

27.5.2026

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**Title**

The paradox of autonomy : Japan's vernacular scholarship and the policy pursuit of "Super Global" /  
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**Publication year**

2016

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education policy. - 29 (2016) 4, S. 451 - 472

**Inventory number**

44834

**Keywords**

Ausland : Japan : einzelne Hochschulen ; Ausland : Japan : Forschung, Hochschullehrer ; Hochschule  
: Wettbewerb

**Abstract**

Japan's humanities and social science scholarship has retained its commitment to the national language and local readership over the past two decades despite a policy-driven shift away from the old norm of distinctive independence once termed "opting out" of the game. Analysis of academic publications in two disciplines in a public research university from the 1990s to the early 2010s indicates little change in language or medium: an overwhelming majority are written in Japanese and published in national periodicals and books. The article unveils the paradox of autonomy in Japan's academia by examining the continued commitment to locally relevant research at the expense of global recognition vis-à-vis the government's declaration to make some of the nation's top universities "super global." Amidst the global fad to join the ranks of the world's top-ranked universities, the Japanese government's quest is likely to bring mixed consequences for domestic higher education institutions. In particular, the study points out an increasing risk of

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compartmentalization and erosion of vernacular research that demands a serious policy reappraisal.

(HRK / Abstract übernommen)