



## 1. Special Essay:

Researching  
Internationalization of  
Japanese MNEs through  
Firm-Level Data:  
Contributions, Challenges,  
and Opportunities

## Special Essay:

### Researching Internationalization of Japanese MNEs through Firm-Level Data: Contributions, Challenges, and Opportunities

## 2. Special Essay:

Possibilities for Research  
across Disciplines and  
Japan as a Research  
Setting in International  
Business

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When I received the invitation to write an essay for the Japan MNE Insights, I thought about how to contribute to the Japan Academy of Multinational Enterprises. In particular, to help international scholars get in touch with Japanese international business (IB) research, which is a proposal made by the former Academy President Shigeto Morokami (2014). I read previous articles to know the point of view already made by scholars about Japanese IB research. They all shared excellent insights and reinforced the importance of scholars to continue the investigation of Japanese multinational enterprises - MNEs (Lehmborg, 2014; Narula, 2020; Rose, 2021; Strange, 2015), despite the great attention to emerging markets MNEs (e.g., Chinese firms). Thus, I decided to write something more related to a way to research the internationalization of Japanese MNEs using firm-level data. I am an IB researcher and have used firm-level databases for over twenty

years. Also, I came to Japan for my sabbatical leave as a visiting researcher at Keio University<sup>1</sup> to gather more recent firm-level data from Japanese databases for an ongoing research project. Therefore, I hope to contribute to this newsletter by sharing what I have learned using firm-level data to understand the internationalization of Japanese MNEs. In this essay, I want to provide to the international academic audience, particularly those unfamiliar with Japanese databases, the richness of information we can get using these sources, and the relevant contributions already made by scholars to Japanese business studies and IB research. Finally, I want to discuss some challenges of using these datasets and opportunities for future research in the field.

## 2. MAIN DATABASES

In the following, I will present two primary databases published in Japan and cite other overseas

sources used by scholars to develop research on the internationalization of Japanese MNEs<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.1 Toyo Keizai Databank: Overseas Japanese Companies (OJC)

Toyo Keizai Inc. (TK), a private company, was founded in 1895 and has published several business and economics books and magazines and has focused on collecting statistical and Japanese corporate data. The most known and used TK dataset for IB research is *Kaigai Shinshutsu Kigyou Souran*, published annually since 1970. It translates into English as 'Japanese Overseas Investments' or 'Japanese Multinationals – Facts and Figures' or 'Overseas Japanese Companies' (OJC), labeled by TK. It prepares this annual directory through an extensive survey collection obtained by Japanese companies with operations overseas. OJC is considered a reliable and comprehensive source of Japanese-owned foreign subsidiaries by listed and unlisted MNEs. It covers rich information about each Japanese foreign subsidiary worldwide in two printed versions: classified by country (*kuni betsu*) or firm (*kaisha betsu*). Both versions provided the same detailed information such as: the subsidiary's name; address/phone number; establishment year; capital; turnover; business description; entry mode; the name of the director; the number of total employees and expatriates; name and capital share held by each partner; and subsidiary measurement of performance (i.e., gain, breakeven, and loss). The last OJC printed edition launched in April/May 2022 comprises 33,000 foreign subsidiaries of 5,400 Japanese MNEs. In addition, it includes information on 2,900 foreign offices (Toyo Keizai, 2022). Besides the printed format, TK offers CD-ROM and WEB (Toyo Keizai DCL – Digital Content Library) formats with additional information such as the classification of the industry sector and the investment motives.

OJC is considered one of the few private databases offering detailed data for each foreign

subsidiary. Usually, other datasets provided important information about international subsidiaries based on the parent company, but not with such details as OJC data. For instance, Wharton Research Data Services (WRDS) Company Subsidiary Data provides information about a parent company based on SEC filings that shows the subsidiary's name, location (country or city), and percentage of ownership. These details are almost similar in Mergent Online, Orbis (public and private firms), Osiris (public companies), and LexisNexis. In addition, the S&P Capital IQ offers more information based on a parent company's FDI (subsidiaries), including relationship type, industry, investment date, assets, money valuation, total investment, percent owned, and business description. However, Capital IQ does not show information for longitudinal data (i.e., sales over time, ownership changes, and management leadership) for each subsidiary.

### 2.2 METI data: Survey on Overseas Business Activities (SOBA)

Another firm-level data on Japanese overseas affiliates is a survey conducted since 1971 by the Research and Statistics Department and the Trade and Investment Facilitation Division of the Trade and Economic Cooperation Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). It is called *Kaigai Jigyo Katsudo Kihon Chosa*, translated into English as 'Survey on Overseas Business Activities – SOBA.' This survey presented the actual conditions concerning overseas business activities of Japanese firms helping the government develop future industrial and trade policies. METI separates the survey method into two parts. The first is the 'Basic Survey,' which contains more detailed information gathered every three years. The other is the 'Trend Survey,' comparatively rough and carried out between the Basic Surveys. It includes information on Japanese firms (parent companies) that, at the end of the fiscal year (31 March), own or

<sup>1</sup> Joint research with Chie Iguchi (Keio University), supported by a grant from the Japan Foundation Japanese Studies Fellowship Program.

<sup>2</sup> Based on English published articles in international academic journals.

have owned overseas affiliates (subsidiaries) in the past. However, it excludes the financial, insurance, or real estate affiliates. In addition, SOBA data lists three types of overseas affiliates: (i) those in which a Japanese corporation has invested capital of 10% or more; (ii) those in which a 'subsidiary,' funded more than 50% by a Japanese corporation, has invested capital of more than 50%; (iii) those in which a Japanese corporation and a subsidiary funded more

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than 50% by a Japanese corporation have invested capital of more than 50%. In addition, the survey includes various items on affiliates' characteristics, such as the establishment year, the breakdown of sales and purchases, employment, costs, and R&D expenditures. The last survey (51<sup>st</sup> edition) launched in July 2021 got a 75.2% response rate and resulted in 25,703 subsidiaries of 7,281 Japanese firms with valid responses (METI, 2021).

### 2.3 Other databases

Depending on the context investigated, international scholars adopted other country-specific databases for triangulation purposes or to complement previously mentioned Japanese datasets. For instance, when examining Japanese FDI in the US, some researchers utilized the Japan Economic Institute (JEI) – Direct Investment in the United States with the OJC database (Chen, 2008; Chen & Hennart, 2002, 2004; Hennart & Reddy, 1997; Hennart, Roehl, & Zietlow, 1999).

To investigate the Japanese FDI in India, Buckley, Cross, & Horn (2012) and Horn & Cross (2016) used the 'Japanese Companies in India Handbook' published by COMM Bangkok (COMM) in

conjunction with the OJC database. In addition to India, COMM published other countries' handbooks, particularly from Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. It lists information about the Japanese company name in roman letters and *kanji*, business description, name of the managing director, website, mailing and e-mail addresses, and telephone/fax numbers of all units in the country for the same affiliate. However, to my

knowledge, I do not find any publication in major academic journals using these other countries' handbooks.

To analyze the internationalization of Japanese MNEs in Brazil, I also gathered additional subsidiary-level data to complement OJC data. I used the 'Yearbook: Japanese Companies in Brazil'

(Ogasavara & Hoshino, 2008, 2009). It is a bilingual Portuguese and Japanese yearbook published in Brazil since 1974, providing some additional information not available in the OJC database. For instance, it is possible to find details of the balance sheet and income statement (sales and profit) for some subsidiaries, providing subsidiary-level data performance such as ROS, ROA, and ROE.

### 3. ACADEMIC RESULTS

The **OJC database** started its history in the IB area with a focus on quantitative analysis by the researchers' group headed by Professor Paul Beamish at the University of Western Ontario's Ivey Business School in the mid-1990s. According to Sartor (2014), Shige Makino introduced first the database to Beamish in 1994. At that time, Makino was one of the first Beamish's Ph.D. students and had used the OJC to develop his MBA thesis at Keio University in the late 1980s. Inspired by the successful case of Raymond Vernon's development of the Harvard Multinational Enterprise Project (HMNEP)<sup>3</sup>, Beamish launched, in 1994, the Japanese FDI (JFDI) Research Program at Ivey Business School. The HMNEP resulted in

longitudinally based research with academic contributions in the area and a notable output of publications<sup>4</sup>. Also, Beamish noted that the OJC data provides detailed subsidiary information to investigate his research interests in international joint ventures and strategic alliances. Beamish's vision and efforts of using OJC data for IB studies showed very successful and impressive outputs. As for May 2022, the Ivey-JFDI research program with the contributions of faculty members, Ph.D. Program graduates and candidates have authored 179 publications: 158 academic journal articles, 2 books, 19 book chapters, and 31 Ph.D. dissertations<sup>5</sup>.

Sartor (2014) made a great overview and analysis of the Ivey-JFDI research group's publication before 2009. He showed that most articles were published in top-tier journals<sup>6</sup>, providing important contributions to the IB literature and understanding the Japanese FDI phenomena. It includes topics related to entry modes, ownership structure, equity control, strategic alliances, joint ventures, location strategy, subsidiary performance, expatriation strategy, the timing of entry, institutional distance, regionalization, geographical scope, and product diversification, among others. Sartor (2014) also demonstrated by an OLS regression that the research impact (i.e., citation count) is explained particularly from studies related to theory-building, publication age, journal quality, theoretical foundation, and event history analytical method. After a long history of the Ivey-JFDI Program, besides Beamish, most former Ph.D. students became prominent scholars in the IB and Strategy area<sup>7</sup>, such as Andrew Delios, Jane Lu, Shige Makino, Charles

Dhanaraj, and Anthony Goerzen, among others. In their Top 5 publication citation list, all have papers based on the OJC data as a source for their empirical analyses (i.e., Delios & Beamish, 1999, 2001; Delios & Henisz, 2003; Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2004; Gaur & Lu, 2007; Goerzen, 2007; Goerzen, Asmussen, & Nielsen, 2013; Goerzen & Beamish, 2002, 2005; Henisz & Delios, 2001; Lu, 2002; Lu & Beamish, 2001, 2004, 2006; Makino & Delios, 1996).

In addition, we can also find other scholars, who are not associated with the Ivey-JFDI Program, using the OJC data to investigate the internationalization of Japanese MNEs. As private data, anyone can purchase the OJC database. We can highlight some Japanese and non-Japanese scholars<sup>8</sup> who published their research in international academic journals. For instance, Hideki Yamawaki, with an economic perspective, investigated the relationship between Japanese FDI and exports (Yamawaki, 1991). Naoki Ando contributed to the understanding of the subsidiary staffing of Japanese MNEs (Ando, 2011, 2012; Ando & Paik, 2013; Ando, Rhee, & Park, 2008; Paik & Ando, 2011). Jean-François Hennart examined entry strategies (i.e., WOS, joint ventures, and acquisitions) of Japanese firms in the US market (Chen & Hennart, 2002, 2004; Hennart, 1991; Hennart & Reddy, 1997; Hennart et al., 1999). Jacques Jaussaud analyzed the effect of control mechanisms of subsidiaries (i.e., joint ventures, family and nonfamily business) on performance (Abdellatif, Amann, & Jaussaud, 2010; Jaussaud & Schaaper, 2007; Jaussaud, Schaaper, & Zhang, 2001). Jaeyong Song developed his research on sequential FDI of Japanese MNEs

3 In the 1960s, Vernon started his effort to collect longitudinal data with the 180 of the largest U.S. MNEs from public and private data from sources dating back to the early 1900s. The data collection efforts ended in the mid-1970s including 400 MNCs headquarters not only in the U.S., but also Europe and Japan.

4 By 1975, the HMNEP resulted the publication of 151 academic journal articles, 17 books, and supported 28 Ph.D. theses.

5 Based on the information available at <https://www.ivey.uwo.ca/internationalbusiness/research/ivey-international-research-by-theme-geography/japanese-foreign-direct-investment-article-abstracts/>

6 Top-tier journals including Journal of International Business Studies, Academy of Management Journal, Strategic Management Journal, Organization Science, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of World Business, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of International Marketing, Journal of Management, Organization Studies, Strategic Organization, Journal of Business Venturing, Academy of Management Executive, Asia Pacific Journal of Management, Journal of Business Ethics and Management and Organization Review.

7 As for 20 June 2022, at least with 1,000 citations on Scopus: Paul Beamish 12,861; Andrew Delios 6,998; Jane Lu 4,260; Shige Makino 4,184; Charles Dhanaraj 3,277; and Anthony Goerzen 1,765.

8 With at least three publications in academic journals using OJC data.

9 Third generation of Japanese-Brazilian. I studied in Japan with the support of the *Mombukagakusho* scholarship.

(Chung & Song, 2004; Song, 2002). Moreover, I cite some foreign graduate students, including myself, advised by Professor Yasuo Hoshino to investigate different contexts of Japanese FDI (Ben-Youssef & Hoshino, 2007; Rasouli-Ghahroudi & Hoshino, 2007; Siripaisalpipat & Hoshino, 2000; Somlev & Hoshino, 2005).

At the beginning of the 2000s, I started my journey in the IB field as a young foreign<sup>9</sup> graduate student at the University of Tsukuba. I had my first contact with the OJC database at that time through Hoshino's international seminar group. I was very fascinated with the details provided by this database for each Japanese foreign subsidiary. I used the OJC data resulting in my master's thesis and Ph.D. dissertation investigating the internationalization of Japanese MNEs in Brazil. I continued my research on this topic at the National University of Singapore<sup>10</sup> and in Brazil as a professor in graduate programs<sup>11</sup> when I got research funding to acquire some printed editions of the OJC database. I have learned that Japanese subsidiary had a better performance when: (i) entering through JVs with home-country partners with prior experience in the local market (Ogasavara & Hoshino, 2007); (ii)

having partners with interfirm trust, which is the previous partnership in other countries (Ogasavara & Hoshino, 2008); (iii) having accumulated both local and international experiential knowledge (i.e., operational time and network of subsidiaries) and invest sequentially in the host country (Ogasavara & Hoshino, 2009); (iv) having more expatriates, local experience and home-country partners during the economic crisis period (Cordeiro, Ogasavara, & Masiero, 2017). Japanese MNEs are influenced significantly by their own- and other-entry modes

when investing in the electronics sector (Ogasavara, 2013), while subsidiary control with expatriates and ownership level influence the location choice in global cities (Izumi, Burnier, Ogasavara, & Figueiredo, 2017). In addition, formal and informal institutions matter for expatriation assignments in Latin America moderated by subsidiary size and having the same general manager over time (Moreira & Ogasavara, 2018). At the same time, institutional distances between home and host countries affect subsidiary survival (Cassio-de-Souza & Ogasavara, 2018), internationalization speed (Chang & Ogasavara, 2021), and subsequent investments (Battistuzzo & Ogasavara, 2022).

Other relevant results we can highlight include several worldwide conference winner awards from different academic associations. For example, we can list best

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paper awards in the Academy of International Business – AIB (Delios & Makino, 2002; Goerzen & Beamish, 2002); Academy of Management – AoM (Chan, 2003; Fang, Jiang, Makino, & Beamish, 2008); Administrative Sciences Association of Canada – ASAC (Delios & Zhou, 1998); Brazilian Academy of Management – ANPAD (Ogasavara, 2008); Academy of International Business Latin America and the Caribbean Chapter – AIB-LAC (Battistuzzo & Ogasavara, 2021a; Moreira & Ogasavara, 2015); and Association of Japanese Business Studies – AJBS

10 At the Department of Japanese Studies, in the Japanese management area working with Hendrik Meyer-Ohle.

11 At the University of Fortaleza and ESPM Sao Paulo.

12 Founded in 1957 at the US-Japan Trade Council as a non-profit research organization supported by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

13 WRDS Company Subsidiary Data, Mergent Online, Orbis, Osiris, LexisNexis and S&P Capita IQ.

(Ando, 2016; Battistuzzo & Ogasavara, 2021b) among others. Of course, it does not mean that OJC data was determinant for winning these awards. The award committee evaluates the best papers based on the field's theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. But it is important to emphasize that the OJC data offers crucial information to use as a construct for dependent or independent variables and test hypotheses by applying different statistical techniques while helping to advance IB theory development.

The **SOBA data** has been used mainly by some scholars to investigate Japanese MNEs in international trade, FDI, and overseas R&D based on economics perspectives published in economics journals (Bellone, Kiyota, Matsuura, Musso, & Nesta, 2014; Hayakawa & Matsuura, 2011; Hayakawa & Tsubota, 2014; Kiyota & Urata, 2008; Todo, 2011; Todo & Shimizutani, 2008). When looking at publications in the IB and Strategic fields, we can highlight the contributions of Takehiko Isobe, Shige Makino, and Christine Chan. They examined the effect of institutions and location on the performance of Japanese foreign subsidiaries (Chan, Makino, & Isobe, 2010; Chung, Lee, Beamish, & Isobe, 2010; Makino, Isobe, & Chan, 2004).

#### 4. SOME CHALLENGES

Regarding the challenges of using firm-level data in investigating the internationalization of Japanese MNEs, first, I highlight the restricted access of some databases to international scholars. It is the case of **SOBA data**. Although it is considered a comprehensive firm-level data of Japanese foreign affiliates, we should remember that the Japanese government gathers SOBA data through METI. Therefore, it has confidentiality protection by law that it is difficult to disclose such information. It is only possible to access this firm-level data when a scholar is

associated with the METI research project, most of the time available mainly to Japanese researchers. There is a chance to conduct joint research, but it must verify the terms of use when involving foreign scholars. Another challenge is the low coverage rate of this survey, which vary sharply over time and differ substantially from variable to variable within a year (RIETI, 2010). For open access, it is available no more than aggregate data such as summary tables of employment and sales by industry and country. Another challenge is the discontinuity of data publication for some sources, which becomes difficult to update and build longitudinal data. For instance, **JEI** (Japan Economic Institute)<sup>12</sup>, which gathered data on Japanese foreign affiliates in the US, concluded its activities in 2001. The '**Yearbook: Japanese Companies in Brazil**' followed the same way, publishing the last edition in 2009. Moreover, even though we can obtain foreign subsidiary information of Japanese MNEs through some **international private databases** mentioned earlier<sup>13</sup>, the great challenge is the high subscription cost, which restricts the accessibility of this data to a few universities and scholars. Also, these databases mostly show foreign subsidiaries of listed Japanese firms, not including unlisted firms, and the subsidiaries directory is not extensive and provides detailed information like the OJC data.

In this way, the **OJC data** is the only feasible database to be used by international scholars. However, we should state some challenges related to this dataset. Although the acquisition price<sup>14</sup> is reasonable for a one-year edition of a printed version, it demands a lot of effort to input (typing) this data into a spreadsheet to be later used for quantitative analyses. Some information follows a standard or a code (in *kanji*), making the collection possible even for those who cannot read Japanese. It was the case for most of my Brazilian students who developed their master's theses or Ph.D. dissertations using the OJC data. But

14 As for June 2022, according to the Amazon Japan website, the price of the 2022 printed edition is ¥24,200.

15 For instance, business description to identify the industry sector; name of the Japanese firm (in *kanji* or *katakana*) to identify the parent firm or partners; name of the general manager (in *kanji*) to evaluate the subsidiary management stability over time.

16 Kinokuniya bookstore offers a possibility to buy a digital version of the OJC data accessed through the reader app Kinoppy.

there are limitations since we could not use all the available information. To fully explore the data, there is a need for Japanese language skills<sup>15</sup>. Last year, I had a student fluent in Japanese for the first time. He acquired the digital format<sup>16</sup> of the 2021 edition to develop his master's thesis on the internationalization of Japanese trading companies. Even for the digital format accessed through a reader app (screen view), it was impossible to copy/paste the information from the data to the spreadsheet. It is necessary to enter (typing) all information like the printed version.

TK also offers the OJC data through CD-ROM and WEB formats. However, one year's edition of a CD-ROM format costs almost ten times more than the printed version. The subscription to the WEB version (Toyo Keizai DCL) is more expensive since it covers a range of years (2009 to 2022). Thus, this directory's high cost also limits the access for a few universities and scholars. But even using these expensive versions, the data extraction demands a lot of effort. For instance, using the WEB version, after selecting the items and filtering them, it shows a list of subsidiaries individually per year, accessible only by clicking one by one. Moreover, getting an electronic file when visualizing this subsidiary's particular year information is impossible. Instead, there is a need to select, copy and paste from there to a spreadsheet. Therefore, it is very time-consuming to collect the firm-level data independent of the available format. Finally, although the OJC database lists many Japanese foreign subsidiaries, another challenge is the existence of many missing data for some subsidiaries, which could restrict the number of observations depending on the variables used in the study or when building longitudinal data.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even though we have some challenges in using these databases to develop research on the internationalization of Japanese MNEs, as mentioned earlier, previous studies have already made relevant contributions to the IB, Strategy, and Japanese business literature. But, scholars have focused mainly on country-level influences when investigating the location strategy of Japanese MNEs. To advance the IB and

Japanese studies research agenda, we must incorporate relevant insights into subnational-level aspects to analyze variations across countries (Chakravarty, Goerzen, Musteen, & Ahsan, 2021). Scholars have already made appropriate contributions using a subnational perspective focused on global cities (Goerzen et al., 2013) or some specific contexts such as North America (Chan et al., 2010; Delios & Ensign, 2000), East Asia (Hayakawa & Tsubota, 2014), and China (Chan et al., 2010; Ma & Delios, 2007; Ma, Delios, & Lau, 2013; Peng & Beamish, 2019). However, we should investigate more the subnational-level location choice strategy of Japanese MNEs in other subnational developing markets, particularly outside the Asian region. It implies extending the view of a regional strategy for Japanese firms (Collinson & Rugman, 2008).

Moreover, we learned from Peng & Beamish (2008) and Jiang, Jung, & Makino (2020) the effect of the country- or firm-level corporate social responsibility (CSR) on FDI attraction and performance. But we need more studies on this topic to expand our understanding of how CSR, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), and SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) affect the strategy and expansion of Japanese firms over time in different industries and regions, particularly with the trend of a more sustainable development world. Also, we should not only investigate the internationalization of Japanese manufacturing firms but go further by analyzing more Japanese service firms. We still have little research on it (Bouquet, Hebert, & Delios, 2004; Goerzen & Makino, 2007; Qian & Delios, 2008). In the new century, which changes happened with the internationalization pattern and strategy of Japanese trading companies, banks, and other service firms? What about the internationalization of the Japanese ventures in the creative industries, new high technology sector, or more digital-oriented firms?

Applying mixed methods in our research (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela, 2006) is another opportunity to advance the knowledge of Japanese MNEs. I mean to combine the findings of quantitative analysis using firm-level data with an in-depth

qualitative study from the rare events or outlier cases we find in our statistical tests (Beamish & Hasse, 2022). In this way, we could build a bridge with international and Japanese scholars, dealing with the differences stated by Professor Asakawa (2014). On the one hand, the Western-style focus their research on the rigorous application of quantitative methods that depends on firm-level data availability. On the other hand, Japanese-style are more orientated to the qualitative approach of fieldwork studies to understand the phenomena deeply. Thus, we could attempt to diminish the tension between distinctiveness and generalizability (Westney, 2005). Shall we try doing joint research in this way?

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## Special Essay:

# Possibilities for Research across Disciplines and Japan as a Research Setting in International Business

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In the current globalized society, people worldwide are influenced by international business (IB) whether they wish to be or not. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of our lives, our communication system, and our way of working. The pandemic has been accelerating digital transformation in our life and work. Furthermore, not only the pandemic but also international politics has influenced everything including business. Therefore, I believe that IB research has the potential to contribute to achieving world peace and creating a sustainable society.

IB research offers the possibility of approaching various issues from a variety of disciplines because it is related to all human beings and their activities. Since 2012, I have attended IB conferences such as the Association of Japanese Business Studies (AJBS) or the Academy of International Business (AIB). Originally, my specialty is applied linguistics, particularly second language acquisition (SLA). I joined the IB academy motivated by a simple but scholarly question: What is truly necessary for English education in Japan? As all of you know, Japanese people are notorious for their lack of English oral communication competence. English education in Japan has emphasized reading since the Meiji era, when industrialization and modernization began. Reading with translation, what is called *yakudoku*, is still taught in some English classes in

Japan, although negotiations in English as an international language with people around the world have become increasingly important. The main purpose of pedagogical methods such as *yakudoku* is to acquire culture and technology through foreign languages such as English. Furthermore, the quality of free automatic translation websites, such as DeepL, has recently increased. Artificial intelligence (AI) has advanced, and the AI singularity will come in the not-so-distant future. As an educator who has been teaching English in higher education, I have been trying to provide learner-centered education and develop my students' creativity through participation in my class to survive in the future in a more competitive society and maintain their dignity as human beings (Suzuki, 2020).

Since 2012, I have been conducting research on language issues in IB collaboratively with Dr. Hidehiko Nishikawa and later Dr. Naoki Ando, my colleagues at Hosei University, to explore my question about the needs of English education in Japan. Next, I explain what we have studied. We have been conducting research on foreign subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Japan. First, we carried out qualitative studies. We interviewed Japanese employees who had experience working for non-Japanese MNCs'

foreign subsidiaries. We found that our interviewees had encountered culture clashes and language barriers (Suzuki & Nishikawa, 2013, November • 2014). The problem with the qualitative study was that it has limitations due to interviewees' confidentiality and compliance requirements. This is one of the critical issues and limitations of IB research as well. Thus, based on our prior qualitative research, we formulated propositions or hypotheses for subsequent quantitative research on language, communication and MNCs. We conducted a questionnaire survey. The respondents to the questionnaire were Japanese

employees working for MNCs' foreign subsidiaries in Japan.

From the research, we found that intra-organizational communication between parent firms and foreign subsidiaries is positively associated with the effect of MNCs' knowledge sharing. Service firms gain a greater benefit than manufacturing firms from communication within MNCs. According to another finding, foreign subsidiaries established through acquisition can receive a more positive effect from intra-organizational communication than those established through greenfield investment (Suzuki, Ando, & Nishikawa, 2019a). The results of the study suggest that communication is particularly effective in difficult situations, such as cross-border M&As, or cases of large cultural distance between parent firms' and foreign subsidiaries' countries for service industry localization.

Furthermore, we studied three different types of recruitment (profession-sensitive, language-sensitive, and interculture-sensitive recruitment) and their effect on the foreign subsidiaries of MNCs. We found that each of the three recruitment orientations positively affects MNCs' knowledge transfer. Profession-sensitive recruitment has a positive influence when foreign subsidiaries are established through acquisition. Moreover, offering professional training

strengthens the positive effect of interculture-sensitive recruitment (Suzuki, Ando, & Nishikawa, 2019b). The results imply that professional competence is primarily important as a required competence for MNC employees. Recently, we have advanced our research,

“According to interviewees including the HR directors of leading MNCs, *wataridori* managers are detrimental to MNCs; this information provided us with a preconception. However, recently, we have come to think that there are two types of *wataridori* managers, those who are beneficial and those who are unbeneficial to MNCs through communication with IB colleagues and practitioners.”

focusing on host country national employees' competences (e.g., corporate language proficiency, communicative competence, or professional competence). In AJBS 2022, we will give a presentation about *wataridori* managers, defined as managers who repeatedly move from one foreign subsidiary to another. The word *wataridori* can be translated as “migratory bird” in English, but *wataridori* managers rarely go back where they have previously worked. We have been examining their attributes (Suzuki, Ando, & Nishikawa, 2022, July). According to interviewees including the HR directors of leading MNCs, *wataridori* managers are detrimental to MNCs; this information provided us with a preconception. However, recently, we have come to think that there are two types of *wataridori* managers, those who are beneficial and those who are unbeneficial to MNCs through communication with IB colleagues and practitioners. Our research on *wataridori* managers is set to continue in the future.

Next, I describe what I have learned through collaborative research in the IB academic community as an applied linguist. First, I will write about sociocultural theory (SCT) and the IB academy. In SLA research, there are two main research orientations: the psycholinguistic approach (the mainstream) and the sociocultural approach (the

alternative). The concept of mainstream SLA is often described with the metaphor of a computer. Learners are regarded as computers. The process of SLA is considered to be one of teachers inputting (through instruction) linguistic information into learners' brains, where learners process the received information and then output it. Learners are regarded as a uniform entity similar to a computer. People who participate in mainstream SLA research are called subjects, a conception of human beings as objects like

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a computer. I learned mainstream SLA mainly from Dr. Teresa Pica at the University of Pennsylvania during my master's program.

On the other hand, the application of SCT to SLA has developed since the 2000s, mainly in North America, when I obtained a Ph.D. in this field. I learned directly from one of the main SCT scholars, Dr. Merrill Swain at the University of Toronto. In SCT, all people involved in an activity are considered participants in the activity. For example, in a place of education, teachers and students participate in learning in class. They both create the learning environment and produce the outcome collaboratively. My research position as an applied linguist is between the mainstream and SCT. I have conducted SLA research from both perspectives (Suzuki, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

I have participated in the IB scholarly community. In other words, I am one of the participants there. Personally, I feel that the community is very open and collaborative in advancing IB research. I have been academically inspired through interaction with IB scholars at several IB conferences or seminars. In SCT, one of

the key concepts is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Within a ZPD, a person (e.g., a learner) can reach a higher level that he or she cannot achieve alone with the assistance or guidance of a more capable person (e.g., a teacher, a caretaker, or a more capable peer). I have experienced a ZPD in exactly this way in the IB academic community. I hope that the community continues to be open and collaborative even to scholars from other fields.

Second, I will write about a problem I encountered while conducting IB research with Dr. Ando and Dr. Nishikawa. The difficulty lies in the definitions of IB terminology. For example, I have not ascertained the differences between communication and knowledge transfer or the differences between language proficiency and communicative competence. Moreover,

it is still unclear to me whether language is included in culture. The existence of dictionaries for IB research could help it advance further. In my field, such dictionaries or books have been published (Ellis, 2008; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). They are a necessity for SLA research, and they are similar to “bibles” of SLA.

Finally, Japan has lost its economic power since its bubble economy burst. This obviously has been reflected in my personal experience. In 2000, when I visited my American graduate school friend's uncle and aunt in California, there was a SONY TV set in their living room. In 2007, when I visited them again, the Sony was replaced by a Samsung. Even at the AJBS conferences, an increasing number of businesses in other Asian countries, such as China and Korea, have captured attention, as Dragon and Tiger power has been increasing (Hemmert, 2012). However, Dr. Horst Melcher, one of my colleagues at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, where I took a sabbatical from 2018 to 2020, gave me a different perspective on the Japanese economy, and I could see a little light for the future of Japan. We discussed “Can Japan Compete?” (Porter, Takeuchi,

& Sakakibara, 2000) and Dr. Melcher's collaborative case study on NTT's 5G development at Harvard University (Alcácer, Melcher, & Kanno, 2020). Moreover, I sometimes saw advertisements for SONY and young people wearing SONY headphones in the streets or the subways of Munich during 2018 and 2020. I felt that some Japanese products were still competitive and popular in the world.

One of the issues for Japanese firms seen in NTT's smartphone technology development is that Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon (GAFA) have gained more profits than NTT from their state-of-the-art technology (i.e., 5G). Historically, Japan absorbed technologies and cultures from China and Korea before modernization and European countries after modernization, applied them, and created its unique and more convenient ones, for example, *hiragana*, *katakana* or *Walkman*. However, Japan requires new technology applications now. As Porter et al. suggest, the reform of the business system or higher education has not progressed yet. However, I believe that Japanese firms still can gain advantages from "compact, multifunctional, quiet products" in addition to products with a sophisticated appearance due to Japan's long tradition and unique culture (Porter, et al., 2000, p.188).

I would like Japan to be a decent country, as Oe Kenzaburo suggests in his essay, "Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself" (Oe, 1995). My interpretation of the word "decent" encompasses a country that is not weak but indeed strong enough to contribute to world peace, economics, politics, art, and science. Regardless of its attractiveness as an IB research target, Japan will continue to be one of the most appropriate settings for IB research and host to a variety of MNCs conducting business there. My travel to search *wataridori* managers with Dr. Ando and Dr. Nishikawa will continue, as will my participation in the open, collaborative and thus progressive IB scholarly community.

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