

The Potential of Japanese Studies as a Global Knowledge-generating Mechanism

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Introduction

It may be a historical coincidence that the bubble economy of Japan crashed roughly at the same time when the Cold War ended. In any case, these two events are not usually related to each other in scholarly discussions despite their respectively recognized historical significance. But when situating our understanding of the post-crash socio-economic conditions of Japan, now objectified as the “lost two decades,” into the broad context of transformations from Cold War to post-Cold War periods, especially the overarching discursive shift from the modernization theory to that of globalization, we obtain a historical perspective that can not only complicate our understanding of Japan’s past twenty years but also enable us to start to imagine new possibilities the “lost two decades” may have been impregnating. In this essay, I explore how certain changes in Japan and the world in the past two decades might have enabled a new imagining of Japanese Studies beyond the entrenched conception of a discipline shaped by political and national interests to be a global knowledge-generating mechanism.

It may sound counterintuitive to try to identify a “global” potential in a discipline that takes a nation-state (its history, society, culture, language) as its object of study. Isn’t this kind of potential more easily found in such disciplines as sociology or philosophy whose subjects are general and not territorially delimited? As I will argue in the essay, however, Japanese Studies, understood as studies of Japan both outside and within Japan, embodies the quintessential features of humanities studies that lay at the foundation of modern scholarship and education. As such, studies of Japan is a branch of modern knowledge production energized by universalistic ideals of humanism while simultaneously shaped by national and other particularistic agenda and goals. I would like to identify the practical significance of those universalistic ideals in Japanese Studies and bear them upon the ongoing discursive and institutional dynamics of globalization in and outside Japan so as to tease out an arguably unprecedented possibility, a possibility of the formation of a consciousness and mode of knowledge that go beyond the horizon of the nation, which is a potential likely to be realized in the practice of an emerging global academia.

Key for appreciating this unprecedented potential is the understanding of two main features of modern knowledge production. First, from the very beginning, there has been a tension between humanistic studies based on the universalistic category of *humanitas* that enabled the implementation of modern knowledge production all over the world on the one hand, and the exclusive and particularistic national framework within which modern knowledge has been conceived and produced on the other. Second, modern humanistic studies acquired its Other, the *anthropos* from the beginning. The *humanitas-anthropos* figuration constituted one key epistemological principle underlying modern knowledge production. Connecting studies of Japan as an academic discipline to *humanitas*-nation nexus on the one hand and to the *humanitas-anthropos* figuration on the other then requires a historical examination that goes back to 18th-century Europe.

Humanism, Anthropos, and the Nation-state

The term “humanism” was first employed (as *humanismus*) by late 18th and early 19th century German scholars to designate the Renaissance emphasis on classical studies in education while calling themselves “neohumanists” (*neuhumanismus*). For the German scholars, at the basis of Renaissance humanism was the idea of *humanitas*, which meant the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent. While Renaissance made a shift away from the divine toward the human being thus giving birth to an implicit sense of the individual, however, it is not until the late 18th century that the theory of the integral, autonomous individual began to take shape. Classical liberalist theorists such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau played important role in the development of the idea of the individual. This individual was conceived of as a being in whom certain rights reside and of whom certain obligations, conditioned by learning and culture, are expected (Grafton 2010, 465). The German neohumanists such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller stressed the importance of this conception of the human individual. Disenchanted with traditional religion, these thinkers drew inspiration from the ancient Greek world, which they idealized, finding there a love of harmony and beauty. Humankind then could dedicate itself to the pursuit of beauty and virtue for their full realization in one’s self, and without the structures of organized religion (Grafton 2010, Fujita 1998, 1169).

This pursuit was known in German as *Bildung*. By the end of the 18th century, *Bildung* has been imbued with not only spiritual but also philosophical and political connotations (James A. Good). It was associated with liberation of the mind from tra-

dition and superstition, and through Hegel's dialectical philosophy became connected to the realization of the universal World-spirit. Hegel was concerned with *Bildung* as the self-development of the individual human spirit as well as the self-development of the human race. *Bildung* requires self-knowledge, discerning one's own talents by discovering activities that bring satisfaction and fulfillment. And the greatest sort of fulfillment for Hegel is activity that promotes *Bildung* for one's society. As such, *Bildung* meant that philosophy and education are virtually synonymous terms that designate an ongoing process of both personal and cultural maturation (James A. Good). In this connection of the individual with culture and society, *Bildung* came to be associated with the liberation of the German people from a pre-modern political system of small feudal states that owed allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire. The universalistic theory of the individual and its fulfillment came to be connected to the particularistic idea of the German people and nation.

Indeed, when early 19th century Prussian thinkers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gottlieb Fichte translated these ideas into a pedagogical program that sought to promote humanistic and individualistic values, unify teaching and research, and institutionalize freedom of research and study, they were responding to a political crisis resulted from the defeat of Prussia by France in the Napoleon Wars of 1806. The reason of defeat was identified as the lack of spontaneous motivation on the part of the general populace to defend the state. That is, there lacked a German nation. To create the German nation involved three major projects: rebuilding the military, making a constitution, and implementing national education. As such, neohumanism from the beginning was closely tied to the project of nation-building through education (Soda 2005). The neohumanist educator Reinhold Bernhard Jachmann argued in 1812 that "if the nation should be developed, national education needs to be derived from the same source of the highest objective of development of human being and be rooted in the basic soil of the national character. There exists but one *humanitas* (*nin-gensei* 人間性) and each nation as a totality is its completion" (Soda 2005, 132). National education was discussed in terms of the universal ideal of the highest objective of humanity, "It is not borrowing one's goal from the world but rather to look at oneself as the goal of the world and strive for the highest objective of humanity. Only those schools that maintain their unchanging character by holding on to this objective are schools that cultivate true humanity" (Soda 2005, 132).

Wilhelm von Humboldt made a key contribution to the formation of the idea of *Bildung* and played a major role in the establishment of the modern education system with the University of Berlin, established in 1810, at its pinnacle. He regarded the university as the noblest facility of national culture and defined scholarship in university

to be incessant exploration of unresolved problems. “What is important for the formation of university and the nation is not only erudition but a spirit that demonstrated by the entire range of disciplines and researches enabled by that erudition; in other words, a spirit enriched by fruits of the brain” (Soda 2005, 133–134). For Humboldt, scholarship aims for spiritual formation of the individual and based on that spiritual formation fostering citizens’ abilities to act in society.

Because of this intersection of the universalistic ideal of *humanitas* with the project of nation-building, the conception of humanism developed in the German context became well-suited to nation-states in cultivating models of individual and social development. It is important to recognize the idealistic and inspiring dimension of this humanism-nation conceptual nexus which may have contributed to its subsequent global spread in the nationally distinguished yet isomorphic institutionalization of modern education (e.g., national history, literature, linguistics, ethnography, etc.). In redirecting the cultivation for an ideal individual (also captured by the term “citizen”) to the practical and specific purpose of making the national, this conceptual nexus embodies a logical contradiction yet a historical interdependence. As it happened, in the second half of 19th century, this model of scholarship and education was introduced to other European countries as well as the U.S. and Japan. In the U.S., with his work *Culture and Anarchy* (1884), Matthew Arnold, influenced by Humboldt, argued for an education that would produce a deep knowledge of culture and would then lead naturally to *Bildung*, the ennoblement of character (Harpham 2011, 85). With Arnold, humanism gradually morphed into the academic form of the humanities and became linked to the liberal arts education at the collegiate level (Harpham 2011, 85–86, Duara 2014). In the case of Japan, the *humanitas*-nation nexus was introduced to and reformulated in Japanese to underscore the modern national educational system in the 1880s. The key figure in the creation of this system, the first Minister of Education Mori Arinori (1847–1889) wrote into middle school textbook the *humanitas* ideal thus, “the ultimate purpose of humans is to follow truth and seek to become the complete human being” (Mori 1972, 425).

Humanitas denotes a process of pursuit of the universal essence of that which is human, released from religious restraints and detached from the reference to the ultimate and unreachable Being. It is the pursuit of human knowledge by humans to realize the full *humanitas*, the essential nature of being humanbeing. As it happened, however, *humanitas* as the self-referential form of knowledge yet was in need of an external referent after the Christian God was given up. The very giving up of Christianity at least partly is a result from the relativizing effect of Europeans’ encounter with previously unknown culture and societies in their global colonial expansion.

These encounters gave rise to an inextricable and fundamentally asymmetrical relation between *humanitas* — people who become through knowing oneself — and *anthropos* — people who become through being known, to explain a complex historical formation in vastly simplified terms. *Anthropos* cannot escape the status of being the object of anthropological knowledge, while *humanitas* is never defined from without but rather manifests itself as the subject of all knowledge (Sakai 2010, Nishitani, 4). Overtime the *humanitas-anthropos* formation overlapped with the essentialized binary categories of the West and the non-West. The 19th century saw this overlapped epistemological mechanism gave rise to the basic modern disciplinary distribution in knowledge production that largely remain with us today: sociology, economics, and political science are about oneself by the West as *humanitas* whereas Orientalism and anthropology are about the Other, the *anthropos*, as object of study by the West (Masuzawa 2005, 15–17).

Post-WWII Japanese Studies and Modernization Theory

Postwar studies of Japan in the U.S. and Japan exemplify respectively the *humanitas-anthropos* and *humanitas*-nation nexus in objectifying Japan as an object of knowledge. The Cold War constituted the historical context for the practice of what Prasenjit Duara calls the imperialism of the nation-state, which manifested in the imposition of designs for enlightenment upon emergent nations by an enormously superior national power backed by military force (Duara 2010, 90). The U.S.-Japan relationship reflected this new form of imperialism. The US recognized that Japan's economic growth was a potent force that might bring stability not just to Japan itself but also to the region more widely. This included the vital role Japan could play to stemming the tide of communism which could be aggravated by poverty. It is in the interest of the US that Japan be manipulated to appear as a demonstration of what the western style liberal-capitalist model of modernization could achieve in practice. From the 1950s, studies of Japan in the U.S. advocated modernization theory and tried to shape scholarship on Japan to show how and why Japan was able to modernize and develop so successfully. This politically motivated agenda brushed aside alternative research concerns and issues of scholars in Japan and the U.S.

In creating a research agenda and imposing that on the object of Japan, Japanese Studies during the postwar period betrays operations of the *humanitas-anthropos* figuration. To the extent that area studies have been tied to the strategic and political consideration of the U.S., it may be said that Japanese studies in the U.S. operated on the premise of a separation of *humanitas* the knowing subject from *anthropos* the ob-

ject to be known. During the past three decades, however, scholars have waged consistent critique of area studies in particular Japanese studies as a form of knowledge production in close association with, and in the service to political agenda (Dower 1975, Harootunian 2000, Miyoshi and Harootunian 2002, Sakai 2007). Without recounting this critique in detail here, I will briefly quote the incisive observation by the scholar of Japan, Naoki Sakai, on the *humanitas-anthropos* figuration as an operative mode of knowledge production in Asian studies, “Things Asiatic were first brought to scholarly attention through being recognized as ‘different and therefore Asian’. Therefore, and from the presumed vantage point of the West, ‘being different from us’ and ‘being Asian’ were tacitly taken to be synonymous in an anthropologizing gesture” (Sakai 2010, 457).

In Japan, the postwar self-reflective scholarship on Japan’s democracy and modernization, represented by Maruyama Masao and Ōtsuka Hisao, could be seen as the most manifest scholarship of *humanitas* in their abiding concern with the formation of the modern individual as citizen. In applying the West as the referent for Japan’s democracy and modernization while taking for granted the existence of the Japanese nation (*minzoku* 民族), with or without the emperor, their study of Japan, like the Marxist scholarship, corresponded well with modernization-centered studies of Japan in the U.S.

Globalization and Beyond Area Studies

In the wake of the end of Cold War in 1990, modernization theory gave way to the new theory of economic globalization of a strong neo-liberal bent. Globalization theory prescribes more than it describes. It advocates a new alignment of political and economic interests at the global level in the creation of a new global political economic regime with a distinct American template of neoliberalism (Antonio 2007). Source of power shifted in the 1990s from the state’s concern with Cold War boundary security to transnational corporations that saw no geographic limit on their interests (Cumings 2000). This however should not be interpreted as having resulted in the decline of the nation-state but rather should be seen as having propelled the nation-state’s changes in form. Nation-state remains a key player in engineering social-economic changes and global capitalism operates through the framework of the nation-state system. Cultural imperatives in the nation-state remain largely unchanged: peace, justice and growth/development, but in attaining those goals a new type of discourse has emerged in the wake of the end of Cold War that recognizes multiculturalism and diversity of society and nation, as well as enabled new ways in which the identity of

selves can become differentiated to assume a variety of forms and modes of representation: the national, class, religious, gender, etc.

At the same time, large protests by various groups from around the world at the World Trade Organization meetings since 1999 and the recent worldwide Occupy Movement symbolize a critical transnationally formulated response to globalizing capitalism. These more vocal events are accompanied by the widespread, multi-front opposition to the neo-liberal doctrine of the so-called Washington Consensus. We may also mention the strong opposition in Japan to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) despite the fact this opposition is mainly out of the view of protecting national industries and domestic market which are in themselves important but nation-focused. In looking at these changes, it makes sense to assume a subjective and cultural dimension of globalization and to ask whether we can identify a certain consciousness of that which is called globalization. Marking this consciousness is a critical stance toward the neo-liberal economic globalization. If the latter is represented by the slogan “the world is flat” popularized by the globalization advocator the U.S. journalist Thomas Friedman, in opposition to this uniformity and imagined equality is a new global consciousness celebrating and advocating heterogeneity based on critique of social and economic inequality. It is hard to tell which one, the neo-liberal capitalist globalization or the critical consciousness come first, or between consciousness and reality is a dialectically intersecting formative process. In any case, assuming such a consciousness that is grounded on specific conditions of possibility is meaningful because possessing this consciousness makes it possible for one to formulate agenda and take initiatives to enact changes as part of the process. That is, it makes sense to contemplate if we can imagine a potential of a new type of consciousness, under the post-Cold War conditions of globalization, which is able to relativize and change, even eventually transcend, the institutional and epistemic framework of the capitalist nation-state world system.

The departure of modernization theory in Japanese Studies in the US meant the departure of a major political agenda that shaped studies of Japan. The past two decades saw flourishing postcolonial and postmodern theories and cultural studies that informed and energized studies of Japan, just as more and more students of non-Western origin joined university education in the U.S., making classrooms increasingly a transnational space. Resulted from assimilation of these theoretical insights is the now widely shared reflective awareness of the politicality of one’s position and stance in academic research, an awareness resembling the self-awareness of *humanitas* as a knowing subject studying oneself. Key to this awareness is the critique of nationalism and the nation-state as the quintessential modern form of political power, a critique

that characterized Japanese Studies in the past two decades or so. This critique called into question the basic assumption (the national society) of modernization theory. In this sense, the globalization era (and the “lost two decades”) signifies certain significant new development in academic study.

These ideological and cultural changes contributed to shift in definition of area studies from in terms of national strategic interest to globalization. In a special message for the annual conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators in May 2015, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, expresses the stance of the U.S. government with regard to international education while making reference to area studies, “in the 21st century, a quality education is an international education. That’s why we developed the International Education Strategy which will guide the Department of Education toward its international future. We continue to support study abroad, area studies, and foreign language learning ... It is more important than ever that our college graduates will be able to not only compete with graduates from around the world, but are able to collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds” (NAFSA website). Needless to say, Duncan is talking about the need for globalization from the perspective of the American government and out of the concern with how international education will reinforce the power of the U.S. in the new context of globalization. Nevertheless, the articulation of conscious reorientation of education to post-Cold War global condition is notable.

These changes could lead, and indeed have led, to the gradual dissipation of the *humanitas-anthropos* figuration that marked area studies in postwar U.S. Calling into question the political nature of area studies went in tandem with critical scholarship of postcolonial, ethnic, cultural, and gender studies as well as diversification of both faculty and student bodies in U.S. universities. We can understand these changes as providing the condition for the possible project of reconceiving *humanitas* to make it adequate for the era of globalization, in other words, as a conceptual tool that connects rather than divides as it previously did through such as the *humanitas-anthropos* figuration. Posing a reimagined *humanitas* is further encouraged by a new change on a global scale. Not just in the U.S., at the global level we see the emergence of a transnational academia resulted from increased mobility, institutional accommodation, expansion of higher education beyond the national frame, foreign faculty hiring, and English as the increasingly deculturalized lingua franca of research and education. This is an emerging pattern for all the disciplines including Japanese Studies in many universities across the world but is particularly clear in case of universities in Asia, including Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Singapore. U.S. universities are also expanding outside North America by developing exchanges and collaborations with

universities in other continents.

One important dimension to this pattern of connecting in the Asian context is hiring non-native faculty. Many young scholars with PhD degrees from U.S. or European universities find jobs in Asian universities which welcome them as a vitally necessary asset in their efforts to meet the challenge of the globalization of education (this does not mean that there is not also a flow from Asian to European universities). These PhD holders speak English and to different extent share the Western academic culture, which has *humanitas* as the foundation, not only among themselves but also with educators in Asia with similar thoughts and goals (recent outcry of crisis for the increasingly strained funding for humanities and social sciences disciplines may indeed point to the erosion of the status of *humanitas* as the foundation for knowledge creation but the consequence remains to be seen). In the sense that Western-style education is positively evaluated by most Asian universities, which to different degree, share the West-originated *humanitas* ideal, and is being modelled upon, this emerging transnational academia could serve to connect the previously separate education and research in different parts of the world through developing research and education collaborations. The role of this global academia in connecting education across the world predicates upon re-conceptualizing *humanitas* to be an executable and concretized definition for mutual sharing. With their transnational background of education, this emerging group embodies the tensions of *humanitas-anthropos*. It is up to them to first of all externalize this tension and eventually dissolve it. Needless to say, this is a difficult task.

The Lost Two Decades, Education Reform, and Reimagining Japanese Studies

“The lost two decades” is marked by the Japanese government’s efforts to reform higher education to respond to the decrease of college-age youth population and the perceived long-term crisis in decline of international competitiveness of Japan in the age of globalization. Echoing the statement of the U.S. Secretary of Education Erne Duncan, these efforts are constitutive of Japan’s participation in a world-historical unfolding of a major political, economic and cultural dynamic: the increasing interconnectedness of the world. The government’s efforts in most recent years (2009, 2012 and 2014) are nothing less than remarkable, especially given the fiscal constraint the government is increasingly subject to.

In 2009, in order to improve the competitiveness of Japanese higher education and to attract more foreign students to Japanese universities, Japan Society for Promoting Sciences (JSPS), the fund-distributing organization for the Ministry of Educa-

tion, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), announced the Project for Establishing University Network for Internationalization (G30) (国際化拠点整備事業). The project set out to sponsor the globalization of 30 selected universities by providing each of them an annual support of up to 400 million yen for five years (JSPS website). As such, it is more widely known as the G30 project. Eventually, however, only 13 universities, both public and private, were selected for implementing this project. Then in 2012, JSPS followed up with the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development (グローバル人材育成推進事業). 42 schools were selected to receive annual funding of between 120–260 million yen for up to five years. Then most recently in 2014, JSPS invited universities to compete for the Top Global University Project (スーパーグローバル大学創成支援). 37 universities were successful in their bid and were each awarded 200–500 million yen each year for up to ten years to implement structural reforms to increase international compatibility and strengthen global competitiveness.

Major components of structural reforms demanded by these JSPS projects include: increasing courses and programs taught in English in particular those on Japan to attract international students, hiring foreign faculty to increase diversity as well as English-speaking teachers, building up collaborative relationships with overseas universities, and conduct regularized international research and education activities. There is considerable resistance to these efforts as many criticize that the emphasis on English is succumbing to “English imperialism” and it is becoming a fad to develop globalization programs, which in many cases lack substance. Despite these criticisms, Japanese universities, in particular the major private ones, met the government initiative with enthusiasm and created many new programs because private schools, depending to significant degrees on tuition for existence and growth, see globalization as the way to go.

As part of these reforms, Japanese universities hire more and more internationally trained, English-speaking faculty. In this sense, Japan is joining other Asian countries in contributing to the formation of the afore-mentioned transnational academia. PhDs in Japanese studies comprise a significant part of this community. They could be expected to serve as a connector between English-language Japanese studies in the West and other areas of the world and broadly defined studies of Japan within Japan, conducted in Japanese language. The role of the connector is facilitated by afore-mentioned government-funded globalization projects that develop international conferences, research and education exchanges, and other forms of collaboration.

Despite the fact that globalization of higher education in Japan is state-led and is meant by the government to strengthen the competitive power of Japan in the age of

neo-liberal economic globalization, the key dimension of globalization, the anti-neo-liberal stance, is not missed in this process. It is readily observable that in Japanese academia there exists a strong critical stance toward neo-political economic agenda cloaked under the slogan of globalization. Being critical of neo-liberal globalization theory, Japanese universities share the critical consciousness of globalization. However, they are not nearly as critical toward the nation and its politicized embodiment: the nation-state. There is no clear sign that this critical examination of the nation and the humanism-nation conceptual nexus is emerging in Japanese higher education.

Nevertheless, these ongoing changes are historically significant and impregnate possibilities. If the emergence of a global academia is in sight and a new consciousness can be created and shared among this academia, a new mode of knowledge then can arise from these globalizing developments in higher education both in Japan and around the world. How the emerging global academia will evolve and what it is capable of doing remain to be seen. Imagining possibilities, however, is important and articulating a potential consciousness is likewise necessary. If we can call into question the *humanitas*-nation conceptual nexus that has accompanied modern history of education and knowledge production, and sustain this critique, it can eventually lead to the imagining and realization of a new type of humanities studies which bases itself upon critiques of capitalism and the nation, both of which delimit our thinking as well as imagining. If we recognize there is a dialectic between the discourse of neo-liberal economic globalization and the happenstances identified as globalization (or its causes or effects), however, globalization is also a manipulatable process, i.e., it can be talked into reality and directed toward goals we define. Certainly, we are part of a world-historical process that has its own logic of changes but it is up to us to determine how we play our part by exercising our limited agency in this process. We can't expect to step outside or overthrow capitalism nor the nation-state (it is perhaps impossible to identify that which is called either capitalism or the nation-state separated from what is not capitalism or nation). We can only be part of the process while retaining a critical stance toward that process. More specifically, we can start to imagine the possibility of certain global humanities studies with "Japan" as its subject, object, perspective, or just background, without being constrained by "Japan" as our subject or object of study. This means to transform "Japan" into enabling conditions for exploring and understanding a new type of *humanitas*.

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