

Foreword

In 2018, the Scandinavia Japan Sasakawa Foundation (SJSF) generously supported by The Nippon Foundation launched a new Japan studies initiative with the aim of upgrading studies on contemporary Japan at Nordic universities and degree awarding institutions. A survey showed a general lack of expertise within this field among Nordic universities and think tanks. In general, scholarly knowledge on Japan in the Nordic countries is scattered and fragmented among relatively small research environments across the Nordic region. In many universities there will only be two-three experts among the regular faculty, in some only one. Especially regarding faculty who combine social science expertise with solid Japanese language capacity, they are almost non-existent. This seriously limits the capacity for research and teaching in a wide area of social science topics in the study of Japan. It also has adverse effects on the quality of public debate on Japan in electronic and print media.

Traditionally, the study of Japan in the Nordic countries was embedded in an area studies structure, most commonly as a sub-section of a Department of East Asian Studies, which had its focus – in terms of tenured faculty and state-allocated financial resources – on aspects of Japanology such as historical phonology, philosophy, classical religion and linguistics. Beginning in the 1980s, studies of modern Japanese society and history also began to emerge. Unlike the China field, social science-oriented studies of Japan in the field of economics, politics, international relations, etc., were very few as universities did not train and hire specialists in the field.

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of students enrolled in Japanese studies in Nordic universities. However, on the part of university administrations there has been a reluctance to follow up on the increased interest by hiring more full-time faculty.

Area studies are often bypassed by traditional disciplines when it comes to new faculty and funding. Unlike the situation in the USA, Nordic universities rarely employ area studies specialists in social science departments such as economic, politics or anthropology.

This article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v41i1.6889>.

© Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard

Published under the Creative Commons License (CC BY).

Instead, they prioritise faculty who are oriented towards theoretical work, rather than empirical-based work.

Another important reason is a general lack of funding. In recent years, many Nordic universities have had to save on their expenditures on faculty. There has been no funding available for expanding into areas such as Japanese studies. Instead, departments engaged in East Asian studies have tended to focus on Chinese studies where there has been a greater political pressure for knowledge generation. In prioritising scarce resources, it has often been forgotten that Japan is actually the world's third largest economy and an important political and cultural factor, and it must be in the interest of Nordic countries to have the capacity to generate knowledge about this important part of the world.

The Nordic Japan studies program was launched with the goal of addressing the deficiencies in Nordic social science studies on contemporary Japan. Realising the budget constraints many Nordic universities were experiencing, the SJSF in cooperation with The Nippon Foundation decided to provide funds for establishing nine fully-funded lectureships in the Nordic region. The subject area was social sciences in a broad sense, including aesthetics and architecture. After a round of open competition, three positions were allocated to Denmark (University of Copenhagen, Aarhus University and Copenhagen Business School), two to Finland (University of Turku and University of Helsinki), two to Norway (University of Bergen and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology), one to Iceland (University of Iceland), and one to Sweden (the European Institute of Japanese Studies at the Stockholm School of Economics). Lecturers were employed during 2019 and 2020.

The initiative also involved financial support for PhD students travelling to Japan for field research. So far twenty research scholarships have been granted to PhD students enrolled at Nordic universities.

Furthermore, the SJSF and The Nippon Foundation have allocated funds to networking in order to facilitate cooperation among the new lectureships in the form of working groups and joint seminars. The goal is to create synergies and linkages among existing knowledge nodes in Nordic Japan studies.

SJSF has done a survey which shows that the Sasakawa lecturers on average teach 50 per cent of their working hours; research accounts for 38 per cent and outreach 12 per cent. The numbers show that the lecturers are not only engaged in teaching and research. They also

communicate their knowledge and expertise on Japanese affairs to the wider society in the Nordic countries.

To celebrate the Japan studies initiative, SJSF, supported by The Nippon Foundation, arranged an international conference on Japanese studies in the Nordic countries entitled 'Japan and Japanese Studies in the 21st Century'. The conference took place at the Copenhagen Business School, 24-25 March 2022. There were 65 participants from the Nordic countries as well as from Japan, France and the UK. The Sasakawa lecturers and PhD students who had obtained PhD scholarships from SJSF presented papers on their research topics. In an online keynote speech, Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, the chairman of The Nippon Foundation, opened the conference.

This issue of *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* publishes two of the presented papers from the conference. They include a paper by PhD student Oshie Nishimura-Sahi, Tampere University, Finland, and Assistant Professor Jens Sejrup, University of Copenhagen. In addition, the issue contains a paper by Associate Professor Aike Rots, University of Oslo, which is based on his keynote lecture at the conference. The papers fall within the scholarly scope of the journal and have all been through a thorough peer-reviewed evaluation process.

Nishimura-Sahi's paper, 'Fudo in Foreign Language Learning in Japan and Finland: An Autoethnographic Study of a PhD Journey', discusses the possibilities, limitations and pitfalls of knowledge production projects that adapt a conceptual 'insertion' from Japanese philosophy, *in casu* Watsuji Tetsuro and his notion of fudo and the dual nature of human existence. The paper uses the author's own experiences in the form of a diary adopting an autoethnographic approach of careful self-reflection.

Sejrup's paper, 'Past and the Present: Iconicity and Authentication at Two Reconstructed Heritage Sites in Japan', analyses cases of reconstruction from archeological evidence of two lost historical landmarks: the Great Audience Hall at the Japanese historic city of Nara and the old Dutch trading station on the artificial island of Dejima. By way of these two cases, the author analyses the Japanese contribution to the global phenomenon of reconstruction. He wishes to connect the reconstruction taking place at these two sites to larger place-making and rebranding strategies in contemporary globalising cities.

Aike Rots' contribution, 'Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Three Directions for Japanese Studies', discusses the concept of methodological nationalism in Japanese studies. The author argues

that to avoid or overcome methodological nationalism, scholars of Japan need to reconsider their choice of subject matter and to reflect on their use of the adjective 'Japanese'. Rots also suggests that in order to abolish the notion of the nation-state as an etic unit of analysis, it would be useful to approach the notion as an emic category that may or may not carry meaning to the actors involved. Moreover, he suggests that the field should move towards intra-Asian comparative studies that focus on particular places and practices instead of essentialising the nation-state. Rots' arguments are relevant in a wider discussion on areas studies. Area studies have been blamed for focusing on the cultural, political and social characteristics of a particular nation and neglecting how academic knowledge production should transcend national and disciplinary boundaries. In short, it is important that scholars break out of the methodological and theoretical confinement of traditional area studies by applying concepts and methods of an interdisciplinary nature. Although deep empirical knowledge of Japan is needed in order to understand the country in its social, cultural, political and economic complexity, insight and understanding must be part of an inter-civilisational dialogue.

It is a tall order as scholarly studies of Japan and other Asian countries require language competencies and cultural understanding. For scholars there is not much time left to engage in methodological and theoretical studies, which is the focus of the traditional social science disciplines. Clearly, contemporary Japan studies need all the support and encouragement they can get to survive and perhaps advance in an extremely competitive university environment.

The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies gratefully acknowledges financial support from The Nippon Foundation in preparing and publishing this special issue.

Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard
Chair of Conference Committee
Vice Chairman, Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation