**Selection Review for FY 2024 "Grants for Japan-Related Research Projects"**

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The selection process for the "Grants for Japan-Related Research Projects'" has ended again this year. This year marks the final year of my four-year term, and I was exhausted as I read through over 120 applications, waking up to the new year.

Last year, I wrote a detailed post-selection review for the first time, which was well received by the Foundation's staff. They told me that they could respond to a various of questions raised by the participants in information sessions at a variety of venues in Asia by introducing this review. This is truly rewarding for me.

## 1. Application Status and Selection Process

As with last year, I will focus on the recent four years when I have served as a selection committee member and will comments on the applications received (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Number of Application by Country/Region: 2021-2024**

| FY | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| China | 29 | 34 | 38 | 73 |
| Taiwan | 8 | 10 | 4 | 37 |
| Korea | 17 | 22 | 15 | 24 |
| Thailand | 17 | 40 | 31 | 57 |
| Indonesia | 78 | 78 | 254 | 155 |
| Malaysia | 293 | 350 | 426 | 449 |
| Philippines | 14 | 16 | 14 | 18 |
| Singapore | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Vietnam | 15 | 15 | 24 | 28 |
| Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia | 3 | 3 | 6 | 12 |
| Bangladesh | 7 | 10 | 7 | 13 |
| India, Sri Lanka, and others | 10 | 19 | 32 | 22 |
| Total | 494 | 600 | 853 | 891 |

Although there were few applications in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this table shows the constant increase of the applications during this period. In this one year alone, the number of applications from Indonesia has decreased, while the number of applications from other regions has increased. In recent years, the number of applications from China and Taiwan has stagnated, but this year it has increased significantly. In China, area studies (called "regional and country studies" in Chinese), which includes Japanese studies, became a "first-class discipline" in 2022, and there has been a trend of Japanese language teachers shifting to be Japanese studies scholars. At this point, it is unclear whether the increase in the number of applications this year indicates a long-term trend reflecting such policy changes in China, or just a temporary phenomenon.

891 applications were selected and screened in two stages. In the first stage, 14 expert committee members familiar with local knowledge production in each region of Asia reviewed the applications (in most cases, one expert committee member reviewed the applications, but in areas with a large number of applications, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, multiple expert committee members shared the review work) and narrowed down the candidates for selection. Then detailed comments were added to determine the order of selection, and information such as a reasonable accessed amount was sent to the Foundation's secretariat. The secretariat tallied the results of the first selection and sent the documents that passed the first selection to the two selection committee members. At this point the number of applications to be reviewed was reduced to 127.

Two selection committee members carefully read the 127 applications by taking into account the opinions of the expert committee members, and ranked the final candidates for selection. The results were brought together and discussed at the selection meeting, taking into account the responses to the questions raised during the selection process, to determine the final candidates. This year, 66 applications were awarded, with a competition rate of 13.5 times, higher than last year's 11.3 times.

The lower accessed amount of the two selection committee members was used to ensure that as many applications as possible would be awarded.

## 2. Selection Results and Comments

As in the last year, there were differences in the acceptance rate by country and region. In general, the acceptance rate is high in East Asia, while in countries with a large number of applications, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, the acceptance rate is relatively low (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Number of Awarded Applications by Country/Region: 2021-2024**

| | FY2021 | | FY2022 | | FY2023 | | FY2024 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Awarded | Not awarded | Awarded | Not awarded | Awarded | Not awarded | Awarded | Not awarded |
| China | 12 | 17 | 14 | 20 | 17 | 21 | 16 | 57 |
| Taiwan | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 29 |
| Korea | 6 | 11 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 17 |
| Thailand | 5 | 12 | 6 | 34 | 7 | 24 | 4 | 53 |
| Indonesia | 15 | 63 | 13 | 65 | 12 | 242 | 11 | 144 |
| Malaysia | 13 | 280 | 9 | 341 | 12 | 414 | 10 | 438 |
| Philippines | 4 | 10 | 4 | 12 | 3 | 11 | 3 | 15 |
| Singapore | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Vietnam | 5 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 4 | 20 | 3 | 25 |
| Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 10 |
| Bangladesh | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 13 |
| India, Sri Lanka, and others | 0 | 10 | 2 | 17 | 3 | 29 | 1 | 22 |
| Total | 68 | 426 | 68 | 532 | 69 | 784 | 66 | 825 |

Why so? The reasons can be explained by the selection criteria that I pointed out last year, which include the validity of the research plan, the importance of the research content, and the feasibility of the research, all of which are respected in ordinal research grant, as well as whether the applications meet with unique demand of the Foundation to "enhance "mutual understanding between Asian countries and Japan through promoting research projects in the field of the social sciences or humanities that are related to Japan".

Many applicants in East Asia have experience studying in Japan, and in many cases, they have set unique research themes that reflect the circumstances of their respective countries and regions, aiming at the dialogue and exchange of opinions with Japanese scholars (in other words, research themes that Japanese researchers would not easily come up with or those which they would not be able to carry out even when they did). Moreover, they are well prepared, and the relevance to past research achievements is properly explained. The budget is not overcharged, and the committee members can easily understand the connection between the budget items and specific research activities.

In contrast, many applicants from other parts of Asia, even if they have experience studying in Japan, tend to be biased toward natural science (mostly engineering), and although their applications are written on themes in social sciences and the humanities, many of their applications are immature, with the specific research process not being clear enough. In particular, I found many applications in which the research methods and methodology are explained, but the specific questions, concrete names of interviewees and hypotheses as well as the data to be collected are not disclosed. Moreover, some applicants are intentionally overcharging us, such as overestimating the cost of hiring research assistants. On the other hand, many proposals by researchers in social sciences and the humanities field lack the "unique research themes that reflect the circumstances of each country/region" that East Asian counterparts do, and even when they do, there are problems with feasibility. Some proposals are simply lacking in sufficient preparation, not meeting with the requests from the Foundation.

In order to overcome these problems, as I suggested last year, it would be good to take measures such as (1) including Japanese researchers in the research team (and clearly explaining the reasons for including them and the preparations being made for this), and (2) disseminating the results of the research to Japan/ Japanese researchers (and clearly indicating a concrete plan for this).

I will be stepping down as a selection committee member. I hope more Asian researchers will understand the philosophy of the Foundation's research grants and apply next year onwards.