

# The State of Japanese Studies on Social Science in Thailand

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The study of Japan began in Thailand in a small way in the 1960s. It increased rapidly over the next three decades as Japan became the most significant external influence on Thailand's economy, and a growing influence on its modern culture. Over these forty years, almost all the studies by Thai scholars concentrated on the importance of Japan for Thailand – as trade partner, as investor, as model for education, as destination for labor migrants, and as a foil for historical comparison. Only in the last fifteen years have Thai scholars begun to study Japan for itself.

In this survey, I look mainly at works on social science, with some emphasis on economics since that has been the primary focus of study, but I also look briefly at adjacent areas in the arts and humanities. The final section of the paper assesses the current situation and future prospects, based on a survey of views from leading figures in Japanese studies in Thailand.

## **Beginnings**

The Thai elite has long been interested in Japan's economic success from the Meiji period onwards (Chatthip, 1983). Even at the time, King Chulalongkorn employed Japanese to teach Thais about silk production, and to serve as legal experts for the government, but he did not hire any expert on industrial development strategies. Later in 1932, when a group of reformers overthrew the absolute monarchy and introduced a parliamentary system, the reformers said they were inspired by Japan's economic success and parliamentary democracy. When the reformers established Thammasat University in the 1930s, a Japanese professor, Shoji Ito, was invited to teach economics in the M.A. program. He wrote a text book, *Economics in Depth (Setthasat Pitsadan)*, first published in 1935, drawing many examples from Japan's economic growth.

Because of the closeness between Thailand and Japan in the period before World War Two, several Thais went to do graduate study in Japan. Prominent people of the time wrote books on Japan, including Sin Kamonnawin on *The War between Japan and*

*Russia*, Luang Vichit Vadhakan on Japanese history in the eighth volume of his *World History (Prawatisat Sakon)*, and the socialist intellectual Kulap Saipradit who set his famous novel, *Behind the Picture*, partly in Japan.<sup>1</sup>

### **1960s: Studying Japan to understand Thailand**

Thai interest in Japan was interrupted by World War Two, and revived in the 1960s after the Japanese economy recovered and began to grow even more spectacularly than before the war. Thai-Japan trade increased and Japanese investment became significant. Also in this era, Thai universities began to expand. The Japanese government offered scholarships for Thai students to study for bachelor degrees in Japanese universities. The first Japanese language courses were introduced in Thammasat University in 1964 and Chulalongkorn University in 1966.

At this stage, there were no true “Japan experts.” However, a handful of scholars who had a broad interest in Asia in general devoted a significant part of their attention to Japan. Mostly they were trained at US universities. For the most part, they focused on Japan in order to know Thailand better, rather than to understand Japan for itself. The most prominent areas of study were Japan’s historical development since the Meiji era, and Japan’s economic success since the World War Two. In both cases, Japan’s experience was studied in order to compare it to that of Thailand.

The pioneers were Khien Theerawit, the Director of the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, and Likhit Dhiravegin (later Associate Professor and Dean, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University). Both learned Japanese, and wrote mostly on politics or economic relations. Khien wrote three books on Japan: *Evolution of Japanese Politics* (1965), *Japan’s Political System* (1968) and *Japan’s Foreign Policy* (1968). Likhit wrote an important article on ‘Contrasting Modernization in Chulalongkorn’s Siam (1868-1910) and Meiji Japan (1867-1912)’ (1970). In addition, there was a sprinkling of works by other scholars on history, culture, religion and beliefs, such as *Japanese Civilization* by Pechari Sumit (1968) (Chatthip, 1983).

### **1970s: Studying Japan’s importance for Thailand**

Over the 1970s, Japanese exports to Thailand and investment in Thailand both increased very rapidly. Thailand faced an economic depression due to the hike in oil prices in the early 1970s, which resulted in inflation and large current account deficits. As the trade deficit with Japan was very large, there was a student movement to boycott

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specified, all the works by Thai writers on Japan cited here were written in Thai.

the consumption of Japanese goods. Similar incidents happened in neighboring countries.

Interest in Japanese economy and society was enhanced by the rise of Japan as an economic power, its success in coping with the oil price hike (while Europe and the US experienced an economic recession), and the increased importance of Japan to the Thai economy. Japanese government promoted Japanese studies all over the world with generous funding. What happened in Thailand followed the world trend.

Against this background, Thai researchers made studies on the economic relations between the two countries and tried to understand the rise of Japan from historical perspectives. Khien Theeravit remained the major contributor. In *The Economic Relations Between Thailand and Japan* (1974), Khien discussed the development of the Japanese economy from World War Two onwards, compared the experience of Thailand, and analyzed the Japanese economic influence on Thailand. In collaboration with other scholars he produced, *Thai Perceptions of China and Japan* (1975), and *Thailand–Japan Relations from the Thai Perspective* (1979). At about this time Dr Warin Wonghanchao set up a Japanese Study Group at Kasetsart University. Later both Warin and the group moved to Chulalongkorn University.

In order to provide texts for Thai students, several books were published in Thai on various aspects of Japanese society, history and politics. Some were translations, and the rest were mainly adaptations and syntheses of academic works originating from the west. The Thai academics who produced these works came from the major state universities, namely Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Ramkhamhaeng, Sinakharinwirot and Kasetsart. The Social Science Association of Thailand received some funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to produce textbooks on Japan, and the Japanese government provided generous funding for promoting Japanese studies, especially through the Japan Foundation.<sup>2</sup> The 1970s also saw some theses on Japanese topics by M.A. students.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Among works of this era were: *History of Japanese Civilization*, translated by Petchari Sumit (1973); *New Era of East Asia*, translated by Petchari Sumit (1975); *Contemporary Japanese Imperialism*, translated by Saneh Chamarik (1975); *Modern Japanese History*, translated by Panni Sungbunmi and Prakaithong Sirisuk (1977); *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary (1960), translated by Chamnong Tongprasert (1971); *The Influence of Shintoism on Japanese Society after the Second World War* (1977); *Japanese Economic History*, a basic Thai text book by Watchana Sangrasmi (1978); *Japanese History* (1979) and *Japanese Civilization* (1987) by Pensri Kajanomai; and 'Labour Movement in Japan' by Prasert Chittiwatanapong in 1976.

<sup>3</sup> For example Suphon Pinsipetchkul on some aspects of Japanese pre-history, and Chukiat Banthuwong on Japanese foreign policy.

## 1980s: Studying Japan's impact on Thailand

In the mid 1980s the Thai economy revived and entered a boom period that lasted until the mid 1990s. A major factor in the boom was the unprecedented inflows of foreign investment from Japan and other East Asian sources following the Plaza Accords in 1985 and the subsequent rise in the value of the yen. Moreover, this investment had a new aspect: besides investments from large Japanese firms, there were new inflows from Japanese small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These inflows helped to spark a ten-year boom in the economies of Thailand and its Southeast Asian neighbors.

Japan became the single largest influence on Thailand's economy. Against this background, Thai scholars showed more interest in understanding Japanese politics, society and economy. Instead of using Japan's historical experience as a foil for comparing Thailand, scholars now focused on understanding Japan's involvement in Thailand. That meant understanding more on how the Japanese economy worked, what were the motives behind Japanese companies investing in Asia, what factors influenced Japanese foreign policy, and who was important in Japanese politics.

Several book on the Japanese economy were translated into Thai.<sup>4</sup> Some Thai economists compiled works on economic relations between Thailand and Japan, and on key topics such as Japanese investment and the reasons behind Thailand's trade deficit.<sup>5</sup> In addition several books on Japanese business management and Japanese-style production management were translated from English into Thai, and were used in university courses on business, along with American textbooks (Natenapha, 2004).

The limited number of books on the Japanese economy and management reflected relatively scant interest on the part of Thai researchers and academics in understanding the larger context and underlying causes behind Japan's economic success. There was no debate in Thai academic circles about Japan's economic history, or about the

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<sup>4</sup> Including: *Japanese Economic History* (1983); *Market Strategies*, translated by Somkid Jatusiphithak (1986); *Bargaining Japanese Style*, translated by Amnuey Pathiphatphaophon (1986); *Economic Development of Modern Japan*, translated by Kanoksak Kaewthep and Busaba Khunasirin; and *The Challenges of Japanese SMEs*, translated by Wai Jamonman (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Key works included: Banyat Surakanvit, ed., *Japanese Economic Development: Valuable Lessons* (1983); Suwinai Phoranawalai, *Structure of the Japanese Economy and the Development of World Capitalism after the Second World War* (1980), *Theory of the Multinational Corporations and Thai Economic Development* (1987), and *Japanese Companies and Thailand's NIC* (1989); Khoonthong Intharathai, *Knowing Japan: Its Economy and Society* (1983); Kongsak Sonteperksawong, *The Evolution of Japanese Capitalism* (1985); Medhi Krongkaew, 'The Japanese Economy According to Thai Economists' (1989). Of these only that of Khoonthong Intharathai was written by a Japan specialist and based on research conducted in Japan.

different analyses of the Japanese economic “miracle.” Students of economic development showed little interest in studying the Japanese model.

This lack of interest in Thailand in a “Japanese model” of development is curious. Perhaps it can be explained this way. Thailand was an overwhelmingly agrarian country, and until the late 1970s most of its economic growth still came from agriculture. Japan’s model of industrialization depended on taxing agriculture to raise capital, but such a strategy would face opposition from vested interests in Thailand. From the 1970s there was some attempt by Thai policy-makers to pursue import substitution policies, with the major aim of overcoming Thailand’s persistent trade deficits. Yet the Thai government was not interested in adopting a fully fledged industrial policy along the lines of Japan and South Korea. Thai economic policy makers were heavily influenced by mainstream economics that stressed the importance of the market mechanism and discouraged government intervention except for general macro-economic policies (monetary and fiscal policies) to provide economic stability to facilitate the working of the market mechanism. Policy-makers seemed reconciled to the idea that Thailand was a latecomer which had no choice but to let its industrialization be dictated largely by the forces of globalization – that is by welcoming foreign direct investment, and by becoming a part of global production chains.

Yet Thai policy makers were interested in employment, and concerned whether foreign investment, with its in-built bias towards capital-intensive production, would generate enough new employment to absorb Thailand’s rapidly increasing labor force. For this reason, government planners and academic economists were fascinated by the roles of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as employment generators in Japan.

During the 1980s, there were a few studies on SMEs in Japan, notably by Busaba Kunasirin. I went to Japan on a JSPS scholarship and did a research on the place of SMEs in Japanese foreign investment.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1980s I did another study on *The New Wave of Japanese Investment in ASEAN*,<sup>7</sup> pointing out the shift of orientation from import substitution to export, as well as a change of policy on the part of Japanese investors towards building up some technological capabilities among local sub-contractors and support industries so that Southeast Asia could better serve as an offshore platform for Japanese firms.

With the rise of the Japanese economy, Japanese politics became of more

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<sup>6</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, ‘Decision-Making of Japanese SME’s and Japanese Investment in Developing Countries in the 1980s’, *Developing Administration Journal*, Bangkok, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 1990. In English.

interest to Thai scholars, with some venturing into history and culture.

Several western studies on Japanese politics, society and history were translated into the Thai language. The famous two by American scholars were *Japan as Number One* by Ezra F. Vogel and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict.<sup>8</sup> Khien Theerawit continued to study Japan as part of his broad interest in Asia. Prasert Chittiwattanapong, a graduate of a Japanese university, wrote prolifically on Japan's modern history and politics.<sup>9</sup>

The 1980s saw the opening of another area of Japanese studies as a result of Japan's larger role in the world, and its special importance as an economic partner of Thailand. Thai researchers became interested in the influence of Japanese culture on Thai society. There were studies of the impact of Japanese cartoons on secondary school students, and comparative studies of the ethical aspects of characters in Thai, Japan and China television dramas.<sup>10</sup>

### **1990s and 2000s: Japan and Thailand in Globalization**

By the 1990s, Thailand had a small cohort of scholars who had been educated in Japan. In addition, some Thai students who had been educated in Japan remained there to work, and also began to contribute to research on Japan in the Thai language.

#### **Economics**

The major focus remained on economics, and especially on understanding Japan because of its major role in the Thai economy. In the early part of the decade, when Japanese investment was pouring into Thailand and a new Japanese factory opening every three days, the major interest was in the dynamics of Japanese capitalism. But the economic recession in Japan which began in the 1990s and continued until the early

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<sup>8</sup> Others included: *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State* by E. H. Norman, translated by Phanee Chatpollarak and M.R. Siengsom Kasemsri (1983); *The Japanese* by Edwin O. Reischauer, translated by several academics and edited by Wutthichai Munsil and Supattra Nilwatchara (1981); *Japan's Modern Century* by Hugh Borton, translated by Wutthichai Munsil and Supattra Nilwatchara (1983); *Japan and the Decline of Western Imperialism in Asia 1894-1943* (1982); *Modern Japanese History* (1982); and *Japanese World View* (1983).

<sup>9</sup> His books included: *Democracy in Japanese History* (1980); *Japanese Soldiers: Ideology and the Transformation* (1982); *Japanese Policy Toward Southeast Asia: Fukuda Doctrine* (1985); *Issues concerning Decentralization and the Election of Governors: Case Study of Japan* (1988).

<sup>10</sup> Examples include: Siriwan Lophanpaibun, 'Comparative Studies of Ethical Roles of Characters in Thai, Chinese and Japanese Television Dramas and Serials,' M.A. thesis, 1989; Duangrat Kamalobol, 'The Study of the Social Construction of Emotion of the Japanese Cartoon TV Series,' M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1992.

2000s prompted researchers in Thailand to reassess the development experience of Japan and its relevance to Thailand. After Thailand was hit by the financial crisis of 1997, the question of Japan's role in the recovery and in the post-crisis era became another subject of interest.

In the annual volume of collected articles on Japanese Studies published by the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, there was an article on 'Japanese Economy: Present and Future' in every issue from 1999 to 2005 (Saikaew, various years). Suwinai Pornvalai, Somphop Manarangsarn, and Khoonthong Intharathai composed analyses of Japan's bubble and lost decade,<sup>11</sup> while *The Bubble Economy: The Japanese Economic Collapse* by Christopher Wood, was translated into Thai by Apassorn Ritrangkla (1995). Another scholar, Kitti Prasartsuk wrote on the decline and restructuring of the Japanese economy.<sup>12</sup> Somphop and Khoonthong also researched on Japan's role in Thailand's recovery from the 1997 crisis.

Interest in Japanese SMEs was sustained by Surichat Thammathaweethipul,<sup>13</sup> while other Thai economists wrote on agricultural cooperatives,<sup>14</sup> the auto industry,<sup>15</sup> public budgeting,<sup>16</sup> technology transfer,<sup>17</sup> and business structure.<sup>18</sup> Several MA theses examined different aspects of the Japanese economy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Suvinai Pornawalai, *Bubble Capitalism* (1994); Somphop Manarangsarn, *From Japan: Fighting with Recession Before Being Economic Superpower* (1995), and *Japan Finance: Finance of the Sword, Aftermath of Bubble Burst* (2003). Khoonthong Intharathai, the Japanese expert, wrote two pieces in the English language, one on the bubble: 'Japan 's Development: from the Viewpoint of Southeast Asia', in Wolf Mendl ed., *Japan and South East Asia Volume II: The Cold War Era 1974-1989, and Issues at the End of the Twentieth Century*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001; and 'When an Economic Giant Gets Sick: Analysis of Japanese Economy and Politics', Chiang Mai: Sirilak Publishing ( in Thai).

<sup>12</sup> Kitti Prasartsuk wrote two articles, one on 'The Long-term Decline of the Japanese Economy' (2002) and one on 'Japanese Economic Restructuring' (2003).

<sup>13</sup> An article on 'Theory of SME Business' (based on Japan) (1999).

<sup>14</sup> Dusit Jesadapitak wrote 'Agricultural Co-operatives (Nokyo) in Japan' (1992);

<sup>15</sup> Noppadol Buranathanung wrote an article on 'Rationalization of Japanese-based Multinational Enterprises: Automobile Components Production in ASEAN' (1997).

<sup>16</sup> Worawet Suwanrada, a Japanese trained economist at Chulalongkorn University, wrote an article on 'The Analysis of Public Investment Budget Allocation; Theoretical and Simulation Analysis' (1998).

<sup>17</sup> *Japan's Role in Technology Transfer* by Anuphap Tiralap (1992);

<sup>18</sup> *Business Structures: Kigyo Shudan and Keiretsu* (1999) by Wai Jamornmarn.

<sup>19</sup> Popular topics include comparing Japan and US markets for Thai exports (e.g. demand for frozen shrimps, chicken, rubber, other agricultural goods, garments, furniture, jewelry); various aspects of Japanese direct investment in Thailand; auto-part procurement system in Thailand as compared to the US; lessons to be learned from Japanese experience (industrial policies, especially for exports; roles of the

The 1997 crisis prompted renewed interest in Asian financial cooperation, and in Asian integration more generally, and this opened up another area of academic interest.<sup>20</sup> Discussion on deepening East Asian integration beyond the production networks created by the investments of multinational corporations and towards currency union along the line of the EU surfaced in ASEAN meetings and in academic seminars among Thai and Japanese scholars. The rise of China also raised new questions for relations between ASEAN and Japan.<sup>21</sup>

### **Political Science**

By the 1990s, courses on Japanese politics and government were offered in five public universities (Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart, Songkhla, Ramkhamhaeng, Srinakharinwirot and Thammasat), and some also covered Japanese foreign policy. However, the numbers taking this option to MA level were limited. For the first time in 2000, candidates could take a paper on Japanese language as part of the entrance examination for political science in Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities, yet only one or two students were admitted each years with this qualification.

Among scholars of politics, the major focus of study remained the relations between the two countries, or between Japan and Southeast Asia in general.<sup>22</sup>

But at the same time, there was growing interest in the politics, government and public administration of Japan itself.<sup>23</sup> Chaiwat Khamchoo wrote on *Why the Liberal Democratic Party Could Govern Japan for 37 Years* (1991), and Prasert Chittiwatanawong on *Decentralization and Local Election in Japan* (1997). Major English-language works on Japan in world politics were translated into Thai, including

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public sector; liberalization of the telecom industry), understanding Japanese economy and economic organizations (financial sector, banking, subcontracting in automobiles, business cycles).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, 'Experience and Prospects of Financial Cooperation in ASEAN, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> At the workshop on 'Emerging Developments in East Asia FTA/EPAs' organized by the Core University Program at Kyoto and Doshisha Universities in October 2006, papers were presented on 'Japan-Thailand EPA: Problems and Future' by Suthiphand Chirathivat; 'Regional Economic Integration and Its Impact on Growth, Poverty and Income Distribution,' by Chaiwoot Chaipan et al; 'Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam and East Asian Integration' by Chalongphop Sussangkarn. All these topics involved the roles of Japan.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Nophadol Chartprasert, *Thailand-Japan Relations 1932-1945: From Co-existence to Alliance* (2000, in English); Nipaporn Suthiporn, *The Cultural Relationship Between Thailand and Japan 1932-1945* (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Apinand Phooprasert, 'A Study on the Attitudes of Thai Local Staffs upon Production Related Training System among Japanese and American Companies in Thailand,' M.A. thesis, Thammasat University, 2000.



*The Japanese Question* by Kenneth Pyle, translated by Surangsi Tansiansom (1997).

With the rise of China, and the re-emergence of historical conflicts between Japan and China and North Korea, more Thai scholars paid attention to the changing role of Japan in regional security.<sup>24</sup>

### **Migration**

One new area of research interest which opened up in the 1990s was a result of the increase in labor migration, both legal and illegal, between Thailand and Japan. In 1995, for example, Thai migrants constituted the largest share (5 percent) of all illegal migrants into Japan (Japanese Ministry of Justice, cited in Surichai, 1999). Stories of human trafficking, especially to supply the Japanese sex trade, became a common feature of the Thai press, often with lurid details about maltreatment by traffickers, mamasan and yakuza, as well as corruption among government officials and employment agents. Other press stories focused on the growth of a “little Thailand” in certain cities of Japan (Osaka, Tokyo), and on the lives of Thai illegal migrants.

As part of a broader survey of illegal economies, I made a study which attempted to calculate (based on survey questionnaires of some Thai prostitutes in Japan) the income earned from trafficking women for the Japanese sex trade.<sup>25</sup> A former official in the Thai consulate in Japan wrote on ‘Thai Migrant Workers in Japan’, showing the routes by which Thai prostitutes entered Japan through co-operation between Thai traffickers and the yakuza (Udom, 1999). A Thai researcher studied the ways Japanese men treated Thai prostitutes in Japan.<sup>26</sup>

### **Education**

Studies on Japanese education received interests in the 1990s. Japan had risen to become a major economic power despite its lack of natural resources, and despite the devastation of World War Two. Thai academics and researchers sought to understand how Japan’s policies on education and human resources had contributed to her economic

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<sup>24</sup> See ‘Japan’s Roles in Politics and the Security of the Asian Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ in *Collected Articles on Japanese Studies*, ed. Yupha Khlangsuwan, Thammasat University, 1999; Proceedings of a Seminar on the Great Powers of Asia: Japan, China, Institute of Asian Studies Chulalongkorn University, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit et al, *Guns Girls Gambling Ganja: Thailand’s Illegal Economy and Public Policy*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Suriya Samutkup and Phatthaya Kitti-Asa, ‘Hell of Sushi Land or Heavenly Land of the Sun’ (2000).

success.<sup>27</sup>

### **Studying Japan for itself**

By 2004, some 150 institutions were offering Japanese language courses. Six of the fifty public universities offered courses on Japan, primarily on economy and politics. The numbers of scholars educated in Japan continued to increase, and a Japanese Studies Network was formed in the late 1990s. In 1997, an M.A. in Japanese Studies was inaugurated at Thammasat University.

With this maturing infrastructure, more Thai scholars took to studying Japan *for itself* rather than because of Japan's importance for Thailand. One major signal of this new trend appeared in history where three Thai scholars published works of original research.<sup>28</sup> But the boom area in the late 1990s and early 2000s was in studies of Japan's popular culture.

Kitti Prasirtsuk (2004) pointed out that this boom was "student-led rather than scholar-led ... a kind of bottom-up interest in Japanese studies." It began principally with MA thesis which focused on gender relations and sex education as portrayed in Japanese cartoons. Some researchers examined how these media were being transferred into Thailand, and what impact they were having on Thai youth.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently young

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, *Comparative Studies of Elementary School Curriculum of Japan and Thailand*, by Duangduen Thesavanit (1992); *A Research Report on Education Decentralization: The Japanese Experience as a Reference for Thailand*, by Chollada Chittiwatthanapong, 1994; *The Modernization of Japanese Education* (tr.) by Somkiat Chopphon, 1991, 'Japanese Education' in *Collected Articles on Japanese Studies*, ed. Yupha Khlanguwan, Thammasat University, 1999; 'Strategies to Build up Human Resources Japanese Style' by Warinthon Wowong, in *Collected Articles on Japanese Studies*, ed. Saikaew Thi-phakon, Chulalongkorn University, 1999; Narumol Aphinives, 'Research on the Integration of Environmental Education into School Curriculum in the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia', (Asian Public Intellectual Programme, Nippon Foundation, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Several good researches on Japanese history in the 2000s are: *Prince Shotoku and His Role on Buddhism* by Kanokwan Suthiporn (2002); *The Cultural Relationship Between Thailand and Japan, 1932-1945* by Nipaporn Ratchatapattanakul (2002); *The Reformation of Buddhism in the Kamakura Period (1185-1333 A.D.)* by M.L. Chakrabha Abhakara (2003); *Emperor, Nobles, Warriors and Merchants in Pre-Modern Japanese Society* by Pipada Youngcharoen (2003).

<sup>29</sup> At Chulalongkorn University, Duangrat Kamalobol, 'The Study of the Social Construction of Emotion of the Japanese Cartoon TV Series', 1992; Jutima Phetcharat, 'The Impact of Japanese Cartoons with Sex Contents by Thai Youth in Bangkok on Their Perceptions about Sexual Relations', 1999; Chatnarong Wisutkun, 'Male Youth's Attitudes Towards Japanese Cartoons with the Content of Violent-Sex in Print and Electronic Media', 2000; Nonthaya Pongphakai, 'The Transmission about Gender Relations in Japanese Cartoons', 2001; Wiparat Panritdum, 'Foreign Cultural Influence on Thai Adolescent Identity: A Case of Study of Japanese Music'. Yanathon Jiarattanakun, is completing her thesis on 'YAOI: Gay Cartoon by Women for Women,' see Yanathon Jiarattanakun, 'The Culture and Politics of Gender' presented at a seminar on Transnationalisation and Cultural Diversities, organized by the National Research Council of Thailand, Bangkok, September 22, 2006. At Thurakitbandit University: Songphon Soisuwan, 'Presentation of the Sex-Related Content in Japanese Cartoons,' 1999. At

Thai lecturers who were not trained as Japan experts also became interested in this phenomenon of the popularity of Japanese popular culture.<sup>30</sup>

In summary, in the 1990s, Japanese studies in Thailand focus on understanding Japan and Thailand in globalization. The first set of topics revolved around the impact of the financial crisis in 1997 and the prominent roles Japan played in helping rescue the Thai economy and that of the region. The topics of researches were analysis of Japan's economic bubble and lost decade, Thai-Japanese relations, and regional co-operation to prevent future crisis. The other set of topics revolved around flows between the two countries, including labor migration of Thai to Japan, Japan as a model for education, and Japanese popular culture and its impact in Thailand. In the early 2000s, there was a trend towards research on Japan per se, particularly in the areas of history and popular culture.

### **Limitations, Difficulties, Future Directions**

Japanese studies in Thailand are limited. Most works are translations or distillations of studies that originated in the west, often produced to serve as texts in university courses, or for a general readership. Extremely few studies have resulted from the researchers' original work based on Japanese sources or field study in Japan. Most of those researching and writing on Japan are not Japan specialists and do not have the language. That has begun to change in the last fifteen years, but not radically.

Research interest on Japan in Thailand has tended to be concentrated in economics, politics, international relations, and the impact of Japanese popular culture inside Thailand itself. These are areas which do not necessarily require Japanese language capability. The focus has been on looking to Japan as a model (learning from Japan), or analyzing the impact of Japan on Thai society.

Courses on Japanese language are available in several universities, and the popularity of these courses increased significantly when Japan became more important to the Thai economy from the 1980s onwards. However, graduates of these courses mostly proceed into business careers. There are very few who go into academia, and those have tended to concentrate on linguistics, rather than social science.

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Thammasat University: Two graduate students are conducting research on 'The meaning of Green-Tea Boom' and 'The Meaning of the Boom in Japanese Pop', 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Kamjon Luiyaphong, a liberal Arts lecturer at Thammasat University recently gave a presentation on 'The Influence of Japanese Manga in Thailand.' Somsuk Hinwimarn from the Faculty of Journalism and Panarai Ostapirat from the Faculty of Sociology at Thammasat University, are both interested in issues relating to Japanese pop culture. Kitti Prasirtsuk is of the opinion that "These scholars are likely to produce works on Japanese pop culture in Thailand in the future" (Kitti, 2004.).

The shortage of researchers in Japanese studies is a severe problem as well as the inadequacy of support systems and facilities for them. Researchers graduated from Japan in particular do not go into Japanese studies although they have big potential. Natenapha (2004:14) is of the opinion that “universities and research institutions in Thailand should take responsibility and initiative in addressing these problems... universities and related institutions in Japan should also be asked for their increasing support...” Kitti (2004) argued that Thailand’s rapid economic development has backfired in some ways by attracting potential researchers into lucrative employment in the private sector.

In the past few years students and researchers have been drawn to competing areas of study including Muslim studies, the Mekong region, and the rise of China. The South Korean government has also been giving support to Korean studies and researches. Some of the older and more experienced researchers have shifted their field of interest away from Japan to China (notably, Khien, Somphop, Suwinai), the Mekong region, and Muslim studies (Saikaew, 2004).

Availability of funding for social science research is another problem. There are more scholarship and grants for Thai students and researches in the technological field.

Research has tended to focus heavily on the interrelations or comparison of Japan and Thailand in specialized areas such as modernization, rural development, the role of the state, and business management. Partly this is due to the interest of the researchers, and partly due to the policies of funding agencies such as the Japan Foundation. There have been relatively few good works which help Thai readers to understand Japanese society (Chatthip, 1983). In an important work published in 2005 entitled *Japanization* the book is in Thai with this title in English), Atthachak Sattayanurak noted, “Thais never really know or understand Japanese society, even though books in Thai on Japan are the most numerous among books about foreign countries in Thailand.”<sup>31</sup>

The younger generation among M.A. students are interested in Japanese studies because of the influence of Japanese popular culture (manga, cartoons, fashion, food, music, etc). The opening of an M.A. program in Japanese studies at Thammasat helped to stimulate this interest, but the interest is broader than that. Many of the M.A. theses on Japanese popular culture came from other programs in liberal arts, mass media, politics or even in economics. These young scholars will be an important pool of researchers in Japanese studies in the future. However many of them may not have the language.

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<sup>31</sup> Atthajak Sattayanurak, *Japanization*, Bangkok, Open Books, 2005, 181.

According to Kitti (2004), there is a new generation of Japan specialists in their 30s or early 40s who are likely to play a key role in the future. These include Nophadol Chartprasert and Pipada Yongcharoen in history; Siriporn Waijjawalku in political science; Patamawadee P. Suzuki, Hongpha Sapbunruang, Kriengkrai Techakanont, and Worawet Suwanrada in economics; and Chomanard Sitisarn, and Boonyong Chunsuvimol on culture and society.

To survey opinions on the appropriate future direction of Japanese Studies in Thailand, I sent questionnaires to prominent academics and researchers in Japanese studies.

I found that political scientists in general are quite happy that the focus in social science should remain on comparative studies between Thailand and Japan. However two scholars argued that “Japanese studies in the future should not be focused on how Japan as a superpower or rich country can help Thailand. It should not be geared towards studying about Japan. Studies should be based on the idea of how Japan and Thailand can co-operate for mutual benefits. For Thailand’s sake, we might try to figure out how to co-operate with Japan in the development of the Indochinese countries. Area studies should be the basis of issue studies.” (Saikaew and Nipaporn, 2004)

Others have argued that Japanese studies in Thailand should focus on deeper understanding of Japan’s history, economy, philosophy and culture (Chatthip, 1983, Atthachak, 2005, Kitti, 2004). In other words, these scholars are calling for researchers to focus on Japan per se, and not on subjects which will help Thailand’s development. This kind of approach needs active promotion and funding. In Kitti’s words, “Japanese grant agencies should encourage basic research, translations of classic books, and networking among Japan specialists” (Kitti, 2004). Support for publications in Thai language should also be increased (Chatthip, 1983). Kitti further suggests that “The final goal of networking should be the foundation of a Southeast Asian Association for Japanese Studies.” (Kitti, 2004).

On the future prospects, Japanese study is far from being in decline. It is just coming onto a new plane in the last few years. The recent expansion of interest in popular culture, history, religion, modern political development, economy and public policy is likely to continue and expand. In addition, there is likely to be growing interest in the processes of regional co-operation and integration, in which Japan will play a prominent role. Some believe that regional issues fall within international relations and are thus not part of social science, but in reality it is difficult to separate the two areas. Regional integration involves questions of culture, interest groups, political and economic structures and other matters which are in the realm of social science.

For some researchers, cultural studies have a tendency to be fuzzy and lacking in discipline. However, many younger generation researchers are drawn towards popular culture because it deals with ideas, themes, modes of expression, and analysis of problems which appeal to them personally and which they do not seem to be able to find elsewhere. Some of those whose interest in Japan is sparked by this new enthusiasm for cultural studies may later branch into history, culture, or social science and help to bring about a deeper understanding of Japan in all its aspects.

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