

# Stagnation in Japan Studies Abroad

As Japan's global economic influence declines, Japan studies are also stagnating abroad. What is the situation in countries throughout the world, and what lies behind the situation? What is required in order to maintain and further develop Japan studies around the world? In this issue of *My Vision*, we put these questions to scholars in the front rank of Japan studies around the world.

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Masaki Taniguchi

President, NIRA / Professor, Graduate Schools for Law and Politics, The University of Tokyo

Keywords...Decline in number of Japan studies scholars overseas, Japan studies losing ground to China studies, long-term support for Japan studies scholars overseas, establishment of academic posts, overseas publication of superior research outcomes, provision of support for the writing of English books and articles, provision of support for editing of Japan-based international journals

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What is the status of Japan studies in specific countries, and what must be done to maintain Japan studies abroad?

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Christina L. Davis

Professor, Department of Government / Director, Program on U.S.-Japan Relations, Harvard University

Keywords...Stagnation of the Japanese economy, decline in Japan studies, fewer members of the political elite with knowledge of Japan, increasing numbers of Japanese students studying overseas

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Keywords...Decline in number of study centers, decline in number of Masters' students, Japan's biased overseas strategy, investment in the Japan studies pipeline

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Bruce L. Batten

Resident Director, Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (Emeritus Professor, J. F. Oberlin University)

Keywords...Global decline in humanities research, reduction in number of posts for Japan studies scholars, high level of interest in Japanese language study, interdisciplinary research themes, financial support, endowed chairs, lack of ability to disseminate information, overseas needs

#### Make Data Open and Attract Researchers

Franz Waldenberger

Director, German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

Keywords...<An advanced nation facing new problems>high level of interest in Japan, transnational perspective, Japan as a case study, global joint research, establishment of digital infrastructure, long-term student internships

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About this Issue

# Keeping the Beacon of Japan Studies Alight

## – The Decline in the Number of Japan Specialists Damages Japan’s National Interest



**Masaki Taniguchi**

President, NIRA / Professor,  
Graduate Schools for Law and  
Politics, The University of Tokyo

The number of overseas visitors to Japan reached 31.88 million in 2019, with figures having increased steadily for the past seven consecutive years. The figure has grown more than six-fold since 2003. In 2019 again, the number of Japanese citizens leaving Japan exceeded 20 million for the first time. While there has since been a rapid decline in the number of inbound and outbound tourists as a result of immigration restrictions and restrictions on movement after entering the country due to COVID-19, Japan’s attractiveness, whether for business or tourism, remains unimpaired. It will no doubt take some time until the virus is controlled and tourist numbers recover, but once we are out of the tunnel, the number of inbound and outbound tourists will return to the former figures. The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics should act as a

springboard for this.

### Decline in the number of Japan specialists overseas

However, while there has been a long-term general increase in interest in Japan overseas, there has also been a worsening stagnation in another area. This is a decline in the number of overseas scholars conducting research in Japan studies overseas, in particular in social science fields such as political science, international relations and economics.

Call to mind, for example, the American and European experts who comment on Japanese politics and diplomacy, the Japanese economy, etc. in newspapers and on television. You will realize that it has been the same roster of experts commenting for many years. This may be a sign of the excellence of their insights, but at the same time it is also an indication that there is insufficient fostering of the next generation.

Professor Christina L. Davis, who this year became the Director of the Program on U.S.-Japan Relations at Harvard University, which is one of the major centers for Japan studies in the US, informs us that at the beginning of the 1990s, there would be at least one professor or graduate student specializing in Japan studies at top-ranking universities, but today there are almost no graduate students specializing exclusively in Japan. This fact is linked to a decline in the number of members of the American political elite with a broad understanding of Japan.

Former US Vice-President Joe Biden, who has been announced as a candidate in the US presidential elections to be held in the fall, recently published a foreign policy paper in the journal *Foreign Affairs*. While China was mentioned 13 times in that paper (albeit in a critical context), Japan was mentioned only once, together with Australia and South Korea. The low level of interest in Japan that this symbolizes cannot be attributed exclusively to differences in political system and economic power between Japan and China.

Professor Christopher W. Hughes, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warwick, tells us that even in Britain, which has a stronger foundation for Japan studies than Europe or the US, the number of research centers devoted to Japan is declining, and there has been a conspicuous decline in the number of students taking Master’s degrees, which represent a bridge to doctorates and research careers. He provides us with a strong warning regarding the bias of the Japanese government’s overseas strategy towards the promotion of culture.

The same general trend of Japan studies losing ground to China studies is also observed in South Korea. While there are a certain number of students specializing in Japan studies at top-ranking universities such as Seoul National University, there is almost no interest in regional universities, and the provision of funding for Japan studies in Asian nations by Japan itself is subordinate to funding for Europe and the US, in the view of Professor Cheol-Hee Park, a former Director of Seoul National University's Institute for Japanese Studies.

### **Providing proactive support in order to maintain the health of Japan studies**

There are also approaches that can be taken within the field of Japan studies in Japan itself in order to support Japan studies overseas. Professor Bruce L. Batten, Resident Director of the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies, a Yokohama-based institution that provides intensive intermediate and advanced Japanese language education in the main to graduate students from U.S. universities, points out that while there is a great deal of valuable Japan studies research produced in Japan that would be of considerable interest to overseas scholars, the fact that it is not published in English or other world languages means that it has limited influence.

Similarly, Professor Franz Waldenberger, Director of the Tokyo-based German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ), which is a member of the Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad, indicates that Japan possesses a huge amount of Japan-related data (various statistical data, economic data, etc.), but much of the data that is released is published in Japanese, and it is necessary to establish a digital infrastructure.

Among the diverse proposals made by our commenters, I find two points to be of particular importance if we are to keep the beacon of Japan studies alight. The first of these is the provision of long-term support for overseas Japan studies researchers. In a word, this would mean the provision of academic posts. In addition to providing funding for study in Japan and short-term travel subsidies, it will be necessary to establish endowed chairs and endowed departments to establish an environment in which graduate students and young researchers are able to produce high-quality Japan studies research without worries for the future.

The second is to support the dissemination of excellent research outcomes produced in Japan to countries overseas. It will be necessary to increase the provision of support to enable Japanese researchers to publish books and articles in English. In the humanities and social sciences, research interests differ from region to region, and in many cases research themes considered important in Japan will be regarded in the West as having a narrow focus, looking only at a single “Far Eastern” country. To take the field of contemporary Japanese politics (in which I specialize) as an example, when writing a book or article in English for an overseas audience, it might be necessary to consider themes that would be of interest to political scientists in the U.S., or to highlight the specific political methodologies that we are focusing on – an entirely different mindset to that which we have when writing a book or article in Japanese which might then be translated into English. If left to the market, US and European publishers would be reluctant to publish English translations even of books that were highly regarded in Japan, because they would not sell in Japan (having been already published in Japanese). The provision of support for the editing of Japan-based international academic journals and the publication of English-language translations of books originally published in Japanese would be an effective strategy here.

I urge our readers to listen carefully to the sincere voices of the five leading researchers in this issue, who seek to protect the isolated outposts of Japan studies in countries throughout the world.

Professor Taniguchi is the President of NIRA, and a Professor in the Graduate Schools for Law and Politics, The University of Tokyo. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from The University of Tokyo, and specializes in the study of political science and contemporary Japanese political discourse.

Expert Opinions

# Making Japan Studies a Foundation for Better Japan-US Relations



**Christina L. Davis**

Professor, Department of  
Government / Director,  
Program on U.S.-Japan  
Relations, Harvard University

In the United States, Japan Studies is declining as a subject in tandem with the downturn in the Japanese economy. Considering the number of students learning Japanese language at Harvard University, where I work, we hit the peak with about 580 students in 1992, when the Japanese economy was strong. Since then, there has been a continuing decline in numbers, and recently the number has fallen to about 200 students a year. By contrast, we had about 700 students learning Chinese at the peak in 2013, and we still had about 580 studying in the language this year. The trend is also visible at the research level for the social sciences: in the early 1990s, there would almost always be at least one graduate student or professor specializing in Japan Studies at the top U.S. universities; today, there are very few graduate students conducting research exclusively focused on Japan.

My greatest worry with regard to the downturn in Japan Studies is that policy-makers in the United States will have to rely on a smaller number of people with a broad base of understanding of Japan. Currently, Japan's position and Japanese interests are still being communicated to U.S. leaders, but if there was to be a crisis in the U.S.-Japan alliance, a lack of understanding of the historical background to the alliance might result in mistaken decisions. The general public relies on information from journalists, and if the media doesn't provide enough information, the public will not have a full understanding of the relevant background. Then public opinion might be formed on the basis of impressions garnered from fragmentary information. There are complex issues in the region, for example the Japan-Korea relationship. Scholars and journalists can provide context to help people understand how U.S. bases in Okinawa form a strategic pillar that goes back many decades and the reasons underlying the controversies about the U.S. bases related to public opinion in Okinawa.

Another excellent way to improve understanding of Japan is for Japanese students to come to the United States. Japanese students are ambassadors of goodwill for their country, and they can share their own views about Japanese society and experiences. A large number of Japanese students would help share the Japanese perspective and create an opportunity to increase interest in Japan. At another level, we see this role played by guests who come as researchers to universities and think tanks in the United States. The Program on U.S.-Japan Relations at Harvard is one such program, and we are visited by about 15 Japanese researchers and diplomats every year. We are working to provide our students with opportunities to learn about Japan. We have seminars every week discussing Japanese politics, economics, and diplomacy.

It is the sharing of experiences and the ongoing creation of opportunities for mutual learning that will support Japan Studies and the U.S.-Japan alliance. We should invest our resources and our efforts in programs that support the nurturing of mutual understanding between Japan and the U.S. The provision of more scholarships would be effective in halting the decline in Japanese students visiting America. Japanese companies should also become more aware of the importance of the experience of study abroad. They must utilize these human resources in order to advance their globalization and enhance their international competitiveness. It will be essential for Japanese society to change its thinking in order to recognize that overseas study is a positive for students' future careers.

Professor Davis specializes in international relations and trade policy with a focus on Japan and East Asia. In 2020, she became the third Director of Harvard University's Program on U.S.-Japan Relations, a program that supports US-Japan relations by sponsoring events and hosting visitors from Japanese universities, business, and government institutions. Professor Ezra Vogel was the first Director of the program. A graduate of Harvard University, Professor Davis took her present position in 2018 after sixteen years as professor of Politics at Princeton University.

# Update the Japan Studies Pipeline for the Next Generation



**Christopher W. Hughes**

Professor / Pro-Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Warwick

I think that the situation of Japanese studies in the U.K. is quite strong relative to a lot of other European countries and to the U.S. The U.K. invested quite early in Japanese studies, really from the late 1960s, and not just in traditional Japanese studies but more social science-type Japanese studies. And even though Japan is not as economically strong as it was, we find a lot of students are still interested in Japan. Even today, interest in Japan's popular culture, such as manga and anime, remains strong. If we look at student numbers, undergraduate numbers, there are about 500 students that start a B.A. course involving some Japan-related element in the U.K. every year, whether as a major or some kind of minor element, and that number has stayed fairly strong. It's quite interesting that despite the rise of China, Chinese studies has found it harder to gain as much

strength as Japanese studies in the U.K.

I also think that the shape of Japanese studies is changing. One example is the decline in the number of Japan study centers in universities. We've lost some of these centers because they're not very competitive, but actually, I think that what has happened is that a lot of Japanese studies has instead gone into disciplinary departments. So you will find Japanese studies not in a center, but rather among people doing Japanese studies in the law department or the politics department, or in business studies or sociology. Japanese studies has come to be treated as a subject for case studies or as one aspect of comparative studies of multiple nations.

Another more noteworthy change is that for the past four or five years, the number of Masters' students (and it should be noted that in the U.K. the Masters' degree forms a kind of bridge from undergraduate to postgraduate and research roles), has begun to steadily decline. This decline in the number of Masters' students represents a fundamental problem for the pipeline of human resources. Even if the nature of Japanese studies changes, if the pipeline of human resources remains in place, Japanese studies will always survive and stay strong. In order to maintain this pipeline and continue to enhance the academic foundations for the next generation, the current generation of Japan researchers who have benefitted from the programs in place up to the present will need to continually update and refresh our programs of study and make them very appealing and competitive. It will also be important to firmly emphasize the benefits for later employment of honing a specialization in Japan and possessing the skills to analyze democracy in what is a non-Anglo-European society.

At the same time, it may now be necessary to reconsider the biased overseas strategy that has been implemented by the Japanese government. The Japan House that has been created in London in order to educate people about Japanese culture has perhaps increased interest in Japan, but it is also probably very expensive, and does not directly contribute to Japanese studies. It is more important to invest in the pipeline. Being more strategic, what we must do is think about methods of fostering the next generation of Japan researchers, for example by supporting the provision of scholarships to Masters' and PhD. students.

Professor Hughes specializes in international politics and Japanese politics. He is particularly expert in the areas of Japan's foreign and security policies. The deep knowledge of Japan's policy debates gained from many years of research allows him to speak frankly in relation to Japanese politics. Professor Hughes graduated from Sheffield University with a Ph.D. in international relations. He took his present position following periods as a Research Associate at Hiroshima University's Institute of Peace Science (now The Center for Peace), a Visiting Associate Professor in The University of Tokyo's Faculty of Law, and a Research Associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He is also currently an Associate in Research at Harvard University's Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies.

Expert Opinions

## Strategic Investment in Research – Including the Private Sector



**Cheol-Hee Park**

Professor, Graduate School of  
International Studies, Seoul  
National University

There is no doubt that China studies is flourishing at Korean universities in comparison to Japan studies. Korea and China have similar perceptions of history, and against the background of China's increasing global competitiveness, the nation offers Korea economic opportunities and the ability to profit. There are still a certain number of students enrolling in Japan studies courses at first-rank universities such as Seoul National University, but local universities are struggling to secure a sufficient number of students. In the background of the decline in interest in Japan studies is, first, the fact that the Japanese economy is sluggish and the nation has reduced its budget for promoting Japan studies. In addition, the rise of the information economy and the effect of globalization are increasing the

importance of English, and there is a consequent decline in the necessity to learn Japanese. Japan also no longer serves as a model of economic development for Korea, which is now an economically advanced nation. It is a global trend that area studies focusing on a single country are becoming less popular due to the fact that the benefits of research do not match its cost.

Against this background, Japan should think more seriously about what it can do. Japan has provided funding to the US in order to halt the decline of Japan studies, but the provision of funding to Asia is a low priority for the nation. There is also political friction with Korea and China, and the idea of providing adequate funding to advance Japan studies therefore does not arise. It will be essential for Japan to foster human resources in the Asian region who understand the nation and are able to explain it. Surely it would be a good idea to conduct strategic investments in this area – not just by the government, but also the private sector.

I was one of the people involved in the formation of the East Asian Consortium of Japanese Studies, which is creating a network of Japan specialists between Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China. The goals of the Consortium are to fuse the humanities and the social sciences in Japan studies and to foster young scholars. Historically speaking, the areas of specialization of the majority of Japan specialists in Korea have been humanities subjects such as Japanese language and literature. 90% of Korean Japan scholars study these subjects. There is little representation of social sciences fields, but balance and diversity in fields of research is important. A particularly effective and essential initiative will be to offer opportunities to young people who are seeking to commence their research careers rather than to senior researchers who have already produced research outcomes. When I was younger, I was blessed to have numerous opportunities to collaborate in global joint research projects with renowned Japanese political scientists, but I am concerned that young researchers today have few such opportunities. How to foster young Japanese specialists and to integrate them into the international Japan studies network will be our most important policy consideration for the future.

Professor Park specializes in the study of Japanese politics, Japan-Korea relations, and comparative politics. He is particularly familiar with Japanese and Korean diplomatic and security policy, and is well-known in both nations as a leading Korean Japan specialist. He graduated from Columbia University, taking a Ph.D. in political science, and was a student of Professor Gerald Curtis. Professor Park took his present position in 2004, following terms in positions including assistant professor at Japan's National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies and professor at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. From 2012 to 2016, he served as the Director of the Institute for Japanese Studies at Seoul National University. In 2019, he was appointed Director of Seoul National University's Institute of International Affairs. In 2005, he was awarded the first Yasuhiro Nakasone Award in recognition of his achievements in the area of Japan studies and his contributions to Japan-Korea relations.

# Disseminating Information From Japan to the Outside World



**Bruce L. Batten**

Resident Director, Inter-University  
Center for Japanese Language  
Studies (Emeritus Professor, J. F.  
Oberlin University)

Japan studies is not the only area of academic research in decline. Research in the humanities is contracting globally, and traditional Japan studies, especially in subjects such as literature and history, is no exception. Area studies and country-specific research are also on the wane, even in the case of Chinese studies. The number of academic posts is decreasing, and related to that there are fewer doctoral students in Japan studies. At the same time, foreign students retain a high level of interest in the Japanese language. The Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC) in Yokohama provides training in intermediate and advanced Japanese language, mostly to graduate students from US universities. Although the IUC has fewer Ph.D. students than in the past, that lack is more than made up by the increasing number of Master's-level students. The nationalities, needs, and goals of

the students are becoming increasingly diverse, and many students now attend the IUC with the intention of pursuing careers in Japan as translators, finance industry professionals, lawyers, or entrepreneurs. Among students who wish to pursue an academic career, there is a shift away from narrow disciplinary research to that spanning several disciplines, and also away from studies focused exclusively on Japan to those that are comparative or place Japan in its regional or global context.

Funding is necessary to support these changing needs and to maintain interest in Japan. In addition to scholarship support for international students coming to Japan, funding is also required to maintain the public and private infrastructure of international exchange that connects Japan and the world. Financial support is also needed to stem the reduction in university posts for Japan specialists. At universities in the US and the UK, the system of endowed chairs allows donations from companies or other entities to be placed in funds used to defray personnel expenses. Japan should be more proactive in supporting researchers by establishing endowed chairs in Japan studies, whether at universities in Japan or overseas. One bright spot in an otherwise bleak picture has been the Top Global University Project of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. This project promotes the hiring of foreign faculty and the teaching of courses in English at Japanese universities, thus increasing the number of posts available for non-Japanese researchers with an interest in Japan.

One of the biggest problems for Japan studies is the lack of dissemination of information originating in Japan. Japanese scholars produce much excellent and valuable Japan-related research that would be of interest to scholars overseas, but it has limited influence because it is not published in English or other world languages. When preparing or choosing material for dissemination, it is important to keep in mind the needs and interests of the target audience; I therefore urge Japanese researchers, publishers, and other suppliers of information in English to seek the opinions of foreign specialists in order to ensure that the result will have the impact it deserves. It is important to find ways to facilitate the proper understanding of Japan by the rest of the world. If Japan and the Japanese do not turn their attention outward, the future of the nation is in jeopardy.

Professor Batten specializes in premodern Japanese history and conducts research on frontiers, boundaries, and national identity and also on environmental history. He graduated from Stanford University with a Ph.D. in history. Professor Batten taught at Japan's J. F. Oberlin University for 30 years and began his present job in 2016. Located in Yokohama, the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies offers intensive instruction in intermediate and advanced Japanese to foreign students, mainly from North American graduate schools. Many of the Center's graduates are active in the public and private sectors.

# Make Data Open and Attract Researchers



**Franz Waldenberger**

Director, German Institute for  
Japanese Studies (DIJ)

Germany and Japan share common values and common challenges, and the ties between the two countries as political and economic partners have become stronger. Interest in Japan as a subject of research is very strong, in particular in the field of economics, which is my own area of specialization. As an advanced nation facing new problems, how Japan responds to socioeconomic problems including population change, deflation and a national deficit is attracting profound interest, including from a political perspective.

Even today in Germany, budgets exist for area studies, and research is being actively conducted. However, Japanese studies have taken on a different form from previous area studies. Rather than Japan itself being the sole focus of study, the country is treated as a case study, and research is conducted including an Asia-focused transnational perspective. Even the form of institutions is changing, with Japan studies centers being integrated into Asia-focused departments. It is no longer advantageous to one's career to specialize in Japan alone. Rather, examples in which German and Japanese specialists in such subjects as political science or economics come together to conduct joint research are increasing.

The establishment of a digital infrastructure is an increasingly important factor in the implementation of global joint research. There is a huge amount of Japan-related data – a range of statistical data, economic data, etc. – but the majority is published only in Japanese. Translating these data into English will expand the scope of research. Japanese data should be made open and accessible throughout the world.

In addition, as joint research becomes the mainstream, cultural exchange is increasing in importance as never before. What if we used long-term student internships between countries in order to train young people as scholars? It is quite normal for foreign-affiliated Japanese companies to take in interns for three to six months, and the utilization of internship systems that offer academic credits is increasing in European universities. Internships are also an effective method for companies to secure global human resources. In Japan, a university education is the sole passport to employment, and the nation's unique system of en masse employment (ikkatsu saiyou) prevents students from studying overseas or advancing to graduate school. If it was possible for specialists to find employment at any time, we could no doubt invigorate exchanges between young researchers in Germany and Japan.

Professor Waldenberger specializes in the study of the Japanese economy and corporate governance, conducting comparative research on Japanese and German economic and financial systems and corporate governance. He is also interested in regional revitalization, and is actively involved in projects with regional governments. He holds a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Cologne. He became Professor for Japanese Economy at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in 1997, following periods as a researcher at the German Monopoly Commission and the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ). Professor Waldenberger has held his present position with the DIJ since taking a leave of absence from his position in Munich in 2014.