

PERSPECTIVES ON ASIA

Asian studies “inside-out”: a research agenda for the development of Global Asian Studies

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Abstract

New areas of research and education are emerging under the banner of Global Asian Studies (GAS). This paper examines the intellectual background of the rise of GAS and proposes a research agenda for the further development of GAS to facilitate the extraction of globally relevant findings with the potential to restore an intellectual foundation for connectedness in an increasingly divided world. The paper examines the ongoing repositioning of Asia studies in relation to the Asianization of Asian studies, new methodologies for a new era, the increasing importance of multi-lingual research, and theorizes the potential of area studies “inside-out” in relation to trends in and studies of globalization. Proposing four focal themes as a platform from which a new GAS may depart, this manifesto paper aims primarily to open up a discussion to eventually serve as a foundation for sustained research and education in the field of GAS.

Key words: Area studies; connectivity; GAS; global Asia; new methodologies

“Global Asia” as an emerging concept

Since the turn of the millennium, a new concept of “global Asia” has emerged, triggered by mushrooming arguments on globalization after the end of Cold War in 1992 and initially coined by the East Asian Foundation in South Korea as a name of their quarterly journal in 2005. The term has been more recently incorporated into the titles of research groups and courses of education. The Global Asia Research Cluster, established in 2015 by the Nanyang Technological University School of Social Sciences, “tracks the rise of Asia and studies the region from an interconnected global-contextualist perspective.”¹ The School of Social Sciences at the National Taiwan University likewise established the Global Asia Research Center (GARC) in 2017 “to promote research on Asian interactions and comparison and to stimulate new ways of understanding Asian modernities in a globalized world.”² NYU Shanghai³ in China and Waseda University⁴ in Japan established research centers called the Center for Global Asia and Global Asia Research Center in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

The concept of “global Asia” is also spreading in universities in Europe and North America, mostly in their teaching portfolios. Utrecht University⁵ in the Netherlands, University of Toronto, Scarborough⁶ and Simon Fraser University⁷ in Canada, Duke University,⁸ Pace

¹ https://www.ntu.edu.sg/sss/research/global-asia#Content_C011_Col00, Accessed on 24th of April, 2021.

² http://www.garc.ntu.edu.tw/?page_id=4765&lang=en, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

³ <https://cga.shanghai.nyu.edu/>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

⁴ <https://www.waseda.jp/global-asia/aboutus>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

⁵ <https://students.uu.nl/en/hum/global-asia>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

⁶ <https://www.uts.utoronto.ca/hcs/global-asia-studies>, Accessed on 13th of December, 2020.

⁷ <https://www.sfu.ca/globalasia.html>, Accessed on 13th of December, 2020.

⁸ <https://igs.duke.edu/initiatives/global-asia-initiative>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

University,⁹ University of Illinois at Chicago,¹⁰ DePaul University¹¹ in the US, for example, have started new educational programs with titles including Global Asia(n) (Studies). Part of this trend reflects the global competition for international students from Asia, yet what we are interested in here is its intellectual content and its potential as a field of scholarly investigation.

What makes Asia “global”

What is the significance of the adjective “global” in “Global Asia Studies”? Why is the concept of “global Asia” gaining ground? We highlight the following three possibilities.

First is the gravity of Asia and its increasing political and economic influence on the global landscape, not to mention the expanding influence of China. “Global” in this context is almost equivalent to “Asia gaining power and scholarly attention.”

Second is the increasing awareness of social connectivity. Both Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and National Taiwan University are putting emphasis on migration studies, because of their keen awareness of Asian migration issues in the region. Conventional migration studies mainly focused on the host society (namely Singaporean and Taiwanese society), analyzing the inclusion/exclusion of domestic migrants. The new paradigm of migration studies, however, is promoting comparative analysis of migration policies and practices in Asia, paying more attention to the relations or contrasts between the sending society and receiving society(ies) of the migrants. In other words, migration studies have come to observe more than two Asian societies which are somehow “bounded” by the flow of migrations in the region. Here, the concept of “global” means “increasing connectivity” among Asian societies reflected in the cross-border movement of people.

Third is the connectivity of the environment and health that has strong implications for inequality within and beyond Asia. From the management of international rivers such as the Mekong, to climate change and natural disasters that ignore national boundaries, countries are forced to work together. “Global” here can be translated as “in the context of global issues.”

It is also important that Global Asian Studies (hereafter, GAS) is increasingly attentive to the “ownership” of these issues by researchers who reside in Asia, or the “Asianization” of Asian studies (Tzeng, Richter, and Koldunova 2018). This trend echoes the rise of “global history,” self-reflective on the issue of Eurocentrism (Conrad 2016, p. 67). Increasing number of local researchers and research institutes on Asian studies in Asia has brought about a greater presence of Asian studies in Asia. The greater presence of Asian studies in Asia has also increased the knowledge created in these centers and, in turn, is increasing the significance of Asia in humanities and social sciences globally.

The emergence of “Asia in Asia”

Subcategories of GAS demonstrate new developments. The International Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto held its first Preparatory Committee meeting for a Consortium for Global Japanese Studies in 2016¹² to set up a network of scholars in this area of research because of the rapid increase of departments and research programs called Global Japan(ese) (Studies). The Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo launched a new project called the Global Japan Studies Research Network in 2014 to create a “bridge between researchers who work on Japan-related topics at Japanese institutions, and their counterparts at universities outside Japan.”¹³

The First World Congress of Taiwan Studies, organized by Academia Sinica, Taiwan since 2012, held their most recent congress under the main theme of “Taiwan in the Globalized World: The

⁹<https://www.pace.edu/academics/undergraduate-students/majors-minors/global-asia-studies-ba>, Accessed on 13th of December, 2020.

¹⁰<https://glas.uic.edu/>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

¹¹<https://las.depaul.edu/academics/global-asian-studies/Pages/default.aspx>, Accessed on 8th of December, 2020.

¹²<https://cgjs.jp/en/>, Accessed on 14th of December, 2020.

¹³<http://gjs.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/about/>, Accessed on 22nd of December, 2020.

Relevance of Taiwan Studies to the Social Sciences and Humanities” in 2018.¹⁴ “Global Taiwan Studies” has also been used for new types of Taiwan studies in the pages of the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* (Fell 2018).

The Education University of Hong Kong¹⁵ has initiated a one-year master program of social sciences in Global Hong Kong Studies, while NYU Shanghai¹⁶ and Duke Kunshan University¹⁷ in China and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology¹⁸ in Hong Kong have set up major degree program called Global China Studies. Sogang University¹⁹ and Kyungsung University²⁰ in South Korea created a new educational program called Global Korean Studies.

These new attempts are more salient in those East Asian societies whose tertiary education has been established by local languages rather than English. Because the expression of new challenges to the conventional Asian studies is articulated predominantly in the English language by the globalizing East Asian intellectuals, the divide between the two schools is easier to demarcate.²¹ Looking beyond the “new” language, however, GAS is a symbol of the rising status of area studies in Asia while conventional area studies in the US have been losing grounds.

Interestingly, Global Japan/Taiwan/Hong Kong/China/Korea Studies have been promoted as reaching beyond the conventional area studies, in which a West-East dichotomy prevailed. In other words, these newly emerging areas of research have been promoting perspectives of “Asia in Asia” as is the case of Global Japan Studies in which the perspective of “Japan in Asia” is gaining ground. The global influence of “washoku (Japanese food culture)” is a case in point. This otherwise domestic topic attracted cross-national as well as interdisciplinary approaches ranging from health, nature-culture studies, history, law, and diplomacy (Kohsaka 2017). Perhaps more importantly, what used to belong to the realm of culture is now intimately linked with politics, as demonstrated by the promotion of washoku by the Japanese government.²²

According to the Japan Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the number of washoku restaurants has increased from 240,000 in 2006 to 1,560,000 in 2019 with a significant increase in Asian countries (MAFF 2019). It is clear that the demand for Japanese cuisine is growing in Asia as is the topic of intellectual analysis. These new initiatives go beyond the study *about* Japan, aiming to build new knowledge *through* the study of Japan.

Repositioning area studies

Shifting to a focus on the global may come with costs, such as overemphasizing cross-border interactions while downplaying more endogenous social change and development, or perpetuating the marginalization of already marginalized local experiences. Perhaps it is useful to step back and reflect on area studies at large and how “global Asia” might position itself in relation to the lessons and legacies of the space-based approach.

On reflection, the role and (in)significance of area studies have always been discussed in reference to something else, some pre-established criteria that help to locate the position of area studies. The focus of the debate has been on its relationship with disciplines (such as economics, political science, and sociology) (Bates 1997). The debate questioned whether area studies are apt for generalization and theory building, i.e., exploring the extent to which the knowledge produced from area studies possesses any universal value. Of course, the question is not “either/or.” As Vincent Houben postulated: “Whereas disciplines look for the universal within variety, Area Studies want to highlight variation

¹⁴ https://wcts.sinica.edu.tw/wctsIII/download/Detailed_Program_180905.pdf, Accessed on 24th of April, 2021.

¹⁵ <https://www.eduhk.hk/ssc/en/mssghks>, Accessed on 15th of December, 2020.

¹⁶ <https://shanghai.nyu.edu/academics/majors/global-china-studies>, Accessed on 15th of December, 2020.

¹⁷ <https://undergrad.dukekunshan.edu.cn/en/global-china-studieshistory>, Accessed on 15th of December, 2020.

¹⁸ <https://www.shss.ust.hk/ug/major/gcs/>, Accessed on 15th of December, 2020.

¹⁹ <http://gks.sogang.ac.kr/english/>, Accessed on 14th of December, 2020.

²⁰ <http://ksccms.ks.ac.kr/gc/CMS/Contents/Contents.do?mCode=MN040>, Accessed on 14th of December, 2020.

²¹ Probably the only exception is Singapore which is aiming to be an intellectual global hub.

²² Similar initiatives are taken by Thai government to export Thai food abroad.

within global universality” (Houben 2017, p. 202). Attaining a certain level of generalization without sacrificing the detailed knowledge of human lives in particular places (Morris-Suzuki 2020, p. 20), therefore, has implications for the status of area studies in the hierarchy of academia.

The tension is not just in the potential for generalization. More importantly, there is an underlying politics of Asia as late-comers to modernization, which creates different distinctions to those in the West (Pletsch 1981). Asian studies, at least in the way it started after the Second World War, accompanied the nuances of how latecomers to industrialization (often seen as “exotic peoples”) come to modernize and transform their culture to become comparable to those of the West, as can be seen in Yoshimi Takeuchi’s argument on “Asia as Method” (Chen 2012). Western scholars were looking at areas of study as a source of “culture shock,” to reflect or to implicitly reaffirm their own culture (Steward 1950, p. 2). This constant use of the West as a reference point has long characterized the way Asian studies have been conducted, and worked to relativize knowledge in relation to would-be universal standards of that (partly imagined) Western civilization.

Allegiance to the disciplines tends to win over “pure” area studies due to the nature of the job market in the US (Ostwald and Schuler 2015). More specifically, most job descriptions give priority to disciplinary training over specific knowledge about a particular region in Asia (Ostwald and Schuler 2015, p. 879). Some also add to this critique that the emphasis of Asian studies as a distinct form of knowledge resulted in the marginalization of Asia, having cut itself off from the disciplines, distancing area-based knowledge from the mainstream.

The situation in the Asian job market, however, is slightly different. Even though the debate on discipline vs. area studies exists, some Asian countries have been promoting Asian studies through their nationally funded foundations/institutions/programs for promoting global/strategic cultural exchange – a mode of funding which has fallen into decline in Western countries since the close of the Cold War.²³ Asian studies in Asia are rising in status in many parts of the region.

New methodologies for a new era

Perhaps the less discussed dimension that relates to the repositioning of area studies is its methodology. While there has been periodic discussion on the relevance of area studies in a broader academic context, not much has been written about how area studies have collected, analyzed, and presented data. Discussions on enhancing the status of area studies in Japan, for example, have tended to leave behind the question of methodology as given, probably sidelined due to the more immediate pressure of declining budgets in humanities and social sciences (Research Committee for Area Studies 2020).

Nonetheless, new methodologies are emerging in GAS due to the digitalization and the spread of open-access data in a globalizing Asia (Sonoda 2018). When it comes to quantitative data, for example, Asia has been changing from a “desert” to an “oasis” of raw data due to numerous national projects in data science. The East Asian Social Surveys (EASS), which were carried out through a collaborative project between the Japanese General Social Surveys Research Center at the Osaka University of Commerce in Japan, the Survey Research Center at Sungkyunkwan University in South Korea, the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and the National Survey Research Center at the Renmin University of China, have been accumulating a dataset that covers four East Asian societies from 2006 to 2015, and the raw data of 2008 are available online.²⁴ The Asian Barometer Survey, initiated by Prof. Fu Hu at Taiwan National University, has already collected five waves of data, which enables researchers to compare several East Asian countries across time, and the raw data are available online.²⁵ These datasets are particularly valuable because they cover some less-developed Asian countries, including Cambodia, Myanmar, and Mongolia, which were not covered by social surveys initiated by non-Asian researchers.

²³They include the Korea Foundation in South Korea, Academia Sinica in Taiwan, Hanban (Confucius Institute Headquarters) in China, and the Japan Foundation in Japan.

²⁴EASS (2020).

²⁵Asian Barometer (2019).

The same can be said of qualitative data. Digital humanities have become a global trend, and Asian studies are participating fully. In the area of conventional sinology, for example, an application programming interface called “Asia Network” has been proposed by a group of scholars to “fully leverage the potential of material digitization and digital research tools without re-creating silos of resources in the digital realm” (Ho, Wang, Belouin, and Chen 2018, p. 1).

Participant observation, one of the central means of data gathering in anthropology, is becoming “multi-sited” and the use of telecommunication in multi-sited ethnography is now a common tool in Asian studies. Scholars can peer into the lives of participants not only through traditional on-site methods, but also by reading personal and professional blogs and opening archives of professional interactions and messages. In the area of migration studies, which tries to capture the relations between countries of departure and host countries of migrants, multi-sited observation is playing a vital role because of its power to capture people on the move (Kharel 2016).

The emergence of new online methods not only changes the scope and subject of research but also ways of doing research. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the potential of online approaches to research into focus. In one sense, scholars in training are forced to take desk studies more seriously in preparation for fieldwork, which has benefits alongside the obvious drawbacks (Sato 2020). In doing so, they discover that not only local documents, but also “remote” documents are far more accessible. Desk research can extend further toward the field. On the other hand, established scholars can communicate with counterparts, whether “native” or not, who are working and living in the field of study. Combined with the increasing number of scholars specializing in the area where they live, or living in the area where they specialize, this has great significance for the potential of scholarly networking. Indeed, many centers researching under the name of GAS describe themselves as hubs for the exchange of expertise amongst scholars who may or may not be physically resident.

These changing methodological environments will make it easier to compare societies and investigate their relations which were not well explored in conventional Asian studies, resulting in some breakthroughs theoretically as well as methodologically. In order to promote such innovative approaches, both new modes of networking and the clarification of a research agenda that articulates the distinctive scholarly contributions of GAS are required.

The increasing importance of multi-lingual research

In order to promote new types of Asian studies, researchers with a command of more than two Asian languages other than English are in a more advantageous position. In other words, GAS is now placing greater importance on multi-lingual research, in addition to English that serves as a lingua franca among Asian scholars in Asia.

In conventional Asian studies in the US, on the contrary, one Asian language and English was a common combination of necessary languages as an Asian study expert. Of course, we can find some great exceptions like the late Prof. Ezra F. Vogel, who had a good command of both Chinese and Japanese and was recognized as an expert in both China studies and in Japan studies. Most of his students, who have promoted sociological Asian studies in the US, however, have chosen one of the Asian languages and focused on a single country for their research.

The “Asianization of Asian studies” has also seen an increasing number of international students from Asia majoring in Asian studies, especially from China in the US, for example. This has further regularized the knowledge of two Asian languages and English. An increasing number of English language educational programs on Asian studies in Asia is also contributing to the change of linguistic acquisition as area study experts. The Information, Technology, and Society in Asia (ITASIA) program at the University of Tokyo, for example, is now producing Ph.D. holders who are trained in English and Japanese and also have a good command of one Asian language as their mother tongue.

Such a trend will continue alongside the consolidation of English as a lingua franca among Asian studies experts in Asia, who most likely undertook doctoral training at foreign universities in Asia.

When it comes to the number of Ph.D. holders on Japanese studies in China, for example, those who obtained their Ph.D. from Japanese universities have outnumbered those who obtained their Ph.D. from Chinese universities since 2010 (Sonoda 2020, p. 354), as those who received their Ph.D. in the 2010s are keenly aware of the importance of using foreign languages in publishing articles. It is foreseeable that the combination of Chinese, Japanese, and English will become commonplace among Japanese study experts in China.

From “outside-in” to “inside-out”

Changes in orientation toward the global and new methodologies also call for a renewed interest in individual research strategies that also question the ways topics are addressed. This may be considered over the span of a career, especially as the training required for familiarity with multiple languages and a second or third region in depth is significant. These shifts facilitate new approaches to research, which allow for a bidirectional consideration of the connections between a region and the global.

Research elucidating the local impact and the context of global phenomenon might be considered an “outside-in” approach. In addition to this established approach, we propose an area studies’ “inside-out” as an essential part of the global research engagement. By “inside-out,” we mean approaching a global perspective based on the long-term experience of a particular society or a set of people to define what is to be studied, respecting the agency of local people in that society or group. Rather than focusing on the one-way intake of global forces by a particular local region, this approach emphasizes the selective reactions to such forces by local people and how their impact might extend beyond the region outward. The subject of research therefore is no different from those under conventional area studies but the questions it addresses differ, and how those questions are addressed differs. Inside-out highlights the *active* experience of those who live through globalization as agents of reflection and change, and focuses on the impact such local agents have in forming the global forces themselves. By “active” we mean a self-reflective process of global engagement rather than marginalizing one-way reception and adaptation to external change.

Let us further elaborate the distinctive contribution of an inside-out approach used in combination with approaches already familiar to Asian studies. Firstly, while conventional area studies attempted to identify the distinctive characteristics of a particular nation-state in question, GAS perspectives will investigate the global make up of such characteristics by delving into the layers of a “nation,” each of which can establish distinctive connections with global forces. They can include units within the government, or ethnic groups, or religious associations. Also, by examining the long-term trend of cross border influence, one can see the sequential adaptation and resistance to external forces, which in turn shape domestic institutions and cultures.

Secondly, ownership of the knowledge creation process works to overcome the “diffusionist assumptions” prevalent in the literature that emphasizes global connectivity (Conrad 2016, p. 74). The dominant discourse in the connectivity literature builds itself on the metanarrative that modernization originated in Europe and gradually diffused to other parts of the World. Those who take a critical position toward cultural imperialism may view the same process as a gradual intrusion and exploitation by the West. Rather than taking an *a priori* position on the direction of change, we focus on the ownership of such knowledge. In this regard, collaborating with Asia-based researchers as equal partners in the form of co-authorship or joint projects should be encouraged.

As the term “Asianization of Asian Studies” suggests, one of the noticeable global effects of Asian studies is that people from Asia are increasingly participating in the discursive realm previously dominated by Western scholars. While local participation strengthens English as the language of communication, the tendency simultaneously shifts the gravity of academic production closer to Asia.²⁶ Asian scholars are now the main builders of Area Studies. However, we need to admit that the main power center in English language will continue to rest with the publishers and universities based in the US

²⁶Indeed, it would be a mistake to assume that the ownership of English continues to be monopolized in those places that formerly regulated its usage (Widdowson 1994).

and UK. Also, the increase in authorship from Asia does not necessarily offer a challenging perspective to the dominant discourse since many Asia-based scholars are trained in the West.

The third and final characteristic is the potential for engagement with practice and policy. Area studies scholars have proven reluctant to be engaged with policy in Asia, putting more emphasis on understanding than attempting influence. Yet the very assumption of globalization is that the context is *changing* regardless of policy. Distancing from policy issues, therefore, rather than being neutral but manifests an endorsement of ongoing change. There is much intellectual space for area specialists with a global perspective. Global targets such as SDGs have to go through institutions in a particular country if implemented at all. This requires a detailed knowledge of the culture and politics, connected with everyday experience, that renders a given policy recommendation acceptable and sustained (Cowen 1997). Illuminating the way that individual countries, and people within, respond to such global demands characterizes the inside-out approach, and its distinctive contribution.

After all, a scholar needs to know some countries deeply enough to establish a frame of reference from which effective comparison can be produced. However, because of the language requirements and the time commitment required to develop expertise even in one country, it has been rare to find area specialists who have a regional coverage. As discussed above, this burden can be minimized through a partnership with domestic authors thanks to increasing connectivity across Asia.

Research agenda for the development of GAS

The research agenda for GAS should be strategically focused on what has been left out in the conventional framing of area studies. Because historical and governmental records are largely collections of papers that legitimize their own policies and existence, there is an inherent bias toward the achievements of the state rather than its failures; a story of self-achieved goals rather of assistance by outsiders. For these reasons, the research agenda for GAS can include topics such as the history of mutual reliance in the formation of national identity. Intensive and ethnographic studies on the long-term impact of foreign aid projects can be an example of this category. Other potential topics include the borrowing and absorption of human resources from one region to another, distribution of food culture, and migration.

Eventually, what is to be researched is a function of what is demanded by scholars and people in Asia. While researchers should not be swayed by fashions or politics directly, there is a clear need to respond to local voices, particularly those of the less powerful. We propose four themes as examples of important themes that will contribute to the development of GAS, each highlighting a key aspect of the inside-out approach. They are intended as an initial foray into the debate on researching Asia:

(1) Society to society movements of ideas and actions

Emerging methodologies and multi-linguistic research make it easier to capture not only local, but also globally significant phenomena from inter-societal perspectives. Cries for democracy and freedom of speech in Hong Kong, for example, is now spreading to other parts of Asia such as Thailand, and these two phenomena are amongst many in which the population of neighboring countries should not neglect. This theme highlights the generativity of local-to-local networks, and researcher-to-researcher networks among civil societies in Asia. In particular, the role of technology, allowing people to connect and allowing the state to surveil, is an emerging tension point that is yet to be systematically tapped by researchers.

(2) Memories of disaster and reconciliation for the future

While Asia can be seen as a hub of economic success, it can also be seen as a location of the disaster. However, how people remember such experience differs and the most knowledgeable are not necessarily the ones who dare to speak out. In Indonesia after the Suharto regime, for example, paramilitary groups reportedly killed more than 1 million “communists” (Kurasawa 2020). The Pol Pot regime in Cambodia practically eradicated the educated classes with deaths estimated in the range of 1–3 million, amounting to 21–24% of total population in Cambodia

in 1975 (Kiernan 2003). How do societies cope with such tragedies? How do people come to forgive those involved? How should such pivotal events be remembered to begin with? By soliciting local stories of forgotten or undocumented disaster, this theme could be a project for global Asia that offers an alternative vision for the future of the region challenging the conventional understanding of its past. Such questions can be answered only by understanding the experience of local people, and their agency in receiving, mediating, and responding to outside forces.

(3) Critical junctures in regional histories

To avoid downplaying local agency while paying attention to the implications of the connectedness of a particular region in Asia may be identified and explained through both global and local factors in power politics. For example, one could investigate the evolution of modern Thailand that navigated the shifting hegemonies in the region: the US in the 1950s and 60s, to Japan from the 70s to 90s, and to China in the 2000s (Pattajit and Sato, *forthcoming*). Some critical junctures serve as “bumps” in the process of globalization, e.g., denial, adaptation, and other negotiations that determined the general direction of change instead of privileging the border-crossing flows. Examining such processes in the long-term may reveal the non-linear process of the evolution of a region shaping global Asia. This theme highlights how such study can reveal nuances in the experiences and mediations of local people that could be missed or flattened in snapshot studies.

(4) Teaching global Asia

How “global Asia” should be taught can be an area of research and cross-disciplinary discussion. What should become the “core” undergraduate curriculum in GAS? Should students focus on one particular region and study the language first to discover the problems and appropriate theories; or should they start with the global and later make applications to cases? Do we teach different materials in the society where a course is hosted, or to students visiting for shorter periods? Experts who are already teaching global Asia can share basic texts and approaches from their experience and discuss how teaching strategies can be nurtured and expanded while paying attention to the local context where such teaching might take place. The question of curriculum brings into focus the need to clarify not only the relation between Asia and the global, but also the relevance of knowledge in relation to the changing experience of people in Asia.

Producing interesting research findings is important. Yet, where area-oriented studies are in a more-or-less inferior position in terms of funding and job prospects, a general claim beyond the region in question should be articulated to remain relevant to broader audiences. A strong bent on theory and generalizations in the social sciences has pushed area studies into the arts and humanities in the US. This did not happen in Asia, including in Japan where area studies are thriving or even developing.²⁷ Where we conduct our research might affect how we conduct our research.

What is to be researched depends also on when we do research in a scholarly career. For young scholars about to venture into the field of Asian studies, it is vital to understand particular countries, languages, and cultures before discovering the “global.” GAS do not necessarily have to target the global directly. In fact, a deep study of a particular country should lead naturally to the global, given time and depth in the study.

To have a secure footing in a particular context is, however, an essential precursor for sensitive analysis and comparison. The point is to depart from an understanding of the country or set of people, and from there venture into global comparison, which might be called an inside-out approach. This is

²⁷The number of department (faculty) of international studies where a lot of area study experts are working has been steadily increasing in Japan since 1987 when a private university set up a new department in Tokyo. As of 2020, 25 universities (including 1 national university and 1 public university) have Faculty of International Studies in Japan (see Knowledge Station 2020).

hard since it pushes us outside of our comfort zone. But the ability to leap, moving from outside-in to inside-out, is required for the next generation of area studies scholars, who will utilize the skills and approaches of conventional area studies for greater engagement with governance and policy, a greater dialogue with the global, and for a positive impact beyond academia that is rooted significantly in the Asian experience.

On top of publishing high-quality studies in conventional Asian studies, *IJAS* aspires particularly to emphasize cutting-edge works in the emerging field of GAS. We hope that our platform will demonstrate the unexplored dimensions of Asian studies that inform other disciplines as well as practical issues at hand.

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