

EDITORIAL NOTE

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES *Vol. 14, No. 2, 2025*

Special Issue on Building a Sustainable Japanese Studies in Malaysia: A Two-Pronged Agenda

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This special issue takes a clear position. Japanese Studies in Malaysia can grow in a sustainable way only when two efforts move forward together with intention. The first effort is to connect Japanese language education with area inquiry in purposeful ways. The second is to design a pipeline that prepares the next generation of researchers. For many years, language and area studies have often moved on separate tracks. One has focused on building linguistic proficiency. The other has emphasized cultural, historical, and social analysis. Our goal is not to merge them into a single curriculum. Our goal is to create thoughtful touchpoints where the two intersect and support each other in classrooms, research practices, and public engagement. We make this case as members of a national ecosystem that is small but energetic. Our capacities are uneven and our funding is limited. These constraints do not reduce our hopes. They encourage us to concentrate on mechanisms that work, steps we can measure, and responsibilities we can share.

The Malaysian context helps explain why this agenda matters now. Students, educators, and the wider public connect with Japan through formal courses. They also connect through popular culture, digital communities, and everyday practices that bring language, media, and meaning into the same frame. If we keep language and area inquiry apart, we risk thinning both. Language can become a skill without context. Context can become a story without access to primary materials. When language instruction uses authentic texts, current media, and social questions from Japanese Studies, learners meet vocabulary in living contexts. They also gain tools that help them see how linguistic forms carry history and cultural nuance. The reverse is also true. When area-studies courses use unmodified Japanese sources such as policy briefs, news clips, artworks, fan forums, and company documents, students build analytical agility that rests on real language use. Many also discover their own motivation to deepen proficiency.

Since 2024, the national community has begun to organize around this two-part agenda. The Malaysian Association of Japanese Studies, working with The Japan Foundation, Kuala Lumpur, launched the Next Generation Symposium on Japanese Studies as an annual event that rotates across host institutions. The symposium pairs student research with expert mentorship and strong peer networks. It creates a visible path from coursework to presentation and then to publication. This initiative is not a side project. It is a backbone for the field. It provides scaffolding that turns language–area integration and researcher development into shared practice rather than individual improvisation. The present volume lines up with that trajectory. It shows how integration works in real classrooms and how research capacity can grow through community ecosystems that include fan cultures and informal learning spaces.

We present the contributions in two movements that mirror the agenda. The first movement highlights formal integration. In the article by Kim Hyogyung, titled “Learning in

Online Case-Based Learning Between Japanese and Malaysian University Students: Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence in Workplace Contexts,” the author examines co-taught online tasks that revolve around authentic workplace conflict. The program is designed for Japanese business communication between universities in Japan and Malaysia. By working with cases that reflect real conflicts in Japanese-speaking workplaces, students practice problem solving, interpersonal communication, and intercultural competence. The analysis shows how participants interpret scenarios and how their perspectives shift through guided dialogue across cultures. The findings point to stronger understanding of workplace interaction. Students become more aware of language practices, cultural conventions, and relationship dynamics.

The second article investigates how Japan Studies courses can raise the motivation of beginner learners of Japanese. Kaori Kimura identifies features of authentic materials that appear to make a difference. Drawing on the approach known as Content Based Instruction, the study analyzes the Culture and Society of Japan course at a Malaysian university. The course integrates cultural content without formal language instruction. More than seventy percent of students reported feeling more motivated to learn Japanese after completing the course. The study looks at activities such as a media based task, peer presentations, and an online exchange session. Exposure to real world Japanese in meaningful contexts appears to spark curiosity and sustained engagement. Three features matter most. Materials that present Japanese in real sociocultural contexts. Materials that remain unmodified rather than simplified. Tasks that sit just above the learner’s current level. The findings help us identify authentic materials in Japan Studies courses that can serve as learning resources for Japanese, even when no modified textbook is available for novice learners.

The third article is by Koji Matsumoto and is titled “Reinterpreting Intercultural Language Learning: Japanese Language Education and Japanese Studies in an Era of Multi/Pluriculturalism.” The author reviews Intercultural Language Learning, which has been strongly promoted in Australian contexts since the 1990s, and argues that the once aspirational third place now exists in practice. The example of Indonesia and Japan helps make that case. The author then critiques earlier versions of ILL that treated culture as static and fixed. Modern society is more dynamic and complex. In response, the article proposes a new model for ILL that brings in multi or plurilingualism and multi or pluriculturalism. This is not a flat or two dimensional framework. It is a more three dimensional and holistic approach. To realize this vision, the author emphasizes the need to integrate language and culture in education, which has been a constant in ILL. Japanese language education and Japanese cultural studies need to move forward together.

The second movement turns to fan cultures and community driven learning. In these spaces, identity work, informal acquisition, and future planning come together. The result is a set of viable pathways into Japanese Studies. In “Japanese Popular Culture in the Formation of Malaysian Youth Identity and Aspirations,” Nunuk Endah Srimulyani and Rohayati Paidi combine Identity Theory, Self Verification Theory, Narrative Identity Theory, and Future Self Continuity Theory. They show that sustained engagement with Japanese popular culture often aligns with concrete future plans, such as the creation of portfolios, enrollment in animation programs, or the study of Japanese. They did not find cases where high engagement came with a low sense of future direction.

Two student authored articles extend this evidence and confirm the strength of Malaysia’s emerging research pipeline. Muhammad Hadzran Md Anuar in his article entitled *Tingkah Laku Pengguna terhadap Pembelian Cardfight!! Vanguard!!: Tumpuan kepada Komuniti Pemain di Malaysia* (Consumer Behavior Towards the Purchase of Cardfight!! Vanguard!!: Focus on the Player Community in Malaysia) examine consumer behaviour on the purchase of Cardfight!! Vanguard cards. The main objective of the study is to identify

purchasing platform preferences, reasons for purchase, and player motivations toward this game. Five user selection values are studied namely functional, social, epistemic, conditional, and emotional values. The findings show that functional and emotional values are the primary drivers of card purchases, particularly the need to build competitive decks and the desire to complete collections. Social value also plays a significant role, influenced by the community and peers. Epistemic value reflects an interest in exploring new strategies, while conditional value becomes prominent during promotions or tournaments. Overall, players' purchasing behaviour is driven by a combination of rational and emotional motivations. This study is expected to guide stakeholders such as distributors, marketers, and producers in designing more focused and effective business strategies based on these five user selection values.

Last article by Ahmad Mahmood Azman titled *Malaysians' Continued Consumption of Japanese Tokusatsu Without Official Distribution*. The article study the Japanese brand of special effects known as 'Tokusatsu' encompasses a genre of filmworks characterized by the usage of special effects techniques. Tokusatsu is associated with consumerism, with most productions being vehicles for the sale of children's toys. Officially distributed from the 1970s, the official distribution of Tokusatsu in Malaysia came to an abrupt halt in the mid-2010s. Even still, Malaysia's community of Tokusatsu fans curiously persists to this day in spite of the lack of official distribution. Through qualitative interviews carried out with self-proclaimed Malaysian fans of Tokusatsu, the research found that the fans were not be affected by the lack of official distribution.

By grouping these three contributions together, we make a clear claim. Fan practice is not peripheral to field development. It sits at the center because it links authentic exposure to language with identity formation and with practical choices about courses, credentials, and careers. In a small ecosystem, this linkage is a strength. It widens the pool of learners who meet Japanese as a living medium of inquiry. It also creates conditions where students can be mentored into research roles with attention to methods, ethics, and data practices. The mix of faculty and student authors in this section signals a commitment to make student participation in publication venues a normal practice. In other words, we move the pipeline from aspiration to structure. If we keep our focus on authentic language in use, on area studies as a meaningful path into language learning, and on fan and community spaces as learning sites, the field can grow in depth, relevance, and resilience.