese studies-related academic societies with relatively long histories in South Korea (Korean Association for Japanese Studies/ 한국일본학회), China (Chinese Association for Japanese Studies/ 中华日本学会), and Indonesia (Indonesian Association for Japanese Studies/ Assosiasi Studi Jepang di Indonesia), the environment for Japanese studies in various parts of Asia varies greatly. For example, there is no academic associations on Japanese studies in Hong Kong, Vietnam, or India. In this situation, it is difficult to get an overview of Japanese studies in Asia, and it is also difficult to estimate the number of researchers in Japanese studies. In recent years, international academic societies covering East Asia and Southeast Asia, such as the East Asian Consortium of Japanese Studies (established in 2015) and JSA-ASEAN (established in 2005), have been active with support from the Japan Foundation, but these have only been around for the past 10 years[4].

On the other hand, there are many private foundations that have supported Japanese studies in Asia, including those supporting international students from Asia who are studying in Japan. In the case of the Sumitomo Foundation's "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects," which is the subject of this report, over the 33 years from 1991 to 2024, it received a total of 11,833 applications, of which 1,947 were granted, providing a total of 1,477,413,000 yen in research grants[5]. Simply analyzing these applications and awarded projects should enable us to estimate the state of Japanese studies in Asia, the number of Japanese researchers, and grasp a rough idea of their intellectual interests.

As a member of the selection committee for the "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects" for four years from 2021 to 2024, and from his own experience of reviewing the applications, the author has come to realize that the application and selection information for this grant is well suited to providing an overview of Japanese studies in Asia. Therefore, on April 8, 2025, the author signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sumitomo Foundation, agreeing on the terms and conditions for data use. After receiving the application and grant selection information stored by the Foundation, the author decided to use this information to create the data for this report.

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[4] The North American-based academic organization, the Association for Asian Studies, launched AAS-in-Asia in 2014 in an effort to revitalize research within the Asian region, but this too cannot be described as an academic organization specializing in Japanese studies.

[5] However, since only two projects were awarded in 1991 and the Foundation officially introduced open applications in 1992, this report will cover data from 1992 onwards.

This report was made possible by statistically processing the resulting data. The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to the Sumitomo Foundation for allowing me to use their information.

Data Used in This Report

The data stored by the Sumitomo Foundation can be broadly divided into four categories: applicant's personal information (nationality, affiliation, position, age), whether the application was selected, application title, and grant amount for awarded projects.

The personal information and application title generally faithfully reflect the information provided by the applicant to the Foundation, so errors, omissions, typos were frequently found. Furthermore, since applications can be written in either Japanese or English, the personal information also contains a mixture of Japanese and English.

Regarding the names of affiliated institutions, there were many cases where the same institution was listed under multiple names due to reasons such as name changes or mergers with other institutions. Therefore, the author first checked the names of the institutions as of May 2025, and for institutions that had changed their names, the author changed them to the new names to unify the information.

With regard to job position information, it is not uncommon for each country and institution to have its own unique categories. Moreover, because applicants were allowed to fill out the information freely, initially 1,869 different spellings were used, including apparent typos and omissions. As this was not usable for analysis, the author divided the data into 17 categories estimated based on factors such as the individual's affiliation and age (Dean or above, Director/Center Director level, Senior Research Fellow, Professor, Senior Lecturer, Research Fellow, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Lecturer, Senior Research Fellow, Researcher, Postdoc, Assistant, Teacher, Student, Other, and No title). Finally, the author narrowed these down to five categories (Director/Center Director or above, Professor level, Associate Professor level, Assistant Professor level, Postdoc/Assistant/Student/Other) for use in analysis. There was no need to clean the entered data for nationality and age.

Even more difficult than the titles was categorizing the application titles. While some applications contained broad themes, such as "Social Science" or "Education," which indicated a field rather than a specific theme, many applications contained themes such as "Chinese students in Japan" or "Early childhood education in Japan," which

indicated the subject of interest but left us unsure how to analyze them[6]. Therefore, all submitted titles, both Japanese and English, were entered into KH Coder, and the words that appear most frequently were used as the criteria for classifying the ***Field***. As "comparison" appeared frequently among the keywords, I defined the ***Perspective*** from which Japan was treated (whether it was treated alone, compared with another country or region, or whether it dealt with relations or exchanges with Japan, or whether it actually dealt with Japan but treated it peripherally, etc.) as a separate item, and finally defined what ***Period*** the event in question took place as a third item, and then coded all 11,833 titles (see **Table 1** for specific coding details).

Table 1 Categories Used in Analyzing Application Titles in This Report

Perspective	***Field***	***Period***
1. Japan alone	1. Language, Literature, and Culture	1. Contemporary (within 20 years from the time of application)
2. Japan in one's own country	2. History and Archaeology	2. Postwar (more than 21 years prior to application)
3. Comparison with Japan	3. Thought, Religion, Philosophy, and Aesthetics	3. Meiji to Wartime
4. Exchanges and relations with Japan	4. Politics, Administration, International Relations, and Law	4. Pre-Edo
5. Other (e.g., focusing on one's own country)	5. Society, Education, Psychology, and Gender	5. Other (Crossing 1-4)
9. Unknow	6. Economics, Finance, and Management	9. Unknown, unrelated to time period
	7. Technology, Environment, Disasters, and Architecture	
	8. Food, Health/Life Sciences, and Medical Sciences	
	9. Unknown	

Note: "Japan in one's own country" refers to work such as analyzing how people in one's own country view Japan (ex. Japanese companies in one's own country, Japanese culture in one's country's views), and analyzing the history of the period when the country was ruled and occupied by Japan.

Coding can be best done by multiple people to ensure neutrality and reliability. However, this process is costly, and most importantly, it can take time to reach a consensus when multiple people's evaluations differ. Therefore, as a second-best solution, the author coded every title by himself. Coding began on May 20, 2025, and ended on July 12, 2025, taking within two months.

[6] Because the results of projects awarded after 2010 can be checked online, it was possible to check the perspectives, fields, and periods that are difficult to discern from the title alone, by limiting it to these selected projects. However, in the current situation where other information is lacking, doing so would ultimately bias the distribution of final responses. For this reason, this report has deliberately refrained from conducting an in-depth analysis of the contents of the application forms.

For selection results and grant amounts, the author primarily used information provided by the Foundation. However, since grant amounts are now both in US dollars and Japanese yen (and still are used in conjunction with each other when transferring grants to the recipients), all grant amounts were calculated in Japanese yen based on the exchange rate used each year.

Notes for Reading This Report

This report analyzes information on 11,833 applications for the "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects" provided by the Sumitomo Foundation. Through this analysis, the author would like to draw reader's attention to some important points when taking a broad view of the state of Japanese studies in Asia.

First, researchers who do not feel the need to obtain research funding are likely not applying for this research grant, and therefore it is difficult to say that this analysis faithfully reflects the status quo of Japanese studies (and researchers) in each country. Researchers leading large-scale research projects in their own countries are particularly unlikely to apply for the grants, whose average grant amounts rarely exceed 1 million yen.

Second, it is highly likely that specific researchers apply for the same topic every year, so the total number of applications does not necessarily correspond to the real number of applicants. If applicants were assigned IDs, the number of applicants could be identified by the number of IDs issued, but this is not the system in place, so we have to be aware of this point.

Third, when classifying the application titles, the *Period* in particular is almost always not implied in the title; the period is merely inferred from the phenomenon being addressed. Therefore, these figures should be understood as rough estimates.

Fourth, even if the application title does not appear to meet the application requirements for the "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects," as long as it was applied for and accepted, it is treated as an application related to Japanese studies.

In spite of these deficiencies, however, the data presented in this report are the only one that retains application and selection information over such a long period of time. Therefore, with this limitation in mind, the author will proceed with the following analysis.

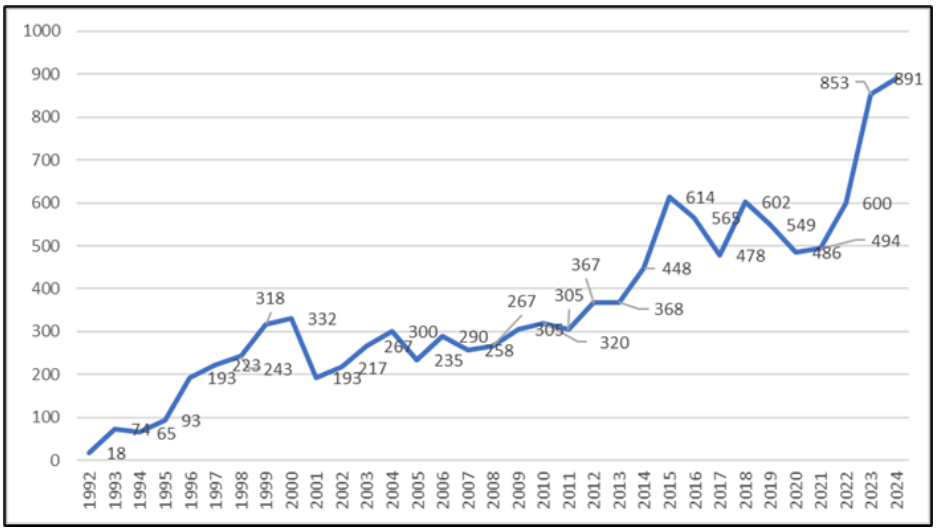
Characteristics of Applicant's Personal Information

First, let us take a look at the current situation of Japan studies scholars in Asia based on the personal information (nationality, affiliation, position, and age) associated with 11,833 applications.

(1) Increase in the Number of Applications

First, it should be noted that the number of applicants for the "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects" has increased over the past 32 years, with the upward trend appearing particularly pronounced since 2014. **Figure 1** shows the change in the number of applications from 1992 to 2024. There was a steady increase until around 2000, and then the number of applications remained at around 300 until around 2012. However, from 2014 onward, the trend began to increase again, reaching 891 applications in 2024. If we treat the number of applicants as a rough estimate of the number of Japanese studies researchers, we can see that the number of Japanese studies researchers across Asia as a whole is increasing, not decreasing. In this sense, the statement made by Professor Taniguchi Masanori of the University of Tokyo, mentioned at the beginning of this report, that "Japanese studies overseas are stagnating" does not apply to Asia.

Figure 1 Changes in the number of applications: 1992-2024



(2) Regional Imbalance

However, the term Asia encompasses a broad range of countries and regions, and the assessment of stagnation varies depending on which region you look at. While there are

49 countries and regions in Asia, only 23 have applicants, less than half of them. Moreover, even within those 23 countries and regions, there are significant variations in the number of applicants.

Table 2 shows the top eight countries and regions with the highest number of applications over the past 32 years. Malaysia had the most applications, with 3,331, accounting for 28.2% of the total. China came next, with 2,477 applications, which together with Malaysia accounted for nearly half of the total. This was followed by Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines. These top eight countries and regions accounted for 95.8% of all applications, which roughly corresponds to the percentage of successful applicants, which will be discussed later. The next country with the most total applications after the Philippines was India with 87 applications, a big difference from the Philippines, which came in eighth place, and applications from other countries and regions were generally small in number.

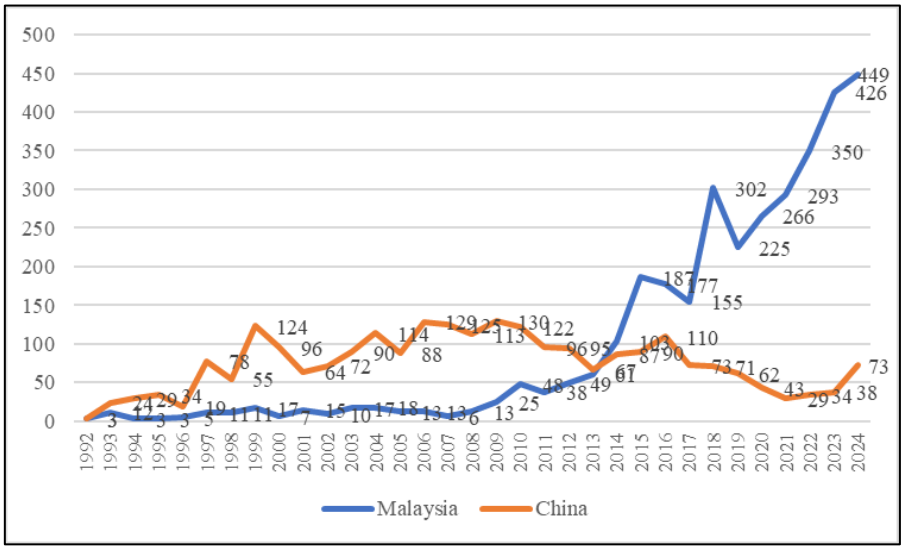
Table 2 Distribution of Number of Applications by Country/Region (Top 8): 1992-2024

Country/Region	Number of Applications	%	Number of Institutions
Malaysia	3,331	28.2	98
China	2,477	20.9	298
Indonesia	1,735	14.7	292
South Korea	1,065	9	202
Vietnam	793	6.7	123
Taiwan	772	6.5	96
Thailand	646	5.5	67
Philippines	514	4.3	73

In addition, differences can be seen in the patterns of changes in the number of applications over time between Malaysia and China, which account for nearly half of the total. **Figure 2** visualizes the changes in the number of applications from Malaysia and China. China boasted the highest number of applications in Asia for 20 years, from the early 1990s to the early 2010s.

However, China was overtaken by Malaysia in the mid-2010s and remains at the top of the list to this day. As of 2024, the total number of applications from China had

Figure 2 Changes in the Number of Applications in Malaysia and China: 1992-2024



recovered slightly to 73, but still accounted for only 16.3% of the total number of applications from Malaysia. Meanwhile, Malaysia had not received more than 20 applications until 2009, but that number has since rapidly increased and continues to do so to today. Among the countries and regions listed in **Table 2**, Indonesia shows a pattern similar to Malaysia, while the others show a pattern similar to China. For some reason, Malaysia and Indonesia have begun to show a unique pattern, with the number of applications increasing sharply since the mid-2010s, which the author will discuss later.

(3) Concentration in Limited Number of Institutions

Just as there is uneven distribution of applications across countries and regions, there is also a tendency for applications to be concentrated in certain research institutions within the same country or region. If there were an equal number of applicants per research institution, Malaysia would have the highest number of applications per institution, at 34, while South Korea had the lowest, at 5. However, applications far exceeding these figures are concentrated at specific research institutions.

Table 3 lists the 22 research institutions that received over 100 applications, sorted by the number of total applications. What is first noticeable is the large number of Malaysian research institutions. The top five are all Malaysian research institutions, and it is notable that many applications come from universities with departments almost entirely based in the natural sciences, such as Petronas University of Technology.

Table 3 Distribution of Total Applications by Institutions (Over 100 Applications): 1992-2024

Name of Institutions	Number of Applications
University of Science Malaysia	535
National University of Malaysia	534
University of Malaya	362
MARA University of Technology	321
Petronas University of Technology	266
Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences	266
Northern University of Malaysia	219
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	199
Peking University	181
University of Indonesia	157
Sultan Idris Education University	148
University of Technology Malaysia	142
University of the Philippines	137
Nankai University	135
University Tunku Abdul Rahman	134
University of Putra Malaysia	131
Bandung Institute of Technology	123
Vietnam National University, Hanoi	119
City University of Hong Kong	115
Chinese University of Hong Kong	113
Fudan University	110
Indonesian Institute of Sciences	106

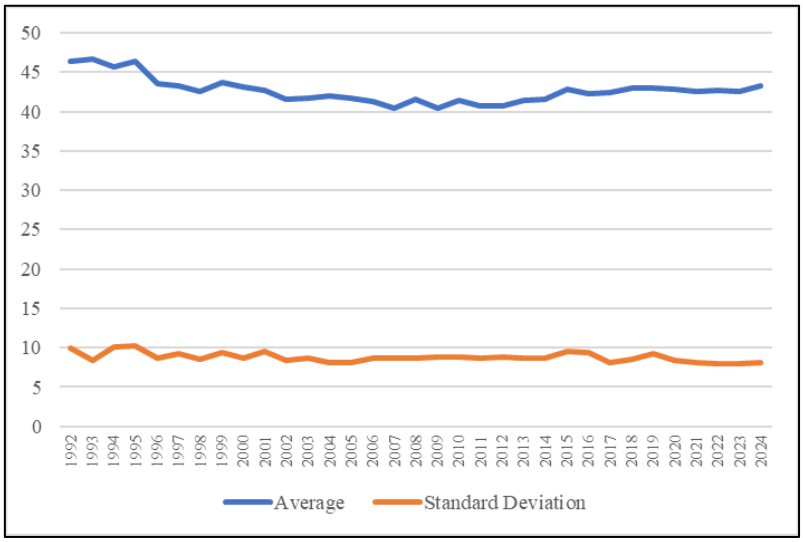
Furthermore, applicants are concentrated at leading research institutions in their respective countries and regions, such as the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and Vietnam National University, Hanoi in Vietnam; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, and Nankai University in China; and the University of Indonesia and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences in Indonesia. Of the 22 research institutions on the list, only two—Petronas University of Technology and University Tunku Abdul Rahman—are private, demonstrating that the hubs of Japanese studies in Asia are national and public research institutions representing each country and region. Furthermore, when looking at the number of applications alone, research institutions

from South Korea and Taiwan do not feature in the top 22. This is because applications from these countries and regions are submitted from a relatively wide range of countries and regions.

(4) Wide Age Range

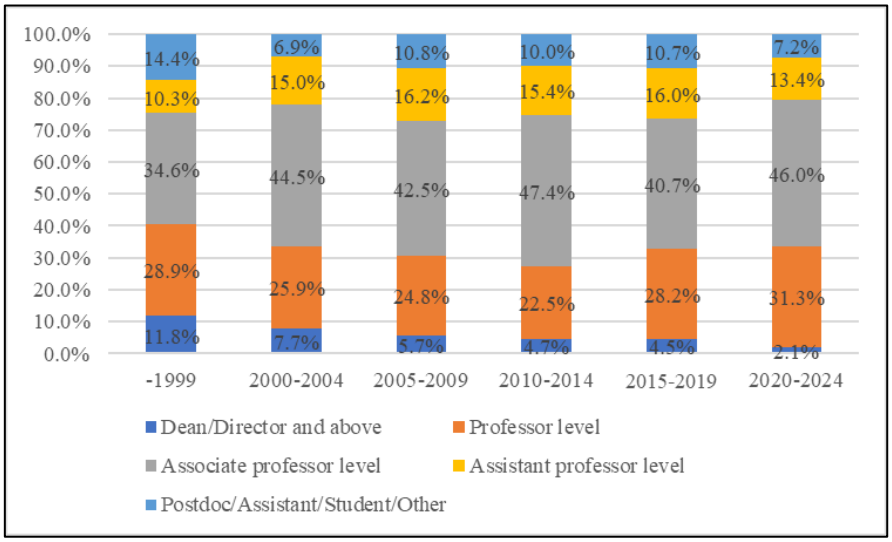
Although researchers are unevenly distributed across countries, regions, and research institutions, the average ages and standard deviations indicate that applications come from a wide age range, and this trend remains consistent over time. **Figure 3** visualizes the changes over time in the average age and standard deviation of applicants, showing that the average age gradually declined from around 45 in the early 1990s to around 40 in the early 2010s, and has remained around 43 since the late 2010s to the present. The standard deviation has also consistently been just under 10 years, indicating that applications come from a wide range of ages, but this does not mean that, at least when it comes to applicants alone, Japan studies scholars are aging.

Figure 3 Average Age and Standard Deviation of Applicants: 1992-2024 (Years Old)



However, the distribution by position reveals secular changes (see **Figure 4**). Previously, a certain percentage of applicants came from executive positions (Dean/ Director and above) and lower positions (Postdoc/Assistant/Student/Other, including those without an affiliated institution). However, this proportion has gradually declined, while the proportion of applicants from professors and associate professors has increased. As **Figure 4** shows, from 1992 to 1999, executive-level applicants accounted for 10.3% of total applications, while lower-level applicants accounted for 16.9%, both

Figure 4 Distribution of Applicants by Position: 1992-2024



exceeding 10%. However, from 2020 to 2024, these percentages have fallen to single digits, at 2.2% and 7.0%, respectively. This isn't a decline in the absolute number of applications, but rather a relative decline due to an increase in the total number of applications from professor and associate professor levels.

In any case, it's fair to say that Japan studies scholars in Asia are steadily being reproduced, both in terms of age and position.

Characteristics Observed in Application Titles

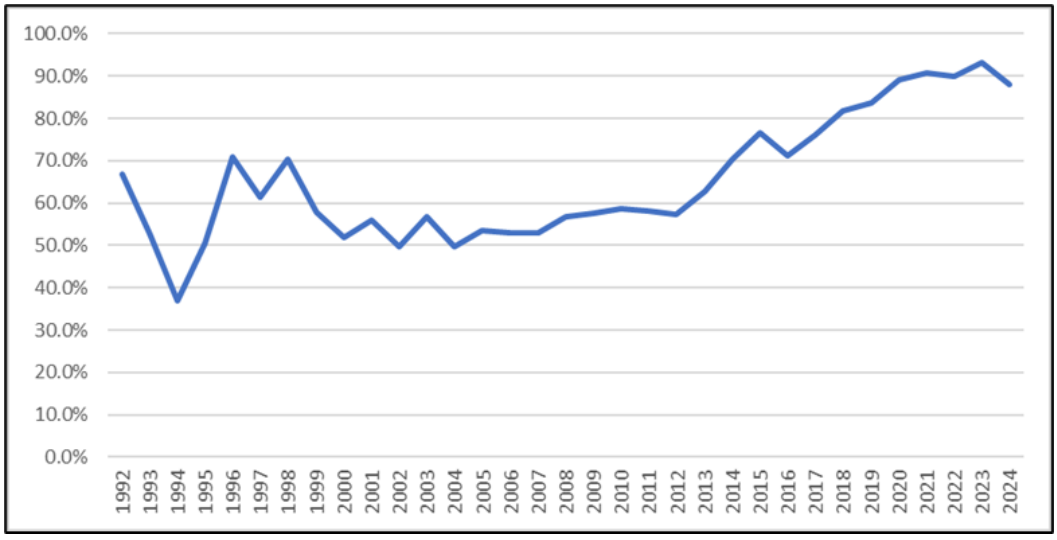
What kinds of applications are being submitted? Before diving into specific analysis, let's take a quick look at the languages in which applications are written.

(1) *The Increasing "Englishization"*

As noted earlier, there has been an increase in applications from Malaysia and Indonesia in recent years, and as can be inferred from this, the number of applications written in English has also increased in recent years. **Figure 5** shows the proportion of English-language applications over time. While the proportions of both languages were relatively equal until 2012, the proportion of English-language applications has since increased sharply, and as of 2024, nearly 90% of applications were written in English.

The increase in applications in English is due not only to the rise in applications from Southeast Asia, but also to an increasing number of researchers of Korean, Taiwanese,

Figure 5 Trends in the Percentage of English Used in Applications: 1992-2024



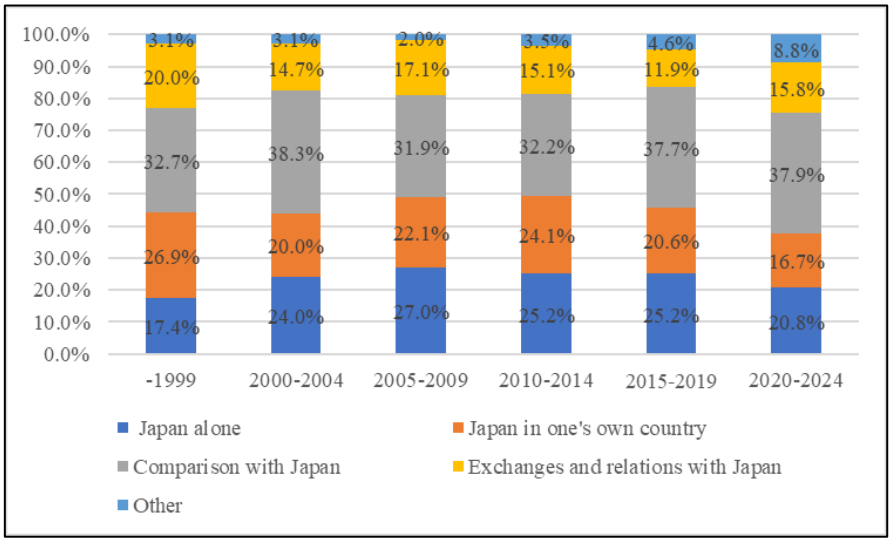
and Chinese nationality submitting applications in English due to circumstances such as studying abroad at overseas universities or working at overseas research institutions.

(2) Japanese Studies with an Asian Characteristics?

In Japan, the term "Japanese Studies" typically refers to Japanese literature, language, history, philosophy, politics, economics, and society. While adjectives such as "interdisciplinary" and "comprehensive" are sometimes used, even in these cases, the focus is generally on Japan. In recent years, research fields such as "Global Japanese Studies" have emerged that promote "Japan seen from outside," but even then, the focus is still primarily Japan. However, among Japanese Studies in Asia, only about 20% of applications focus solely on Japan. Moreover, while the proportion of research projects focusing solely on Japan rose nearly 10 percentage points from 17.4% in the 1990s to 27.0% in the late 2000s, the proportion has since gradually declined (see **Figure 6**).

So, what kinds of Japan studies have been proposed? As shown in **Figure 6**, approximately one-third of the total projects attempt comparisons with their own country, while approximately one-sixth of the total projects focus on exchanges and relations with Japan. Unique to Asia are applications that could be categorized as "Japan in one's own country," accounting for approximately one-fifth of the total. These include (1) research focusing on Japan's colonial period (in their own country), (2) research clarifying the behavior and characteristics of Japanese companies and other entities that have expanded into their own country, and (3) research focusing on the reception and cultural influence of Japanese popular culture in their own country.

Figure 6 Trends in Application Titles (Perspective): 1992-2024



Specific examples of selected projects for 2024 include “The Reception of Japanese Aestheticism in Chinese Dramas and Films,” “The Sake Industry and Drinking Culture in Taiwan during the Japanese Colonial Period,” and “Exploring Japanese Ceramics in Malaysia: A Historiographical Study.”

The “Other (e.g., focusing on one’s country)” category indicates projects where, based on the application title, the connection to Japan cannot be identified, or where there is a phrase suggesting a connection to Japan, the aim is merely to understand Japan in a marginal manner. **Figure 6** shows that Japanese studies in Asia are thus being pursued with a strong awareness of ties to their own countries, rather than being guided by intellectual interest in Japan itself.

(5) The Decline in the Presence of Humanities

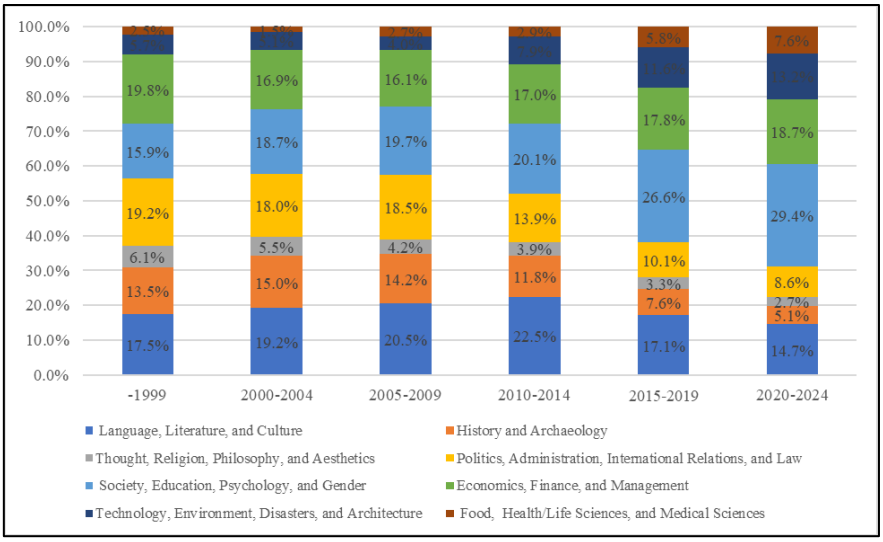
The strong sense of connection to one’s own country is due to the practical and pragmatic nature of research topics. Asian Japan scholars’ approach differs from the “understanding of the society from within” pursued in conventional area studies: they seek to understand Japan through questions relevant to the societies to which they belong—and then utilize the knowledge gained from that understanding[7].

While this approach is well-suited to social sciences and social engineering, it is not so

[7] This is likely related to the fact that Japan is a subject of “study” for Asian researchers, and that many of these researchers work at national and public research institutions, where they may be setting research topics with the interests of their own countries in mind.

well-suited to humanities research such as literature, philosophy, and history. In fact, when looking at the categories of application titles, "Language, Culture, and Literature," "History and Archaeology," and "Thought, Religion, Philosophy, and Aesthetics" combined account for only about one-third of all applications, and this proportion has been declining in recent years (see **Figure 7**). On the other hand, "Society, Education, Psychology and Gender" increased from 15.9% in the 1990s to 29.4% in the early 2020s, while the proportion of fields closer to the natural sciences, such as "Technology, Environment, Disasters, and Architecture" and "Food, Health/Life Sciences, and Medical Science," has also rapidly increased in recent years.

Figure 7 Trends in Application Titles (Field): 1992-2024



(4) Increasing Interest in Contemporary Issues

In the 1990s, applications related to "History and Archaeology" accounted for approximately one-sixth of all applications, but by the 2020s, this figure had fallen to just over one-twentieth, demonstrating a tendency toward practical and pragmatic research topics that are easily linked to contemporary issues.

In fact, as shown in **Figure 8**, while prior to 2010, applications related to "Contemporary" themes accounted for around 60% of all applications, by the 2020s, this figure had risen to 86.4%. The relative decline in the presence of humanities fields also contributes to these trends.

Let the author offer one more piece of evidence suggesting a trend toward practical and pragmatic research topics. **Figure 9** shows the change over time in the number of

applications with the word “Lesson” in the title. As can be seen from this figure, the number of applications with “Lessons from Japan” in the title has increased sharply since the late 2010s[8].

Figure 8 Trends in Application Titles (Period): 1992-2024

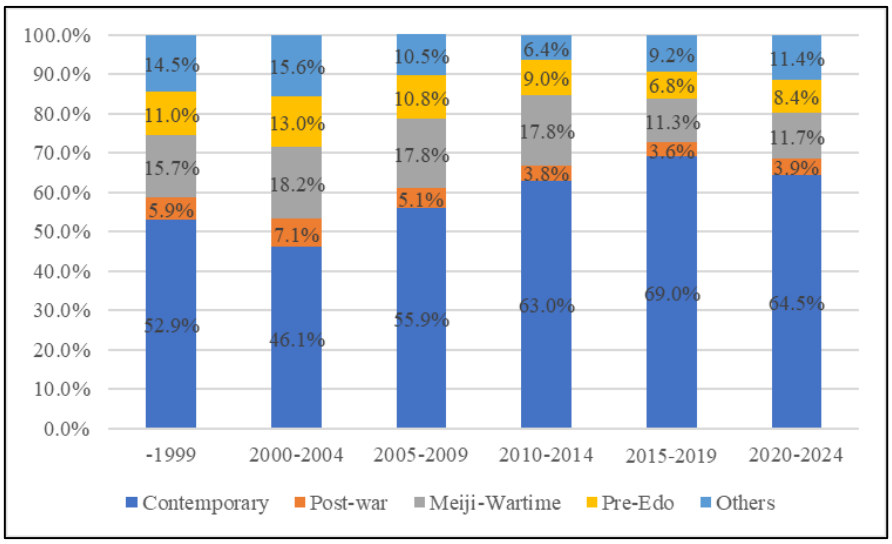
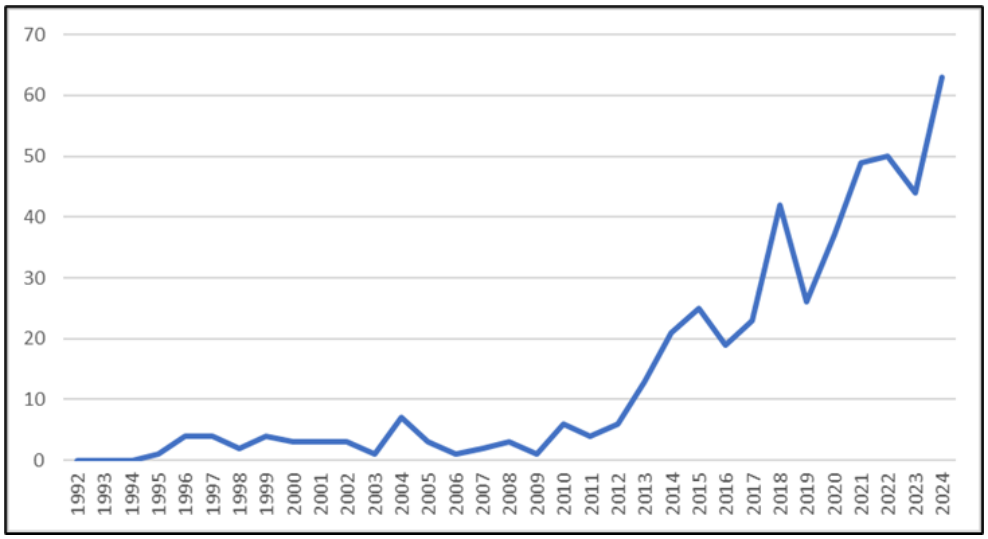


Figure 9 Trends in the Number of Applications with the Word "Lesson" in the Title: 1992-2024



[8] The main reason for this is the recent sharp increase in applications from Malaysia and Indonesia in the fields of “Technology, Environment, Disasters, and Architecture” and “Food, Health/Life Sciences, and Medical Sciences.” It is important to note that an increase in applications from specific countries can affect the overall trend.

Characteristics of Awarded Projects

The above analysis is based on application data. Looking only at selected projects with guaranteed research quality, we can see characteristics different from those discussed above. Below the author will provide an overview of the characteristics of the awardees and awarded projects.

(1) Characteristics of Awardees

As mentioned in **Table 2**, the top eight countries/regions accounted for 95.8% of the total number of applications. The same is true for the total number of awardees. The top eight countries/regions accounted for 95.0% of the total, demonstrating a regional imbalance in awardees (see **Table 4**).

Table 4 Distribution of Total Awardees/ Awarded Amount/Number of Awarded Institutions by Country/Region (Top 8): 1992-2024

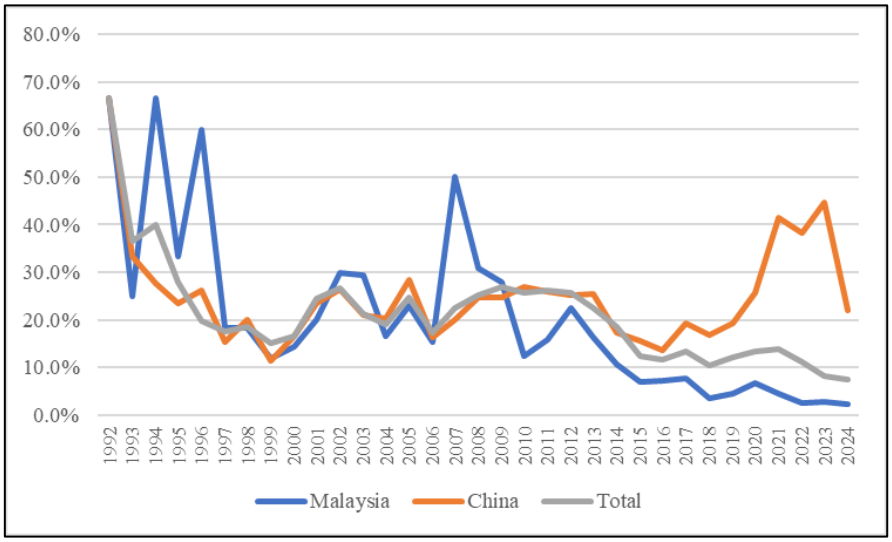
Country/Region	Number of Awardees	%	Awarded Amount (Yen)	%	Number of Awarded Institutions	／All Institutions (%)
China	541	27.8	411,892,802	27.9	148	49.7
South Korea	269	13.8	194,575,881	13.2	88	43.6
Indonesia	220	11.3	177,015,796	12	65	22.3
Malaysia	216	11.1	168,126,144	11.4	25	25.5
Taiwan	183	9.4	133,560,784	9	40	41.7
Vietnamn	159	8.2	115,863,123	7.8	39	31.7
Thailand	132	6.8	108,050,922	7.3	27	40.3
Philippines	129	6.6	98,003,106	6.6	22	30.1

Because the amount of funding per selected project varies little by country, the total awarded amounts follow a similar distribution to the number of projects selected. However, the rankings show interesting trends. Malaysia, which ranked first in terms of total number of applications, has dropped to fourth place overall in terms of the number of projects selected, while South Korea has risen to second place in terms of the number of projects selected. Taiwan, which ranked sixth in terms of total number of applications, has also risen to fifth place in terms of the number of projects selected, highlighting the presence of countries and regions where Japanese-language-based Japanese studies are active and of high quality. Moreover, in China, South Korea, and

Taiwan, the proportion of the research institutions to which the selected applicants belong to exceeds 40%, indicating that applications are being selected from a relatively wide range. Conversely, in Malaysia and Indonesia, where the total number of applications has recently increased, the proportion of the research institutions to which the selected applicants belong to is in the 20% range, indicating that excellent applications are concentrated in some research institutions.

Figure 2 shows contrasting patterns in the total number of applications for Malaysia and China. Comparing the trends in awarded rates for these two countries reveals some interesting results. Malaysia, which received relatively few applications prior to 2012, often exceeded the average. However, as the number of applications increased, its awarded rate gradually declined. On the other hand, China's awarded rate followed a similar trend to the overall awarded rate until 2012. However, as applications from Malaysia and Indonesia increased, its awarded rate began to exceed the overall rate (see **Figure 10**). This suggests that while the quality of applications from China have remained stable, the increase in the number of applications from Malaysia and Indonesia has not necessarily been accompanied by an improvement in quality.

Figure 10 Trends in Awarded Rates for Malaysia and China: 1992-2024



The distribution of awarded researcher's affiliated institutions, unlike that of applicants, indicates a geographical dispersion of the awardees (**Table 5**). While Malaysian research institutions dominated the top five in terms of total number of applications, University of Science Malaysia is now the only one in the top five in terms of total number of grant awardees, with the number of research institutions on the list dropping sharply to three. Furthermore, research institutions from South Korea (Korea University

and Seoul National University) and Taiwan (National Taiwan University), which were not among the top 22 in terms of total number of grant recipients, are included, meaning that all research institutions from the top eight countries and regions in terms of number of grant awardees are included. In particular, China's list shows a significant geographical distribution, with research institutions located not only in Beijing, but also in Changchun, Shanghai, and Hong Kong.

Table 5 Distribution of Total Number of Awarded Applications by Institutions (20 or More Grants): 1992-2024

Name of Institutions	Number of Grants
University of Science Malaysia	62
Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences	56
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	44
Peking University	44
University of the Philippines	43
National University of Malaysia	42
University of Malaya	31
Nankai University	30
Korea University	29
Vietnam National University, Hanoi	28
University of Indonesia	26
Thammasat University	25
Fudan University	25
National Taiwan University	24
Chulalongkorn University	23
De La Salle University	23
Indonesian Institute of Sciences	22
Chinese University of Hong Kong	22
Seoul National University	21
Jilin University	21
Renmin University of China	20

At the application level, national and public research institutions dominated, and a similar trend is seen at the grant recipient level. Although many grant recipients come from private universities such as Korea University and De La Salle University, the

majority of grant awardees are affiliated with national and public research institutions. On the other hand, while applicants were relatively diverse in terms of age, the average age of grant awardees is not significantly different from that of applicants (see **Figure 11**). The distribution of positions in grant awardees is also similar to that of the applicants (see **Figure 12**), but the standard deviation is smaller than that of the applicants, and **Figure 11** shows that many of the grant awardees are researchers in their prime, aged 40 to 45, who are at the stage of being promoted from associate professor to professor.

Figure 11 Average Age and Standard Deviation of Grantees by Year: 1992-2024 (Unit: Years)

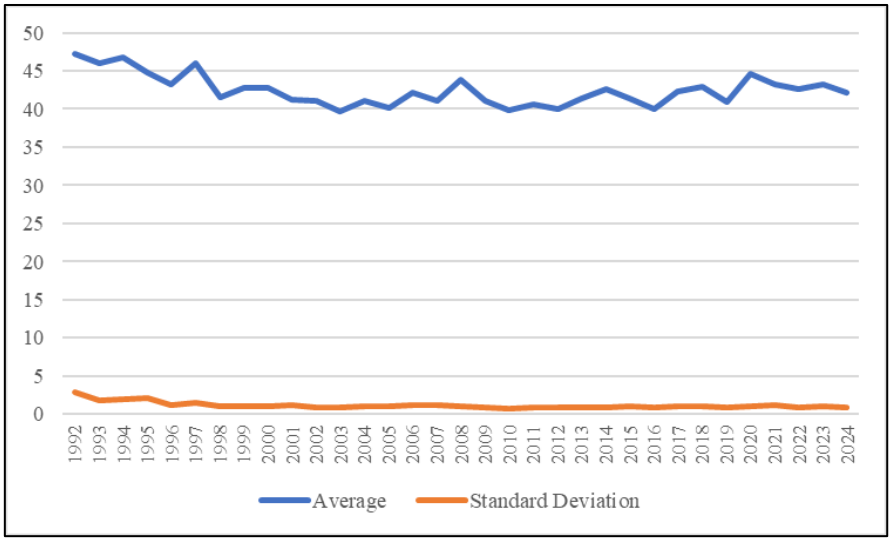
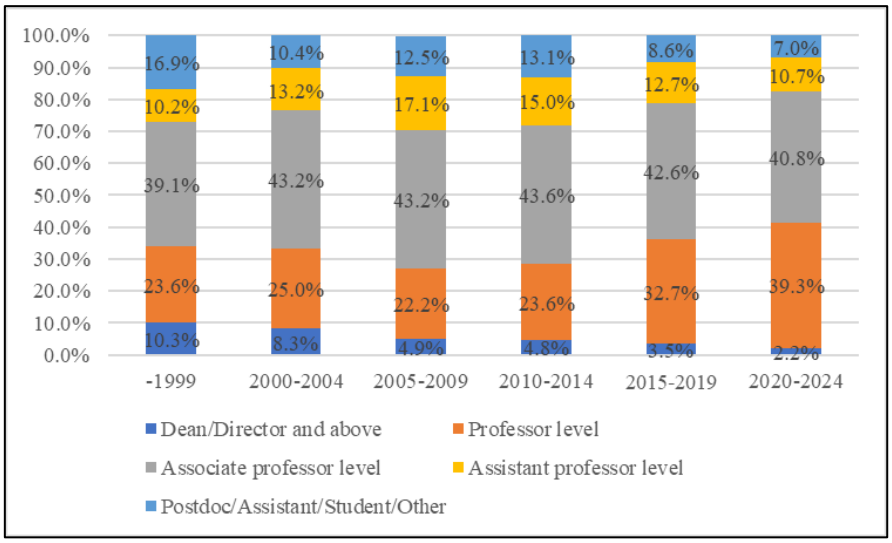


Figure 12 Distribution of Grantees by Position: 1992-2024

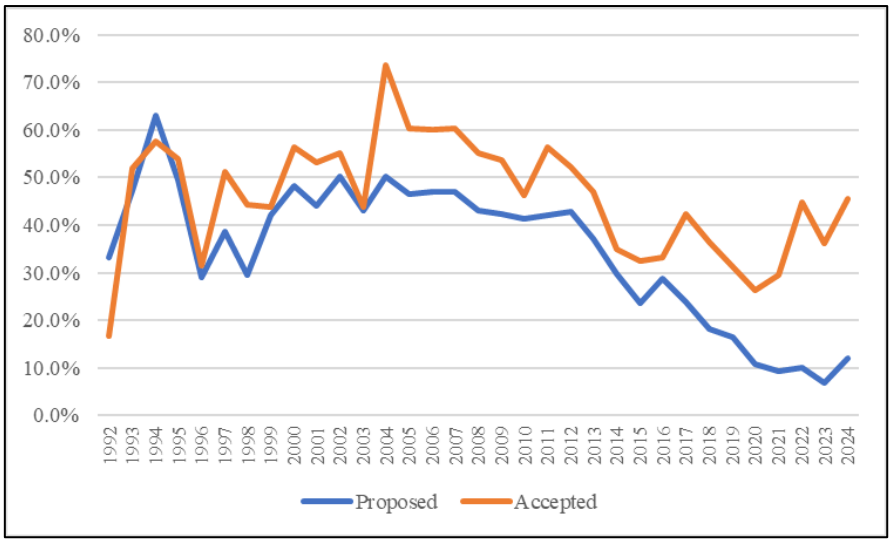


In any case, even at the grant awardee level, there is no evidence to suggest that Japan studies researchers in Asia are aging. It would be fair to say that a relatively wide range of excellent applications continue to be accepted from research centers in various countries and regions across Asia, and that researchers are being steadily reproduced.

(2) Characteristics of Granted Projects

We have already seen that the number of grantees from China, South Korea, and Taiwan is relatively high compared to the number of applications. As can be seen, the proportion of Japanese language used in granted projects remains relatively stable. **Figure 13** shows the time series of the proportion of Japanese language used in grant applications, based on both application and grant selection. Since 2000, the grant selection figures have consistently exceeded the grant selection figures, with the difference widening since early 2020s. This indicates that applications written in Japanese tend to be of high quality.

Figure 13 Trends in Japanese Language Used in Applications: 1992-2024



These differences are also reflected in the content of applications. While there is little difference between the application level and acceptance level in terms of application titles (see **Figure 14**), a look at the field (see **Figure 15**) and time period (see **Figure 16**) reveals a clear trend toward higher quality humanities-related applications dealing with historical past.

While the application level suggests a decline in the humanities, no significant changes are observed at the acceptance level. This is because Japanese studies in the humanities

continue to maintain a reasonable level of quality. Conversely, while applications from researchers in fields related to natural sciences who are interested in contemporary issues are increasing, it could also be said that the quality of these applications needs to be improved. This trend may change if there is an increase in collaborative proposals involving not only researchers from their own country but also Japanese researchers with expertise in Japan.

Figure 14 Trends in Application Titles (Perspective) of Awarded Projects: 1992-2024

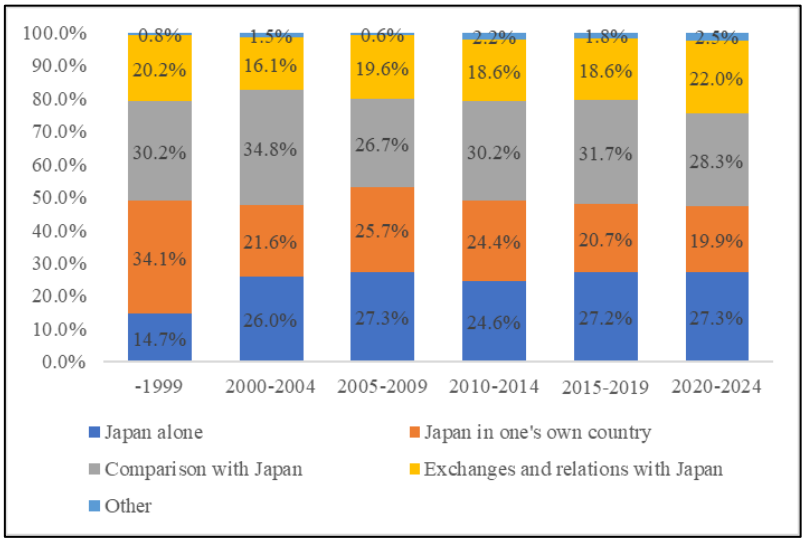


Figure 15 Trends in Application Titles (Field) of Awarded Projects: 1992-2024

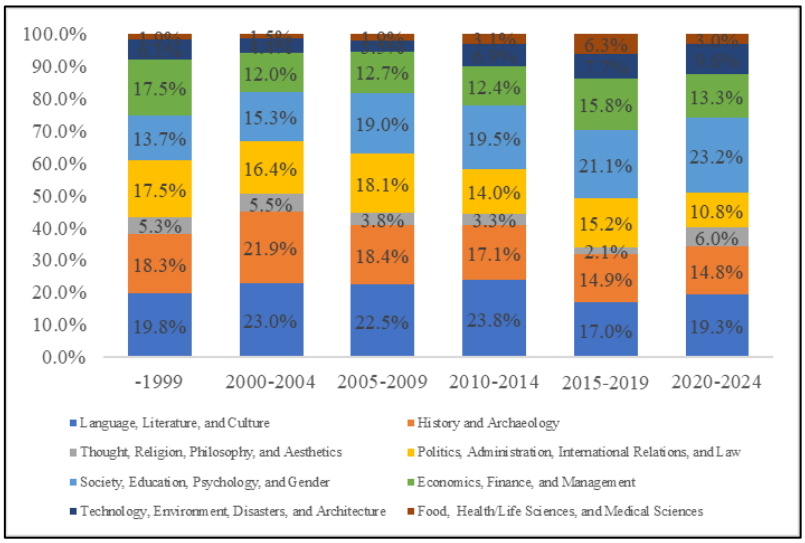
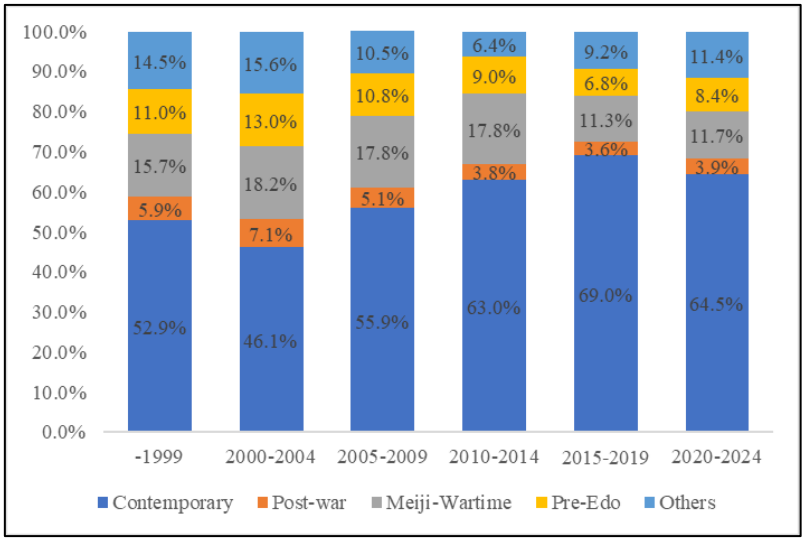


Figure 16 Trends in Application Titles (Period) of Awarded Projects: 1992-2024



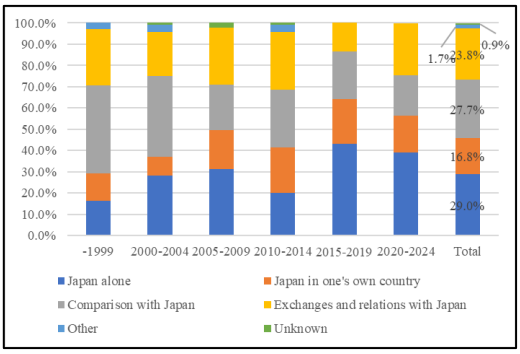
Differences in Selected Projects by Country: Comparing China and Malaysia

This concludes our overview of the application titles and characteristics of selected projects across Asia, as well as their changes over time. As noted in the discussion of the regional distribution of applicants and awardees, there are differences in the characteristics and trends of application titles and the characteristics of selected projects across countries and regions. Due to space constraints, this report will focus on China and Malaysia, which received the largest number of applications, and compare the characteristics of selected projects and their changes over time.

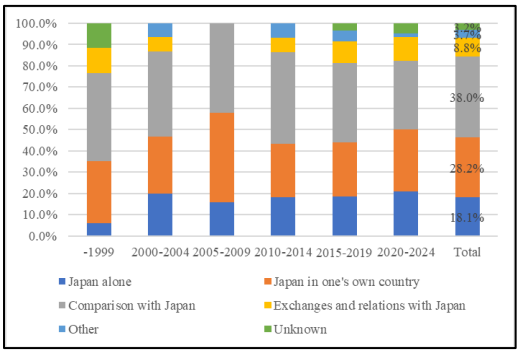
Figure 17 compares the titles (perspectives) of selected projects. Overall, research applications from China focused on “Japan alone” or related to “Exchanges and Relations with Japan,” with the former trending upward in recent years. In China, the number of doctoral degrees awarded in Japan has been increasing since the beginning of 21st century, and research not necessarily involving comparisons with China is on the rise. Furthermore, many applications focused on exchanges and relations with Japan have been accepted, which is another characteristic of East Asia. In contrast, in Malaysia, applications attempting “Comparisons with Japan” have consistently been accepted, accounting for 38.0% of all accepted applications. Applications dealing with “Japan in one’s country” are second, accounting for 28.2% of the total.

Figure 17 Comparison of Awarded Project Titles (Perspective)

(1) China



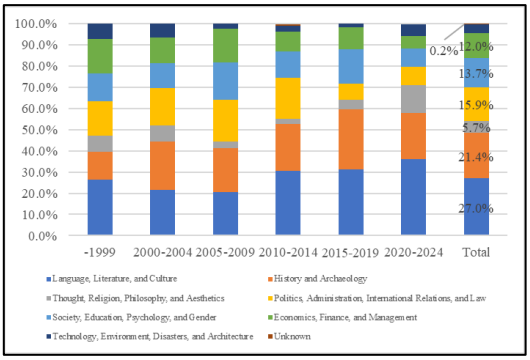
(2) Malaysia



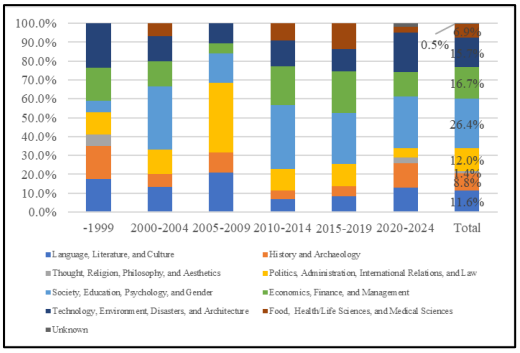
Even more significant differences than perspectives are seen in the fields of research (see **Figure 18**). Humanities-related fields account for more than half of all accepted applications in China, at 54.1%. “Language, Culture, and Literature” is particularly prevalent, with a trend toward increasing coverage in recent years. “History and Archaeology” also accounts for 21.4% of the total, with little fluctuation over time. On the other hand, the social sciences have a weak presence, with “Politics, Administration, International Relations, and Law” being the most prevalent.

Figure 18 Comparison of Awarded Project Titles (Field)

(1) China



(2) Malaysia



A notable feature is that the share of projects in both “Society, Education, Psychology and Gender” and “Economy, Finance, and Business” was larger in the past. Unlike Malaysia, there were fewer projects selected that were close to the natural sciences, with “Technology, Environment, Disasters, and Architecture” accounting for 4.1% and “Food, Health/Life Sciences, and Medical Sciences” accounting for zero projects overall.

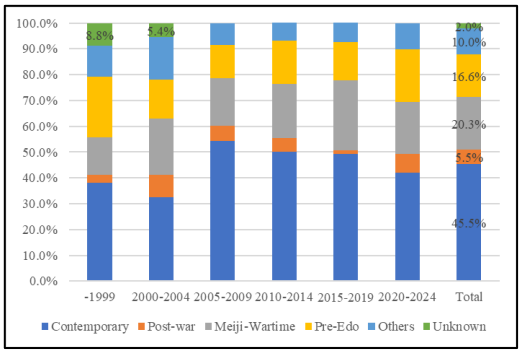
In contrast, the humanities share in Malaysia is apparently low, accounting for just over one-fifth of the total number of projects selected, at 21.8%. The number of projects selected from the "Thought, Religion, Philosophy, and Aesthetics" field was particularly low at 1.4%, which makes sense considering that "Thought, Religion, Philosophy, and Aesthetics" accounted for 2.0% of all applications. On the other hand, there is a strong presence of social sciences in "Society, Education, Psychology, and Gender" and "Economy, Finance, and Business," suggesting a tendency toward practical and pragmatic research topics. "Technology, Environment, Disasters, and Architecture" also consistently received awards regardless of the time period, accounting for 15.7% of the total.

There are also significant differences in the time periods covered by the selected projects. While interest in "Contemporary" period is strong in both China and Malaysia, the time periods covered in China are relatively evenly distributed (with "Pre-Edo" periods being significantly more prevalent than the overall distribution, at 16.6%), Malaysia tends to focus on "Contemporary" period, a trend that has accelerated in recent years (see **Figure 19**).

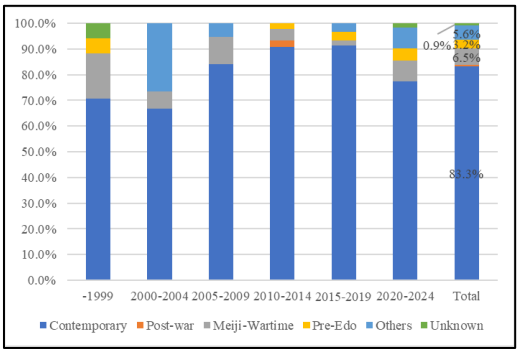
As such, China has a strong foundation in Japanese studies (based on the Japanese language), primarily in the humanities, and this tendency is particularly evident in the selected projects. On the other hand, Malaysia tends to favor practical, pragmatic, and contemporary research topics. Other Asian countries and regions can be said to fall somewhere between China and Malaysia[9].

Figure 19 Comparison of Awarded Project Titles (Period)

(1) China



(2) Malaysia



[9] As a result, voices lamenting the lack of presence in social science research in East Asia and the lack of a strong stance on studying Japan alone in humanities research in Southeast Asia are likely to grow louder.

Conclusion

An analysis of application information for the Sumitomo Foundation's "Grant for Japan-Related Research Projects" indicates a steady reproduction of Japan scholars in Asia. While there are some uneven distributions within the region, applications are steadily flowing to at least the top eight countries (South Korea, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia). The high quality of research in South Korea, Taiwan, and China, where Japanese studies are primarily conducted using the Japanese language, supports humanities-oriented Japanese studies in Asia. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, receives many practical and pragmatic research projects focused on contemporary issues—in some cases, even natural science research.

Whether in East or Southeast Asia, research focused solely on Japan, which is often associated with Japanese studies, is not the norm. Common characteristics of Asian Japanese studies are also evident, such as the predominance of research that attempts comparisons with the home country and focuses on exchanges and relations with Japan.

Even within Asia, each country and region has its own distinctive characteristics in the specific research themes and periods they take up; for example, there is a wealth of excellent research on the Japanese colonial period in South Korea and Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia often discuss Islam-related matters such as "halal (things permitted under Islamic law)" when considering their relationship with Japan, and Southeast Asia has overwhelming interest in the Japanese occupation period (1942-45), with little interest in other parts of Japanese history. A detailed discussion of these topics would require a separate article.

Although this report did not cover them in detail, there are many points regarding Japanese studies in Asia that deserve further exploration, such as the fact that Singapore, whose number of applications is only 90, had an acceptance rate of 42.5%, far exceeding the average of 16.4%; that applications from South Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh have also been increasing in recent years; and that Japanese studies in Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and in West Asian countries such as Iran and Iraq, are still in their infancy, but a growing influx of researchers is emerging[10].

[10] In recent years, the number of students from Central Asia studying in Japan has been increasing, and there is the possibility that these students will one day gain status as specialists in Japanese studies. Furthermore, many students from Iran and Iraq are studying at universities in Malaysia, a fellow Islamic country, and there is the possibility that they may come into contact with Japanese

Looking back, in the 1990s, the majority of applications (52.7%) were from East Asia. However, 30 years later, in early 2020s, applications from East Asia account for only 11.7% of the total, with just over three-quarters of those coming from Southeast Asian countries. It would not be surprising, then, to see a significant increase in applications from South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, where large numbers of youngsters will continue to go up to higher education in the future.

In any case, Japanese studies in Asia deserve more attention from Japanese intellectuals, especially from Asian studies experts. As a researcher who has promoted intellectual dialogue between Asian studies in Japan and Japanese studies in Asia[11], the author would be happy if this report can contribute to the current situation in which Japanese studies in Asia, including those in China, has not received enough attention.

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studies there. In the case of Iran in particular, the data used in this report shows that a total of 51 researchers applied for the grant via Malaysian universities, and three of them were actually awarded.

[11] The author launched Global Asia Studies (GAS) in 2022 at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo, and has been hosting the Sumitomo Foundation's Sumitomo Conference since 2023 as part of this activity. https://gas.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/outreach/

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