


A Historical Review of Japanese Area Studies and the Emergence of Global Studies



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[*Abstract*]

This article will review the historical background of the development of area studies and the adoption of global studies in Japan. Global studies, which focuses on global issues such as migration, mainly developed in the United States and Europe, but more recently found home in universities in Japan. A characteristic of the development of global studies in Japan is that specialists in area studies have played an important role in institutionally establishing this new discipline. “Japanese area studies” has an affinity with the concepts of global studies contrary to the situation with area studies in the United States.

Conventional academic societies based on area studies in Japan, however, have been forced to change as a result of globalization and the establishment of global studies in Japan. I would like to point out that there is some discrepancy between the scholarship boundaries and the actual research and educational program in area studies. I will also discuss how we should reconsider the concept of “area” by tackling global issues.

Keywords: Japan, History, Area Studies, Global Studies, Methodology

I . Introduction

The establishment and development of global studies has been a recent trend in the human and social sciences, and they have focused on global issues beyond the borders of nation-states. The discipline has developed mainly in the United States and Europe. The recent process of globalization since the end of the Cold War has prompted the need to change conventional forms of knowledge acquisition based on the boundaries of nation-states and has seen a new focus on global issues such as migration, global environmental problems, and religious conflicts. Some private universities in Japan, like Sophia University in Tokyo and Doshisha University in Kyoto, have established faculties and departments of global studies, and national universities have also established new research institutes under the banner of global studies in recent years.

A unique characteristic of the development of global studies in Japan is that specialists in area studies have played an important role in institutionally establishing this new discipline. Area studies, which emerged and developed after World War II in the United States, has declined since the end of the Cold War, and it seems that global studies has already replaced area studies. On the other hand, Japanese scholars of area studies have played a key role in accepting and establishing institutes of global studies in Japan.

In this article, I shall review the historical background of the development of area studies and the adoption of global studies in Japan. “Japanese area studies” has an affinity with the concepts of global studies, contrary to the situation with area studies in the United States. Several universities have held interdisciplinary and transborder research and educational programs within the field of global studies without causing any decline in existing institutes of area studies.

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would like to point out that there is some discrepancy between the scholarship boundaries and the actual research and educational program in area studies. I will also discuss how we should reconsider the concept of “area” by tackling global issues.

II. The Birth of Global Studies and the Decline of Area Studies in the United States

In 1999, the University of California, Santa Barbara, established a Global & International Studies program. The new discipline named “global studies”, which explores transnational issues, such as human rights, environmental sustainability, refugees, and immigration, was designed in such a way that it could coexist with the existing international studies program. Consequently, the concept of global studies was not considered a “rival” of international studies. However, area studies” came under threat with the emergence of global studies. Many scholars of area studies have taken pride in the original approach based on “areas” that go beyond national borders, in contrast to international studies that mainly focuses on international relations based on nation-states and multi-national organizations. The field of global studies is similar to area studies in its exploration of transnational issues such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multi-national corporations, and migrant workers.

Global studies is similar to area studies in that research focuses on a certain geographical area. However, other aspects of global studies differ from area studies. For example, in contrast to area studies’ main focus on non-Western countries, global studies research starts from a macro perspective, and generally focuses on the situation of Europe and the United States. In the late 1990s, Cumings (1997) pointed out that people working in area studies sensed the emergence of global studies as rival for research funds.

Area studies emerged and developed in the United States during the Cold War. After World War II, the United States

government funded a number of studies on non-Western countries. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Department of State, and the Department of Defense played vital roles in pushing through research on socialist countries (Anderson 2009: 53). This reveals that area studies was born as a matter of public policy during the time of the Cold War. The U.S. government and several foundations invested heavily in the field in order to keep tabs on communist countries.

Several organizations, such as the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford Foundations, invested in subjects that have not been of much concern to government interests (e.g., history, anthropology, and art). On the other hand, as Cumings pointed out, these foundations apparently worked with the government to launder CIA funding. For example, the Harvard Russian Research Center, established in 1947 with a \$740,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation, was deeply involved with the CIA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other intelligence-gathering and military agencies. The Ford Foundation provided \$270 million to 34 universities for area and language studies from 1953 to 1966 (Cumings 1997: 11). These funds helped establish fellowships for young researchers to reside in non-Western countries for long-term research and language acquisition.

Many of these area studies programs became moot after the end of the Cold War. Since the early 1990s, foundations have reduced their financial support for the field of area studies. Instead, they have become more concerned with issues such as “economic development” and “democratization” (Cumings 1997: 8-9).

III. Adoption of Global Studies and the State of Area Studies in Japan

By the end of the 1990s, some faculty members of Sophia University, Tokyo, started to discuss the idea of founding a new graduate program in global studies. Faculty members were affiliated with the three existing graduate programs (international relations, area

studies, and comparative cultural studies). Faculty from area studies played a central role in designing the joint research program for graduate education. In 2002, the university applied for a Ministry of Education grant and received approval to conduct a five-year project under the 21st Century Center of Excellence Grant Program.¹⁾ The project was entitled, “Area-Based Global Studies” (AGLOS). Global studies in the United States tended to be from a macro or Eurocentric perspective, but Sophia employed an area-based approach that took advantage of the university’s strength in Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American studies. After the project was completed, the Graduate School of Global Studies (GSGS) was founded in April 2006 with three main programs: international relations, area studies, and global studies. GSGS uses an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach to deepen the understanding of global issues and find solutions to food supply, population, environmental, and immigration problems.

Sophia University was not the only institute in Japan to establish a research and education program devoted to area studies-based global studies. In April 2010, Doshisha University in Kyoto also created a graduate program that emphasizes the importance of area studies. Similar to Sophia, Doshisha’s program comprises three clusters: American studies, contemporary Asian studies, and global society studies.²⁾ In 2009, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies reorganized its existing graduate program of area studies and established its own Graduate School of Global Studies. University of Tokyo, Komaba, also reorganized several institutes related to area studies and established the Institute for Advanced

1) The Ministry of Education’s plan to create internationally competitive universities took shape in 2002, when the ministry began accepting applications to its new 21st Century Center of Excellence.

2) The American Studies cluster takes an interdisciplinary and integrated approach to the United States of America and to its global cultural, political, and economic interactions. The Contemporary Asian Studies cluster adopts an interdisciplinary and integrated approach to the many issues facing Asia, with a focus on China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan. The Global Society Studies cluster aims for an interdisciplinary and integrated analysis of global issues that transcend national and regional boundaries, so as to seek ways to build international cooperation. For more information, see <http://global-studies.doshisha.ac.jp/e>.

Global Studies (IAGS),³⁾ which comprises five research institutes: the Center for Pacific and American Studies (CAPS), Center for German and European Studies (DESK), African Studies Center, Sustainable Development Studies Center, and Sustainable Peace Studies Center.

A unique characteristic of the development of global studies in Japan is that area studies scholars have played an important role in establishing this new discipline. Several universities have conducted interdisciplinary and transborder research and educational programs within the field of global studies without causing a decline in existing resources devoted to area studies.

IV. History of Area Studies in Japan

Area studies specialists have played a central role in the design of the global studies programs that have emerged in Japan. After the end of World War II, Asian Pacific Studies (formerly known as *Nan-yo* [South sea] studies) entered an academic dead zone. Many scholars who focused on Asia Pacific Studies halted their research or simply retired. The government could no longer afford to support such research and many scholars came to regret the involvement in the invasion and military rule during the Asia Pacific War.

It was not until the mid-1960s that institutional area studies programs were established in Japan. In his autobiography, Benedict Anderson, a Japanese translator with a major in Southeast Asian studies, outlines the early days and peculiarity of area studies in Japan [Anderson 2009]⁴⁾. Kyoto University and Tokyo University of

3) It is important to note that the name of the institute in Japanese has a slightly different connotation in English. The name in Japanese, *Global Chiiki Kenkyu Kiko*, translates as Institute for Global Area Studies.

4) It was published only in the Japanese language. His friend as well as a Japanese scholar with a major in Southeast Asian Studies, Tsuyoshi Kato, requested him to write his autobiography for young students, and Anderson came to an agreement with the Japanese publisher to have it published in only the Japanese language. Kato not only translated it but also wrote a few chapters upon Anderson's request.

Foreign Studies were the first schools in Japan to establish research institutes devoted to area studies: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSAS) was founded in 1963 (approved in 1965 by the Ministry of Education) by Kyoto University, and The Research Institute for Languages and Culture of Asia and Africa (ILCAA) (*AA-ken* in Japanese) was founded in 1964 by Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The Treaty of San Francisco (“Treaty of Peace with Japan”), which enabled Japan to gain membership into the United Nations in 1956, and reparation agreements with Burma and other Southeast Asian countries in the 1950s, paved the way for Japan to re-enter the Southeast Asian market (Anderson 2009: 219).

The Ford Foundation offered funds to establish CSAS in addition to area studies programs at Cornell University and Yale University (Anderson 2009: 219). Very little was known about area studies in 1960s Japan, as this was the time the U.S. military initiated bombing attacks on North Vietnam, and the public argued about the pros and cons of the Vietnam War. The chaotic situation in Southeast Asia made it difficult for a U.S. foundation to support the work of a Japanese university.

Area studies in Japan after the war featured independent research within the administrative structure of an educational institute. As independent research, international projects were able to solicit support from foreign funders. This positioning (i.e., outside the traditional structure of an educational institute) featured prominently in the development of area studies in Japan. Tsuyoshi Kato, translator and co-author of Anderson’s autobiography, points out that many Asian studies researchers might be “unsuccessful scholars” who could not obtain a teaching position with their alma mater (Anderson 2009: 220).

Sophia University established the Research Institute of Asian Cultures in 1982. The following year the Faculty of Foreign Studies established the Office of Asian Cultures to teach Asian culture, religion, and history, and subsequently instituted a formal Asian studies curriculum for undergraduate students in 1993. These offerings of Sophia University appear to differ from the

course taken by other national institutes.

The primary characteristic of Sophia's Asian studies research project is a practical commitment to actualities. For example, Yoshiaki Ishizawa, a historian of Cambodia, carried out a preservation project of cultural heritage sites like Angkor Wat. Yoshinori Murai, a scholar of Southeast Asian studies who focuses on Indonesia, criticized the development policy of the Japanese government in Southeast Asian countries, as well as the authoritarian regime of Indonesia. These interests—concern for local people and culture, advocacy against government—are unique to Sophia University's approach to area studies. The school's master and doctoral programs, founded in 1997 in conjunction with the Graduate School of Foreign Studies, appear to be the first graduate programs in Japan devoted to area studies.

Since the late 1990s, area studies programs have become gradually known in Japan. National universities began to establish their own graduate programs (e.g., Kyoto University founded the Graduate School of Asian and African Studies in 1998). However, there has been little discussion of the practical aspects of area studies in Japan. As we have seen, area studies developed outside the mainstream of Japan's foreign policy. Therefore, while area studies in the United States was waning after the end of the Cold War, there was no such decline in area studies in Japan. Rather, on the cusp of the era of globalization, area studies researchers were in a good position to tackle "global issues" because of their methodological strategies and understanding of global migration patterns and environmental problems beyond the constraints of national borders.

V. Methodological Features of Global Issue-oriented Area Studies

Institutions for area studies in Japan have restructured their graduate programs and have rebranded them as global studies

since the early 2000s, taking the view that research in Japanese area studies can be pursued under the umbrella of global studies. However, institutional changes, including the change in name, may be inconsistent with the methodological tradition of area studies. Here I would like to propose some methodological features that researchers need to consider when dealing with global issues. These new “global issue-oriented” area studies have the following methodological features: (1) linking of research and practice, (2) the use of multi-site approach, and (3) the possibility of reframing the concept of “area”.

Linking research and practice

Researchers who tackle global issues such as human rights and environmental degradation need to consider the application of their findings. The Japan Consortium for Area Studies (JCAS) has already established a social networking arm that helps coordinate the efforts of academic institutions and NGOs in providing humanitarian aid for victims of natural disasters. The journal of JCAS, *Chiiki-Kenkyu* (Area Studies), explores links between humanitarian aid and area studies (Yamamoto 2012).

Many scholars of area studies have become involved in humanitarian activities via their personal fieldwork. However, there has always been an implicit separation between private efforts and professional work. What I would suggest is that we may need to reconsider the design of area studies to include a component of practical commitment. On the other hand, conventional knowledge of area studies is not sufficient to solve real-world problems, especially regional conflicts (Nakanishi 2014). Any researcher concerned with regional conflict may need to widen his or her geographical research field, and at the same time be flexible about the definition of “area” in accordance with the characteristics of particular issues.

Multi-site approach

Researchers who have the opportunity to travel and conduct

research in a country outside of their main field should consider themselves fortunate. In general, these experiences are regarded as private acts and findings are not published. Global issue-oriented area studies programs need to change this methodological tendency (i.e., of concentrating on a particular geographical region), and my suggestion is to reconsider the notion of “travel” as part of the private sphere. A multi-site approach, first proposed by anthropologist George Marcus, is a new research methodology where one works in multiple sites and situates the findings in a wider system (Marcus 1995). In this manner, the focus shifts from a single country or geographical area to illuminate an entire network of cultures and customs.

Reframing “area” and reconstructing researcher identity

Inevitably, global issues need to be reframed beyond conventional geographic conceptions such as “Southeast Asia” or the “Middle East.” Funding or communication problems can limit the scope of a research project—it is very difficult for a single researcher to work in sites that are thousands of miles apart—so we need to organize joint research units that consist of various investigators working in different geographical areas. At the moment it is difficult to present findings from such joint research projects in a conventional academic setting, given that universities cling to the authority associated with conventional academic societies. Trends point toward further expansion of research around global issues, which may necessitate a reorganization of existing academic societies devoted to area studies.

Conclusion: Reframing Area Studies

In contrast to the situation in the United States, area studies in Japan has a good chance to survive as an effective and insightful branch of social science. The fate of area studies in the two countries has much to do with historical background. While the birth and development of area studies in the United States were closely linked to national security, the development of area

studies in Japan had little relation to foreign policy.

“Japanese area studies” has an affinity with the precepts of global studies, which is also contrary to the situation in the United States. It is possible to translate “Japanese area studies” as “global studies” rather than “area studies”—a name that, for some, has a negative connotation with state policy. However, this current trend could be a challenge for existing academic societies devoted to area studies. Firstly there is a matter of changing mindsets, in that researchers tend to think of themselves as “a specialist” of a certain country. In the future, researchers will need to understand multiple countries beyond the basics of language and history. Second, it is becoming more important for area studies researchers to make a practical commitment to global issues, and not only to aim to make a contribution to national policy. This trend requires researchers to travel to multiple countries and tackle global issues such as immigration, war, and environmental sustainability. Finally, it could be argued that this trend begs for a reorganization of existing academic societies devoted to area studies. The global movement of people, money, goods, and mores beyond the existing concept of “area” undercuts the foreign policy strategy of the United States after World War II. Moreover, existing academic societies developed based on rigid conceptions of area. In the future, it will be more important to be flexible and customize research agendas to reach beyond existing national borders and academic societies.

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Received: Mar. 16, 2015; Reviewed: May 29, 2015; Accepted: June 5, 2015