

Current Condition of Japanese Studies in Korea and Challenges: Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of Nichibunken's Foundation

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1. Introduction

In May 2018, I participated in an international symposium celebrating the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken). The symposium organizer assigned me to report the current condition of Japanese studies in Korea and give critical proposals on Nichibunken's activities. I would like to confess here that there was a 24-year gap in my experience with Nichibunken between my participation in a Nichibunken joint research as an international graduate student at Kyoto University from 1992 to 1993 and my return to Nichibunken as a visiting researcher in 2017, and this gap made me hesitate and doubt my qualification to give a "critical proposal." This paper thus reports the current condition of Japanese studies in Korea and then just expresses my impression about the meanings of Nichibunken's activities in relation to Japanese studies in Korea.

2. Current Condition of the Foundation for Japanese Studies

It was in 1961 that the first Japanese studies department was established in the history of university education in Korea. In anticipation of the normalization of the diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan in 1965, the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies established a Japanese language department four years before the normalization. After that, Kookjae University (present-day Seokyeng University) established a Japanese language department in 1962, and Sangmyung Women's University (present-day Sangmyung University) established a Japanese language course in its foreign language education department in 1967. A fact deserving attention here is that all the early Japan-related departments aimed to deal with "Japanese language." I suppose that this was because Japanese studies was positioned as a practical means to approach the Japanese economy.

In the 1980s, the field of university education in Korea experienced rapid changes. As part of its populist policy, the Chun Doo-hwan government doubled the overall student capacity of the university education, which served as the starting point for the establishment of Departments of Japanese Language and Literature at many universities. About 50 universities established Japan-related departments in that period. However, the rapid increase in the number of Japanese-related departments caused a serious distortion of the Japanese studies market in Korea. The balance between demand for and supply of researchers specializing in Japanese studies was severely disrupted, and Korea experienced a lack of Japanese studies specialists qualified to teach at universities. The boom in studying abroad in Japan from the late 1980s may have been fueled by such trends.

From the 1980s on, Korea continued to see many universities establish Japan-related departments. Although over 90 universities had Japan-related department at one time, 83 of the

over 200 four-year universities around Korea currently run Japan-related departments.

The increase in the number of Japan-related undergraduate departments entailed active trends toward the establishment of related graduate departments. Limiting the examples to doctoral programs, only three universities (the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Chung-Ang University and Hanyang University) offered doctoral programs until 1992, but the number increased to 21 after 2000. Most of those doctoral programs were newly established between 1999 and 2000, when the Korean higher education world seems to have been optimistic about future growth in demand for graduate education. However, 15 years later, the number of graduate students at most of those universities had declined to less than a half of the number at the peak, and now not a few universities do not have graduate students. The issue of undergraduate and graduate education will be dealt with later.

Next, let's look at the current condition of Japanese studies associations in Korea. In February 1973, the Korea Association of Japanology was founded as the first Japan-related academic association in Korea, and the association published its academic journal 『日本学報』 in August the same year. This journal published 116 issues by this year and has historical importance as the first Japanological journal published in Korea.¹ After that, especially after 1990, the number of Japan-related academic associations rapidly increased, and 27 associations currently continue their activities in this field. Some readers may be suspicious about the disorderly coexistence of many academic associations, but I believe that academic association activities in Korea can be viewed as unique in that small study meetings are actively held on a wide variety of themes. The list below shows the current condition of Japan-related academic associations in Korea.

Table 1: Current academic associations of Japanese studies (as of 2019)

	Name	Foundation	Academic journal	Fields
1	Korea Association of Japanology (韓国日本学会)	1973	『日本学報』	General
2	The Japanese Language and Literature Association of Korea (韓国日語日文学会)	1978	『日語日文学研究』	Japanese language and literature
3	The Korean Association of Contemporary Japanese Studies (現代日本学会)	1978	『日本研究論叢』	Politics and economics
4	The Korean-Japanese Economic and Management Association (韓日経商学会)	1983	『韓日経商論集』	Economics
5	The Japanese Education Association of Korea (韓国日本語教育学会)	1984	『日本語教育』	Japanese language education
6	The Society of Korea and Japan Education (韓国日本教育学会)	1985	『韓国日本教育学研究』	Education
7	The Association of Japanology in East Asia (東アジア日本学会)	1990	『日本文化研究』	General

¹ See Korea Association of Japanese Studies 40th Anniversary Special Committee 韓国日本学会 40周年特別委員会 ed., *Kankoku Nibongakkai 40 nenshi: Nihonkenkyū no seika to kadai* 韓国日本学会 40年史: 日本研究の成果と課題, Hōkōsha, 2013, pp. 131–132.

	Name	Foundation	Academic journal	Fields
8	The Japanese Language and Literature Society of Korea (大韓日語日文学会)	1991	『日語日文学』	Japanese language and literature
9	The Society of Japanese Language and Literature, Japanology (日本語文学会)	1992	『日本語文学』	Japanese language and literature
10	The Korea-Japan Historical Society (韓日関係史学会)	1992	『韓日関係史研究』	History
11	The Korea Association of Japanese Education (韓国日語教育学会)	1993	『日本語教育研究』	Japanese language education
12	The Japanese Culture Association of Korea (韓国日本文化学会)	1993	『日本文化学報』	Japanese language and literature
13	The Korean Association for Japanese History (日本史学会)	1994	『日本歴史研究』	History
14	The Japanese Language and Literature Association of Korea (韓国日本語文学会)	1995	『日本語文学』	Japanese language and literature
15	Korea Association for Japanese Thought (韓国日本思想史学会)	1997	『日本思想』	Thought
16	The Japanese Language Association of Korea (韓国日本語学会)	1999	『日本語学研究』	Japanese language
17	Korea Association of Modern Japanology (韓国日本近代学会)	2000	『日本近代学研究』	General
18	Korea Association of Japanese Literature (韓国日本文学会)	2000	Using 『日本学報』 jointly	Literature
19	The Association of Korean-Japanese National Studies (韓日民族問題学会)	2000	『韓日民族問題研究』	Korean communities in Japan
20	Japanese Language and Culture Association of Korea (韓国日本語文化学会)	2001	『日本言語文化』	Japanese language and literature
21	Korea Association of Japanese History and Culture (韓国日本歴史文化学会)	2001	Using 『日本学報』 jointly	History and culture
22	The Military and Culture Association of Korea-Japan (韓日軍事文化学会)	2001	『韓日軍事文化研究』	Military affairs and culture
23	Korea Association of Japanese Politics, Economics and Sociology (韓国日本政経社会学会)	2002	Using 『日本学報』 jointly	Politics and economics
24	Korea Association of Japanese Interpretation and Translation (韓国日本通訳学会)	2002	Using 『日本学報』 jointly	Interpretation and translation
25	Korea-Japan Comparative Linguistics Association of Korea (韓日言語学会)	2009	Using 『日本学報』 jointly	Japanese language
26	Korea Association of Japanese Culture (大韓日本文化学会)	2010	『日本文化論叢』	Japanese language and literature
27	Korea Association of Japanese Buddhist Culture (韓国日本仏教文化学会)	2014	『日本仏教文化研究』	Buddhist culture

Together with academic associations, research institutes are also indispensable leaders of Japanese studies in Korea. As early as in 1979, two universities (Chung-Ang University and Dongguk University) established Japanology institutes, but it is thought that the activities of university-based research institutes went through two different stages before they got on the right track. The first stage is represented by the activities of the Hallym University Institute of Japanese Studies, which was established in the 1990s. The institute was established by Professor Chi Myong-kwan after he returned home in 1994. Professor Chi was the chief editor of *Sasanggye* 思想界 in Korea and was active supporter of the Korean democratization movement while residing in Japan. After establishing the institute, he carried out noteworthy activities, such as beginning to collect written materials on a full scale with cooperation from Iwanami Shoten in Japan and publishing a Japanology series (100 volumes of translations) and a collection of selected contemporary Japanese literary works (40 volumes). The second stage is marked by the Korean government funded project named “Humanities Korea” (HK, or 人文韓国) to develop university-based humanities institutes, which was launched in the 2000s. In the field of Japanology, some institutes began receiving a governmental subsidy of about 100 million yen per year, and the research environment was considerably improved. The Korean academic world after the HK project, in particular, saw the emergence of new developments, such as an increased number of full-time and contract-based jobs at research institutes and original research projects promoted by research institutes. Through these different stages, research institutes have become more and more important in their contribution to Japanese studies in Korea. Currently, Korea has 14 university-based Japan-related research institutes, as listed below.

Table 2: Current condition of university-based research institutes (as of 2019)

	University name	Institute name	Foundation	Academic journal
1	Chung-Ang University	Institute of Japanese Studies	1979	『日本研究』
2	Dongguk University	Institute for Japanese Studies	1979	『日本文学』
3	Hankuk University of Foreign Studies	Institute of Japanese Studies	1985	『日本研究』
4	Seoul National University	Institute for Japanese Studies	1991	『日本批評』
5	Hallym University	Institute of Japanese Studies	1994	『翰林日本文学』
6	Korea University	Global Institute for Japanese Studies	1997	『日本研究』
7	Dankook University	Institute of Japanese Studies	2002	『日本文学研究』
8	Kookmin University	Institute of Japanese Studies	2002	『日本空間』
9	Chonnam National University	Research Center for Japanese Culture	2004	-
10	Dongseo University	The Japan Center	2005	『次世代人文社会研究』
11	Hanyang University	Global Center for Japanese Studies	2008	『比較日本文学』
12	Incheon National University	Institute for Japanese Cultural Studies	2008	-
13	Pusan National University	Institute of Japanese Studies	2010	『日本研究』
14	Jeonbuk National University	Institute of Japanese and East Asian Studies	2016	-

The above is an outline of the current condition of the foundation for Japanese studies in Korea, including university departments, academic associations and research institutes. Then, how many people are engaged in Japanese studies in Korea? Let's limit our calculation to the fields of Japanese language and literature. The number of researchers in the fields of Japanese language and literature currently registered with the National Research Foundation for Korea (NRF) amounts to 1,800. Although it is uncertain that Japanese studies can be clearly distinguished from other disciplines, the current number of Japanese studies researchers in the fields of history, culture, politics, economics, etc. can be estimated to be at least 200. This means that a total of over 2,000 people are engaged in Japanese studies in Korea.

Among the 2,000 Korean scholars, about 420 work as full-time researchers in Japan-related university departments or at research institutes. Adding full-time researchers working in other departments, such as politics and economics departments, we can estimate that about 500 Korean scholars are engaged in Japanese studies as full-time university faculty members.

A survey shows that 420 Korean faculty members largely comprise 180 specialists in Japanese language, 120 in Japanese literature, and 120 in other fields, such as history, culture (including folklore), philosophy, politics, economics and sociology. While Japanese literature scholars comprise 65 specialists in modern and contemporary literature and 55 in classical literature, a more detailed look reveals that the classical literature scholars comprise 11 specialists in ancient literature, 14 in early medieval literature (mainly in the Heian period), 12 in medieval literature (mainly in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods), and 18 in early modern literature. Although the number of early modern literature specialists is slightly large, no particular deviation is found in the entire composition.

Japanese studies in Korea is founded on such a composition of scholars. From the perspective of age-based composition, however, scholars in their 50s or above occupy 85% of full-time positions, so I would like to give a particular mention to the aging of the Korean field of Japanese studies. Among all scholars in Japanese studies in Korea, about 1,500 people other than full-time faculty members work as part-time lecturers or contract-based researchers. Therefore, ensuring stable positions for next-generation scholars is the most important challenge for the Korean field of Japanese studies to overcome from now on.

3. Outlook and Challenges

Japanese studies in Korea has grown quantitatively in parallel with the above-mentioned development of the institutional foundation for research. The quantitative growth is directly represented by the number of academic papers published annually. While the annual number of papers on Japanese studies amounted to about 50 even in the 1980s or earlier, the 2000s saw about 900 academic papers published annually in this field. Therefore, grasping overall research trends in this field requires us to pay special attention. Nevertheless, I believe that I can mention some examples that show changes in Japanese studies in Korea after the 1980s.

An example is the trend toward changing department names. As mentioned before, most of the early Japan-related departments were departments of Japanese language focusing on Japanese language. Since the 1980s, many universities established Departments of Japanese Language

and Literature, shifting the focus to Japanese literature, and this name became the general term for Japan-related departments. However, department names began to diversify in the 1990s. The first outstanding change was the emergence of a few Departments of Japanese Language and Culture, replacing the word “literature” in the former mainstream name “Departments of Japanese Language and Literature” with the word “culture.” In addition, Departments of Japanese Studies, focusing on area studies, began to appear at that time. Briefly, the major name of Japan-related university departments has changed from “Department of Japanese Language” to “Department of Japanese Language and Literature,” to “Department of Japanese Language and Culture” and to “Department of Japanese Studies,” which suggests growing orientation toward Japanese studies and area studies.

Changes can be also found in research subjects. For example, in studies on Japanese language, the number of papers in social linguistics and Japanese language education has significantly grown, replacing papers dealing with grammar, which formerly constituted the mainstream. This change seems to indicate a shift of scholars’ interest from grammatical research methods as a traditional research subject to more versatile subjects in the process of diversification of subjects in linguistic studies of Japanese. In addition, active application of corpus linguistics to linguistic studies of Japanese also deserves attention as a new research trend. In the field of Japanese literature, especially studies of modern and contemporary literature, an increasing number of papers have adopted the perspectives of postcolonial studies and cultural studies, instead of focusing on individual works in a conventional manner. The resulting increase in interest in literary works by Korean writers in Japan can be seen as a natural consequence. There are some attempts to connect studies in the field of classical literature to movies, anime and social history, but these attempts have not yet acquired the power to cause changes in research trends. However, a rapid increase in the number of Korean translations of Japanese classical literature from the 2000s deserves attention.

In Korea, works of Japanese classical literature began to be translated in the 1970s, and over 10 Japanese classical works were translated into Korean in the 1990s or earlier. But over 60 translated works have recently been published, resulting in a total of over 70 Korean translations of Japanese classical works.² Among those Japanese classical works, *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語 and the *Kojiki* 古事記 have been translated into Korean most often. *Genji Monogatari* and the *Kojiki* have been translated by different translators more than 10 times since 1973 and since 1987, respectively. In addition to these two works, the *Manyōshū* 万葉集, *Basho Haikushū* 芭蕉俳句集 and *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 are probably the most-often translated Japanese classical works. Many picture books for children about old Japanese tales, including *Genji Monogatari* and the *Kojiki*, have been published in Korea. The popularization of Japanese classics has been a recent trend that deserves special mention.

While trends in studies of Japanese language and literature in Korea can be roughly outlined as above, Japanese studies in Korea has many unsolved challenges to tackle from now

² See Lee Si-jun 李市俊, “Kankoku no Nihon koten bungaku honyaku genkyō ni kansuru kisoteki chōsa kenkyū 韓国の日本古典文学翻訳現況に関する基礎的調査研究,” *Nihonkenkyū* 日本研究 (Korea), Issue 73, September 2017, pp. 100–106.

on. The most prominent challenge is the fact that Japanese studies in Korea has experienced a major turning point since 2010. After its continuous development from the 1980s, the environment for Japanese studies has been undermined.

The challenges currently faced by Japanese studies in Korea include a decline in the number of Japanese language learners, the reduction of the number of Japan-related classes in universities, the integration or abolition of related departments, a decline in the number of full-time jobs for Japanese studies specialists and the consequent aging of the Korean field of Japanese studies, unstable statuses of next-generation scholars, and the spread of a feeling of fatigue caused by tautological studies.

An accurate understanding of this situation mainly requires a recognition of changes in the environment inside and outside universities. The environment outside universities here denotes the research environment concerning Japan. First of all, we can point out that the increased presence of China has resulted in a relative decline in the presence of Japan in the international community, and that the Great East Japan Earthquake, which occurred on March 11, 2011, has caused a significant decline in the number of university-level Japanese language learners in Korea. In addition, the establishment of the Abe administration and the growth in rightist trends in Japan and political conflict between the Korean and Japanese governments concerning history can be viewed as unignorable factors behind the challenges recently faced by Japanese studies in Korea.³

Meanwhile, the environment inside universities here denotes the research environment in Korea, where major challenges include the declined presence of humanist liberal arts at universities and the fall of the student population caused by the rapid decline of the fertility rate. In particular, the fall of the high-school graduate population due to the all-time low fertility rate can be pointed out as an urgent and severe challenge.

It is estimated that in Korea the overall prescribed university enrollment will exceed the high-school graduate population by 160,000 in 2023. Given that, among the over 200 four-year universities, major ones accept up to about 3,000 students, you can imagine how large Korean universities are. Therefore, universities have made full-fledged efforts to adjust their maximum enrollments and reform their organizational structure, and it is expected that many university departments, mainly humanities departments, will be integrated or abolished from now on. For these three years, a growing number of Japan-related departments have been reorganized into course tracks, or abolished and integrated with faculties of liberal arts. These changes in the research environment have put Japanese studies in Korea under increased pressure, dispiriting Korean scholars in this field and forcing them to face the severe challenge of addressing this situation.

Here, I would like to give a brief mention to the activities of Nichibunken related to Japanese studies in Korea. As widely known, since its founding, Nichibunken has played an important role as a research hub for scholars specializing in Japanese studies from both Japan

³ See Lee Kang-min 李康民, “Tenkanki no Nihon Kenkyū: kenkyūtaishō to shiteno ‘Nihon’ to ‘Nihongo’” 転換期の日本研究：研究対象としての「日本」と「日本語」, *Nihongakuhō* 日本学報 (Korea), Issue 100, August 2014, pp. 2–4.

and abroad. During the early period, many researchers from abroad have experienced research activities at Nichibunken, and about 70 researchers from Korea have received support from Nichibunken. No one could deny Nichibunken's deep involvement in Japanese studies in Korea.

When I was a graduate student 27 years ago, I observed joint researches at Nichibunken and witnessed part of the activities of Nichibunken in its early phase. I remember that Nichibunken at that time was filled with self-confidence and enthusiasm about its research activities and had a bright atmosphere that I could not experience in the Faculty of Letters at the university. I was impressed that Nichibunken was at the vanguard of Japanese studies, with many researchers discussing Japan from a wide variety of perspectives without sticking to conventional research customs.

There was some controversy over the characteristics of the early phase of Nichibunken, and discussions about the uniqueness of Japanese culture may have been based on a certain policy decision. However, I suppose that the primary activity of Nichibunken might be exploration of new research fields. Such attitudes of Nichibunken toward research inspired Korean scholars specializing in Japanese studies to diversify their research perspectives and expand their research fields.

Two years ago, I returned to Nichibunken for the first time in 24 years to work as a visiting researcher and was surprised by the excellent collection of books stored at the library. I remembered my student days at Kyoto University, when I had been able to take away to my room books that would be too precious for us to touch now, or even to photocopy them freely. Returning to Nichibunken, I also had the impression that awareness of global Japanese studies had been heightened and that efforts had been concentrated on enhancing international collaboration. I certainly believe that overseas researchers should welcome collaboration or joint research with Nichibunken, and international collaboration would allow overseas researchers to share questions about Japanese studies and confirm the diversity of questions according to regional environments, probably resulting in the further enrichment of Japanese studies. Efforts to promote global Japanese studies might again arouse the question whether or not Japanese studies needs a lingua franca. I hope that Nichibunken will play a leading role in actively exploring answers to such questions.

Finally, I also hope that Nichibunken will devote further positive efforts to examining the relationship between Japanese language and culture from novel perspectives. Although modern linguistics is founded on the separation of language from culture, some linguists still support the theory of linguistic relativity, which argues that language determines and shapes culture. I also have recently been strongly interested in interdependence between language and culture. With regard to this issue, I would propose that Nichibunken tackle the challenge of collaborating with large groups of Korean and Chinese scholars specializing in Japanese language, taking into consideration the central role they play in Japanese studies.

4. Conclusion

After going through its early phase in the 1960s and 1970s and its expansion phase in the 1980s and 1990s, Japanese studies in Korea has now reached a major turning point since the beginning

of the 21st century. It may not be an exaggeration that, after continuously climbing up a steep slope, Japanese studies in Korea is now getting into a situation that it has never experienced before.

The changes in the given environment naturally mark a shift from quantity to quality. Those changes require us to enhance the quality of our research, rather than its quantity, and maintain the enhanced quality. To fulfil this requirement, we must improve and reconstruct the conventional content of education and old research methods in response to social changes and needs.

In Korea, the development of Japanese studies as a discipline has been centered around Japanese language. Therefore, it can be said that the discipline originated without a broader perspective on Japanese studies, in sharp contrast with Japanese studies in the U.S., which was under the influence of regional studies from the beginning. Although some elements of regional studies have recently been added to the content of Japanese studies education, there are still limitations on our ability to establish theory-focused Western methodologies in Japanese studies in Korea.

In addition, although more than 900 academic papers are published annually in the Korean field of Japanese studies, how many of the research achievements are known to the “outside world”? Considering this question, we cannot escape criticisms about the isolation of our studies from the wider world. Meanwhile, however, given that Japanese studies in English still remains at an untrustworthy level and that a significant number of scholars are suspicious about the English-dominated hierarchy of studies, this challenge cannot be easily solved in a short time.

To overcome our adherence to the conventional recognition about Japan, we must tackle the challenge of teaching about and discussing Japan from broad and multifaceted perspectives. Japanese studies in Korea will have to explore a new path while deeply considering and confronting this challenge. What I have discussed here is thought to be deeply related to the path that Nichibunken has followed since its founding. In this sense, I would like to pay closer attention to the activities of Nichibunken and maintain my high expectation of it.