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Translating Japan: Is There Any Longer a Case for Japanese Studies?

In recent years the usefulness of area studies has been questioned as a paradigm for understanding what is happening in other cultures than one's own. To some extent many old stereotypes, including those assuming the overwhelming significance of a primal national character, are being challenged. Regarding Japan, most of the holistic assumptions associated with *nihonjinron* have come to be dismissed by serious scholars. However, the spread of global (albeit decidedly American) standards has been the prominence of English as an international language. Today the role of Japanese language proficiency in Japanese studies deserves studied attention. As Japanese studies become more diverse and less driven by Anglo-American concerns, the role of its financing also deserves serious consideration. Behind each of these issues lie questions about social class and social inequality and ideologies which perhaps make it difficult to gain an overview of the overall structures shaping behaviour in many contemporary societies.