Paper Title: Recent Trends in the Study of Japanese in Australia: Numbers, Narratives and the Place of Japanese in the Age of the Networked City.

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Abstract

The expansion in the study of Japanese language in Australia in the last two decades of the twentieth century was remarkable. It was influenced by a number of factors, but its growth closely mirrored the story of Japan’s economic success, and increasingly close relationship with Australia. In the first decade of this century, the study of Japanese declined markedly in some sectors and states, particularly in primary education. While the benchmark measure of year 12 enrolments remained relatively stable, closer examination revealed substantial changes beneath the surface steady state. A major survey in 2010 (de Kretser and Spence-Brown) sounded a warning that the impressive achievements of the past decades, and the cultural capital that the teaching of Japanese represents, risked being lost.

This paper provides an update on developments in the study of Japanese in Australia over the last few years in terms of both numbers and changes in the nature and motivation of students. It explores the complex factors that are affecting the study of Japanese in Australia and internationally, at school and tertiary levels, including the impact of the strengthened personal connections possible in our densely networked world. Finally, it discusses the place of Japanese
language education in twenty-first century Australia, and the ways in which it must change to remain relevant in a globalised world where Japan retains a significant, but diminished role.