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https://www.asianstudies.org/surveying-premodern-historians-of-japan-past-present-and-future-directions-of-the-field/

# Surveying Premodern Historians of Japan: Past, Present, and Future Directions of the Field

**By Paula R. Curtis**[1]

**Abstract:**

*In the decade since the 2008 economic crisis, scholars and students across all academic disciplines have expressed concerns about the future of higher education, particularly with the sharp decline in tenure-track hires and significant financial cuts to the humanities. This article explores trends in training, hiring, and retention of scholars within the subfield of premodern Japanese history among Anglophone scholars as an example of how smaller subfields, particularly those that straddle broader disciplines and area studies, have fared since the advent of specialized degrees in the 1940s to the present day. An examination of intersecting data on degrees granted, training sites, current employment status, gender, the ability or desire to mentor, and career paths reveals that strategic interventions and advocacy on individual and institutional levels must be made to ensure the continuation of a prosperous and equitable future for premodern Japanese history, the livelihoods of its scholars, and the broader Japan Studies field.*

**Keywords:** Japan, premodern studies, history, hiring, higher education, academia, area studies

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Since at least the 2008 economic collapse, scholars of all academic disciplines have been anxious about what the future holds for their fields of study. Even before the global pandemic of 2020-2021 exacerbated those concerns, large organizations like the American Historical Association showcased alarming data on the precipitous decline in academic jobs while the number of people obtaining PhDs continued roughly apace, revealing a wide chasm between career goals and job opportunities that was felt by historians and other academics alike.[2]

In order to theorize about how niche fields will survive our current challenges, we must look to the developments of our past to begin planning for and investing in our future. This article surveys historians of pre-1600 Japan from the 1940s—the field's proverbial advent in training Anglophone scholars at educational institutions, particularly those in North America—to 2026 in anticipation of the completion of degrees currently in progress. During the 2019-2020 academic job market season, globally there were approximately eight job advertisements for positions specifically in the history of Japan. Two were tenure-track, one a visiting position, and five were postdocs. In the 2019-2020 season, there was one position (a tenure-track job at the University of Leiden) advertised exclusively for premodern Japanese history. No tenure-track faculty jobs seeking a Japanese history specialist were offered in North America.[3]

As of June 2021, the 2020-2021 job cycle showed six positions worldwide in premodern Japanese Studies: two tenured positions in literature and culture; one postdoc in archaeology; one postdoc in history; and two non-tenure track positions in archaeology and the history of art respectively. Where will these trends leave or lead the next generations of scholars? Many studies of these subfields and other disciplines that intersect with Japanese Studies can and should be written; as a premodern historian, I focus here on training, hiring, and retention to address challenges of our current moment as they pertain to premodern historians of Japan.[4]

In spite of these alarming trends, recent years have not seen sustained studies, particularly within comparatively small subfields, on the people element of specialist development, hiring, and retention, rather than intellectual trends and broader institutional changes. The last major study that came close may have been Helen Hardacre's edited volume *The Postwar Development of Japanese Studies in the United States* (1998). This source, a critical contribution to Japanese Studies, is now over two decades old and was a historical and historiographical survey of postwar scholarship and subfields, rather than a reflection on employment and demographics. The more recent *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History* (2017) offers a similar approach, invaluable to new scholars to better understand trends in premodern historical studies but not aimed at assessing who we are and where we are going.

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[2] Dylan Ruediger, "The 2020 AHA Jobs Report: New History PhDs Awarded Continue to Decline as Academic Job Market Remains Flat," *Perspectives on History* (February 12, 2020), accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.historians.org/ahajobsreport2020; "The 2021 AHA Jobs Report: 2019–20 Data Show Relative Stability in the Year before COVID," *Perspectives on History* (January 20, 2021), accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.historians.org/ahajobsreport2021.

[3] Paula R. Curtis, "Japan- and East Asia-related Job Market Data Visualizations (2019-2020)," accessed March 16, 2021, http://prcurtis.com/projects/jobs2020/

[4] What is "premodern" is the subject of much worthy debate but need not be explored in depth here. For the purposes of this paper, I distinguish between premodern, early modern, and modern. The pre- and post-1600 divide is typically reflected in scholarship and job advertisements aimed at or formulated by non-specialists, as reflected in publications like the recent *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History* and *Cambridge History of Japan*, the forthcoming series of which will feature three books using this schema.

Online efforts such as the Japan Foundation Directory of Japanese Studies in the United States and Canada (last updated in 2016) sought to effectively catalog Japanese Studies and its specialists as a whole, including graduate students, but it is now woefully out of date. Furthermore, the extremely broad net cast by its categorization (allowing the cross-listing of subfields and time period specializations) is more reflective of the interdisciplinarity and breadth of research areas among scholars and is unhelpful for trying to triangulate a single subdiscipline's training and history. In 2012, Nichibunken similar launched Nihon Kenkyu Jōhōmō 日本研究情報網, or NIMOU, a database for housing information on Japanese Studies institutions, researchers, and academic trends, though it is not clear how often and by whom the database is maintained, as it is still far from complete.

There has been some notable work on employment in Japanese Studies in the last several years evaluating other areas of the Japanese Studies field. Laurence Williams surveys the 2019 job market vis-a-vis academic career opportunities in and challenges to working in Japan from the perspective of international academics, citing Japan scholars' hurdles to employment, such as the opacity of the hiring process and its standards as well as entrenched job insecurity.[5] From the perspective of PhDs in the United Kingdom, Peter Matanle and Euan McIntosh evaluated whether British scholars experienced career benefits or stagnation based on international mobility, finding that it might in fact hinder their professional trajectories to take positions in Asia.[6]

Despite its integral place in the development of Japanese Studies at large, premodern Japan has yet to receive such focused treatment. Scholars of medieval history such as Asakawa Kan'ichi (1873-1948) were not only among the first native Japanese educators in the United States, but were deeply invested in making Japanese history a part of intellectual life outside of Japan, pioneering comparative studies in conversation with scholars like Marc Bloch.[7] Similarly, other prewar specialists like Robert Karl Reischauer (1907-1937), George Sansom (1883-1965), and postwar scholars like H. Paul Varley (1931-2015) and eventually John W. Hall (1916-1997) and Jeffrey P. Mass (1940-2001) would, alongside associates in literary studies like Donald Keene (1930-2016) and Helen Craig McCullough (1918-1998), set the stage for Japanese Studies to flourish as a field with a new generation of scholars, both in the premodern and beyond, under their tutelage.[8]

The stewardship of premodern scholars has been critical to the establishment of Japanese Studies in Anglophone academia and still contributes to its vibrancy today. Premodern historians of Japan are embracing the possibilities of digital humanities by mapping trade routes with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies, exploring new conceptualizations of ethnicity and state through ancient court systems, and finding themselves

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[5] Laurence Williams, "Working at a Japanese University: An Attractive Option for International Humanities PhDs?" *Tokyo Humanities Insights* 1, 2019. https://www.tokyohumanities.org/internationalphds.html

[6] Matanle Peter and Euan McIntosh, "International mobility for early career academics: does it help or hinder career formation in Japanese studies?" *Japan Forum*, July 24, 2020.

[7] For a fuller review of Asakawa's contributions to North American scholarship on Japan, see Kohno Masaru and Frances Rosenbluth, "Japan and the World: Japan's Contemporary Geopolitical Challenges in Honor of the Memory and Intellectual Legacy of Asakawa Kan'ichi."

[8] A more detailed review of early scholars in premodern Japanese history can be found in Karl F. Friday's introduction in *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History*, 1-9.

in demand as consultants for Netflix series about medieval warfare, drawing new generations of students into our classrooms to revisit conceptual and historical challenges no less relevant now than they were centuries before.[9] Nevertheless, the neoliberal corporatization of academia more broadly has resulted in a sustained emphasis on the modern and the transnational, and it is often difficult for hiring committees to imagine specialists in a time before nations as relevant to those needs, despite their expertise in seeing the commonalities of historical events and the human condition across millennia.

This article articulates and documents the state of the premodern Japanese history field with a focus on the people that have and do comprise it and the institutional circumstances that have fostered the field's development. In assessing trends in the mentorship and retention of scholars since the beginnings of premodern Japanese history-centric study in the mid-1940s, this study demonstrates the gradual growth and diversification of the field, yet maintains that, given the current state of hiring and academic precarity, this increasingly robust community, and its diversity, is also endangered by its small scope. Rather than rely on ephemeral, anecdotal evaluations of our niche field, it is important to generate a baseline for understanding its scale, composition, and possibilities from its people, rather than just their products. The next generation of scholars and scholarship will depend on a cognizance of the field's well-being, strengths, weaknesses, and a willingness to use that knowledge to strategically support those who come next.

### *Scope and Methods*

The data for this study was collected via a survey circulated in August and September of 2020. Most scholars responded directly to the survey; for those who did not or who are deceased, I located information on their education and training by reviewing their dissertations and early publications, reading articles on their careers, and consulting with other scholars in the field (especially contemporaries and former graduate students). Inevitably, some individuals, particularly those who have left academia and changed careers, were unable to be located. Where relevant, the data reflects any unknown elements.

The data was visualized using Tableau Public and Palladio, with some visual editing in Adobe Photoshop for clarity. I focus on the history of English-language training and mentorship 1946-2026, but a fuller picture of the Japanese system is also worth future investigation.[10]

The visualizations and analyses represent training and mentorship within the premodern Japanese history field, with a focus on English-language circles, particularly within North America and with outlying connections to scholars in the United Kingdom and Australia. This decision was made after collection of the data was completed, as the broader systems of academic training and mentorship in other areas, such as Japan, Europe, and elsewhere, embodied significantly different training and hiring processes and produced comparatively incomplete data. This relative disconnect from English-speaking scholarly circles is worth

[9] See for example, Michelle M. Damian, "As Estates Faded: Late Medieval Maritime Shipping in the Seto Inland Sea" and "A Geographic Analysis of Traders and Trade Goods in Japan's Late Medieval Seto Inland Sea"; Nadia Kanagawa, "Making the Realm, Transforming the People: Foreign Subjects in Seventh- through Ninth-century Japan"; and Stephen Scott, *Age of Samurai: Battle for Japan*.
[10] For a full network visualization of advising in premodern Japanese history, see Appendix A.

noting, as fostering interactions among scholars and students in Japanese Studies outside of Anglophone communities is an ongoing issue that can hinder scholarly exchange.

For the purposes of this survey, I define “premodern” as pre-1600/Tokugawa period. Although many scholars consider themselves to straddle this boundary or cover both premodern and early modern periods, whether they were designated a premodernist depended primarily on if they were trained specifically in pre-1600 history for their PhD and/or whether the bulk of their scholarship has focused on pre-1600 studies or early modern studies. Admittedly, these can be fluid designations and one’s subjects of study inevitably change over time. Part of the challenge in curating data is the necessity of drawing these boundaries to generate meaningful results.

Similarly, the definition of “historian” is equally flexible, as many scholars in literature, art history, and other areas take historical approaches to studies in other disciplines and vice-versa. Furthermore, historians are not always employed in or trained in history departments, a subject that will be discussed below. For this survey, I considered a historian to be a postgraduate or graduate student (PhD) who met one or more of the following criteria:

- being trained and/or primarily published in the discipline of history
- engaging chiefly with historical analyses in their scholarship and in the training of graduate students in historical studies and methods
- in the case of PhD students, training in or planning to work in a history department (particularly one where they could eventually train PhD students in history)

Respondents who did not meet these criteria were excluded. In what follows, I provide summaries and insights from the whole of the premodern Japan historians’ dataset, grouping major themes and providing data tables and visualizations where appropriate. Additionally, I selectively highlight areas of particular interest to the state and future of the field.

## Results and Insights

Between 1946 and 2020 there have been 93 premodern historians of Japan. At present, there are 38 such pre-retirement scholars who are living and still active independently or at an academic institution in the teaching and research of premodern Japan (Table 1). Many, though not all, retired scholars (12) are also still active in the field. As of 2020, there are 15 graduate students in PhD programs being trained specifically in the premodern history of Japan.

Among people who acquired their PhD, approximately 21.5% (20) left the field to pursue other interests or professions. Of those who left the field after their degree, 13 were men and 7 were women. Their subsequent pursuits include data analysis, banking and finance, the auto industry, documentary filmmaking, musical composition and performance,

*Table 1*

Historians of Premodern Japan (1946-2020) by Current Position

| Position | Number |
|---|---|
| Deceased | 8 |
| Retired | 12 |
| Administrator | 1 |
| Independent Scholar | 6 |
| Professor | 9 |
| Associate Professor | 9 |
| Assistant Professor | 7 |
| Assistant Professor (research institute) | 1 |
| Contingent Faculty | 5 |
| Graduate Student | 15 |
| Left the Field | 20 |
| Total | 93 |

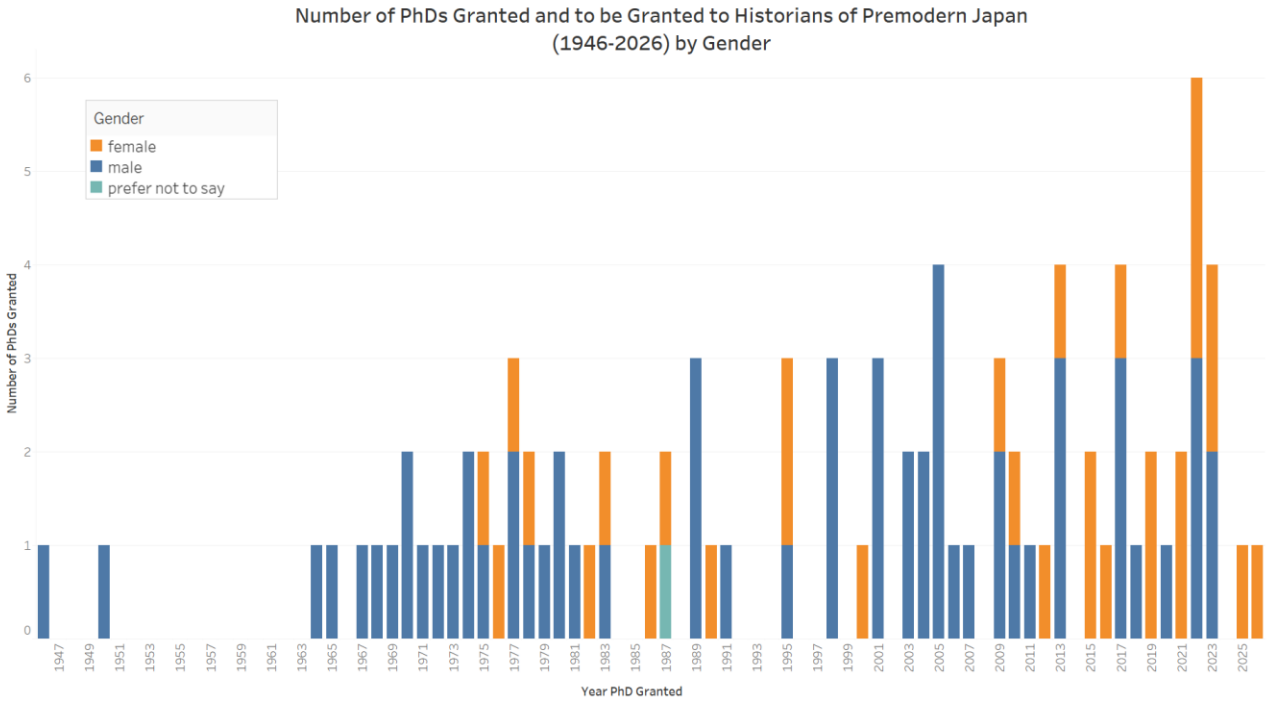
academic degrees in the sciences, and other career shifts inside and outside of academia. The whereabouts and careers of at least half of these individuals could not be determined.

***Degrees Granted, Disciplinary Training, and Institutional Affiliations***

In the sixty-year period of 1946 to 2026, which anticipates the graduation of current students in premodern Japanese history, degrees granted in this specialization have been on a slow rise (Fig. 1). The first degree granted to a woman took place in 1975, by which time 14 men had acquired degrees. Three women followed in 1976, 1977, and 1978, two of whom immediately left the field and one of whom became an independent scholar. In the '70s, 12 men obtained degrees. In the 1980s, 4 more women acquired degrees, as compared to 7 others. The '90s saw a small number of graduates, 3 women and 5 men, with an explosion of degrees granted in the 2000s: 17 in total, but only 2 women versus 15 men.

This disparity resolved in the 2010s, when 9 women and 9 men obtained degrees. If all anticipated degrees are granted in the 2020s, there will be 9 female and 6 male graduates, a reverse-course of the previous tendency for more men than women to acquire degrees in premodern Japanese history. However, this shift in gender balance is taking place during perhaps the bleakest two decades in this period of academic hiring and tenure-track job opportunities.

*Figure 1*



Of the 93 degrees granted to or that will be granted to historians of premodern Japan between 1946 and 2026, they have by and large been situated within history or hybrid history and language departments (Table 2), accounting for 63.5% of degrees granted (59). Area studies or languages and cultures programs comprise 35.5% of degrees (33) granted, with an outlier (1 degree) in political science. Of the current 15 graduate students in premodern history, 7 are situated in history departments, 4 in East Asian Studies departments, and 4 in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies departments across seven institutions.

These data suggest that over the course of sixty years, most historians of premodern Japan obtained their degrees and training through disciplinary training in history departments, though a significant number have received degrees through programs that are ostensibly "area studies" but that maintain strengths in producing historians of Japan. For example, Princeton University's East Asian Studies department accounts for 13 of the 33 degrees (just under 40%) granted in area studies or language and cultures programs.

*Table 2*

**Departments from which Historians of Premodern Japan Earned or Will Earn Degrees (1946-2026)**

| Degree Granted Department | |
|---|---|
| History | 52 |
| East Asian Studies | 15 |
| Asian and Middle Eastern Studies | 5 |
| East Asian Languages and Cultures | 5 |
| History and East Asian Languages | 4 |
| East Asian Languages and Literatures | 2 |
| Faculty of Oriental Studies | 2 |
| East Asian Languages and Civilizations | 1 |
| Far Eastern History | 1 |
| Far Eastern Languages and Civilisations | 1 |
| Far Eastern Languages and Literatures | 1 |
| History and Far Eastern Languages | 1 |
| Japanese History | 1 |
| Oriental Studies | 1 |
| Political Science | 1 |

*Table 3*

**Institutions Where Historians of Premodern Japan Received Degrees (1946-2020)**

| Institution (Degree Granted) | |
|---|---|
| Stanford University | 12 |
| Harvard University | 11 |
| Princeton University | 10 |
| University of Michigan | 8 |
| Columbia University | 7 |
| University of Southern California | 6 |
| University of California, Berkeley | 4 |
| Yale University | 4 |
| University of Oxford | 3 |
| University of Cambridge | 2 |
| University of Hawai'i at Manoa | 2 |
| Rutgers University | 1 |
| University of British Columbia | 1 |
| University of California, Santa Barbara | 1 |
| University of California, Los Angeles | 1 |
| University of Chicago | 1 |
| University of Copenhagen | 1 |
| University of Oregon | 1 |
| University of Toronto | 1 |
| University of Washington | 1 |

As for where those degrees were obtained, between 1946 and 2020 the top five universities for premodern historical study were Stanford University, Harvard University, Princeton University, University of Michigan, and Columbia University (Table 3). Stanford's preeminence is the result of the energetic mentorship of Jeffrey P. Mass, who between 1983 and 2005 graduated 11 of the 12 historians accounted for here, two of whom completed their degrees after his death. Several figures at Harvard, notably Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig between 1950 and 1975, graduated 11 students. Of the 10 students at Princeton, 9 were mentored by Martin Collcutt. Six of University of Michigan's 8 graduated under Hitomi Tonomura, and prior to 1980, H. Paul Varley trained the historians of Columbia University, who have since worked with several others. Appendix A shows a network visualization of advisor/advisee roles for the dates covered in this study, with the addition of those who, although not themselves premodern historians of Japan, trained individuals in that specialization. Each node is sized in relation to the number of connections to others,

meaning those who advised a larger number of students appear as a larger node within the network. It should be noted that the names provided, while identified as primary advisors, do not fully account for the shared labor, expertise, and mentorship duties that comprise a student's training.

In the next few years, several new historians of premodern Japan will graduate from University of Cambridge (4), Princeton University (3), and University of Southern California (3), with additional students at Michigan (2), UNC Chapel Hill (1), University of Oregon (1), and University of Toronto (1). Historians of premodern Japan have been or will be trained at a wide range of universities, including Ivy League schools, private universities, and state universities, with 21 different institutions in total. Of those institutions, 16 are located in the United States (and account for all five of the institutions with the highest number of degrees produced to date), 2 are located in Canada, and 3 are located in Europe.

There are 38 scholars currently active across 32 institutions who are postgraduates who are not retired and have not left the field (Table 4). Of those individuals, 6 are without institutional affiliations. That is, they are independent scholars still active within the field of premodern Japanese history. Nineteen are located in the United States, 7 in Japan, 2 in the United Kingdom and Canada respectively, 1 in Australia, and 1 in Israel. Institutions within the United States continue to lead in both the number of degrees granted and in currently active premodern historians.

*Table 4*

Current Institutional Affiliations of Active Historians of Premodern Japan (post-PhD, pre-retirement, in field)

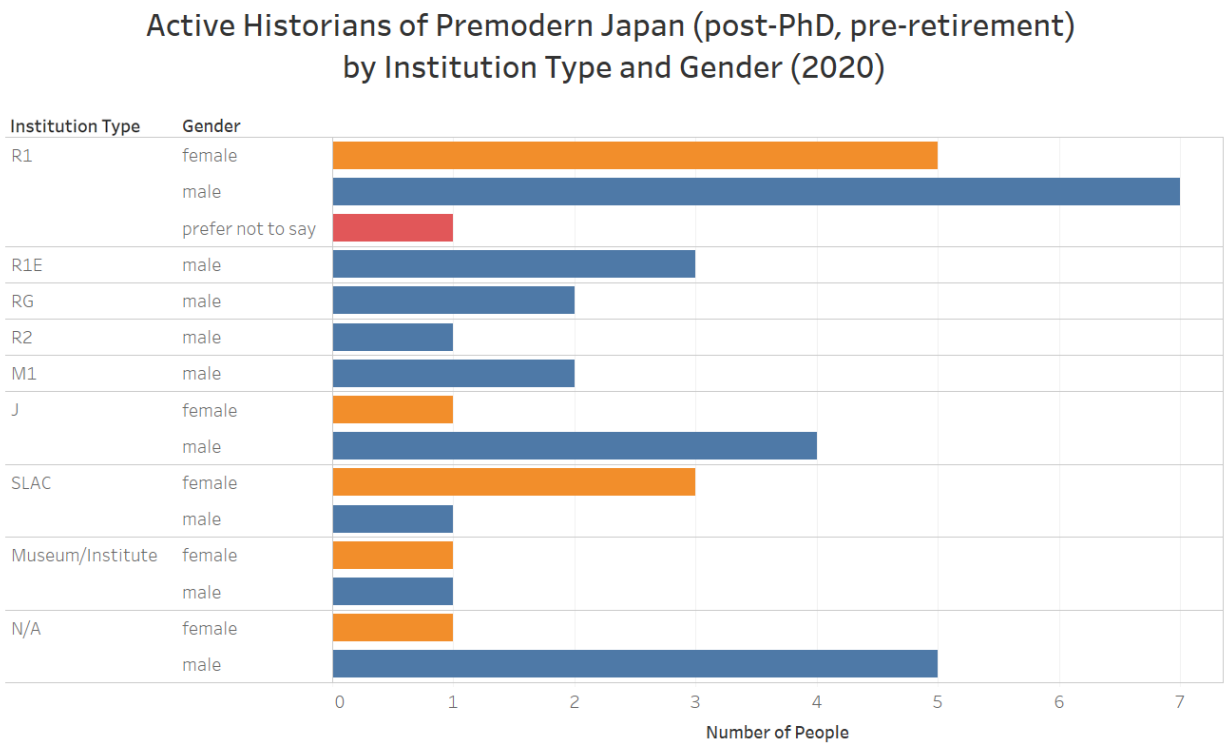
| Current Institutional Affiliation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| None | 6 | Rissho University | 1 |
| Columbia University | 1 | Rutgers University | 1 |
| Concordia College | 1 | Saitama University | 1 |
| Coquitlam College | 1 | Salisbury University | 1 |
| Florida State University | 1 | The Hebrew University of Jerusalem | 1 |
| Furman University | 1 | University of Cambridge | 1 |
| Indiana University Bloomington | 1 | University of Illinois Springfield | 1 |
| Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies | 1 | University of Kansas | 1 |
| Kansai Gaidai Unviersity | 1 | University of Michigan | 1 |
| Keio University | 1 | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | 1 |
| Kogakkan University | 1 | University of Oregon | 1 |
| Michigan State University | 1 | University of Pennsylvania | 1 |
| Monmouth College | 1 | University of Southern California | 1 |
| National Institute for the Humanities/National Museum of Japanese History | 1 | University of Sydney | 1 |
| Newcastle University | 1 | University of Toronto | 1 |
| Oakland University | 1 | Yale University | 1 |
| Princeton University | 1 | | |

Of the individuals described above, those situated at large, non-Japanese research institutions (given here as R1, R1 Equivalent, Russell Group, and R2 institution types) comprise 19 scholars (Fig. 2). Men comprise approximately 72% of those positions. Of the 5 women at large research institutions, 2 are contingent faculty, while 1 is situated in a department outside of the History and East Asian Studies field (and therefore unlikely to train students of history). The remaining 2 are scholars nearing retirement, one of whom will no longer be accepting students. Barring new tenure-track hires or relocations from other smaller institutions, it is likely that in the next five to ten years there will be no women at major research institutions in secure positions geared toward the training of future historians of premodern Japan. There are presently no women in

premodern Japanese history employed in tenure-track or tenured positions at Ivy League institutions.

Male premodern historians outnumber women 4 to 1 in employment at Japanese universities, while women outnumber men at small liberal arts colleges (SLAC), all located in North America, at a ratio of 3 to 1. There are 2 men (and no women) employed at large universities that only offer Master's programs. One man and 1 woman work in institutional settings other than a university, both in Japan. Among independent scholars (N/A), there are 5 men and 1 woman.

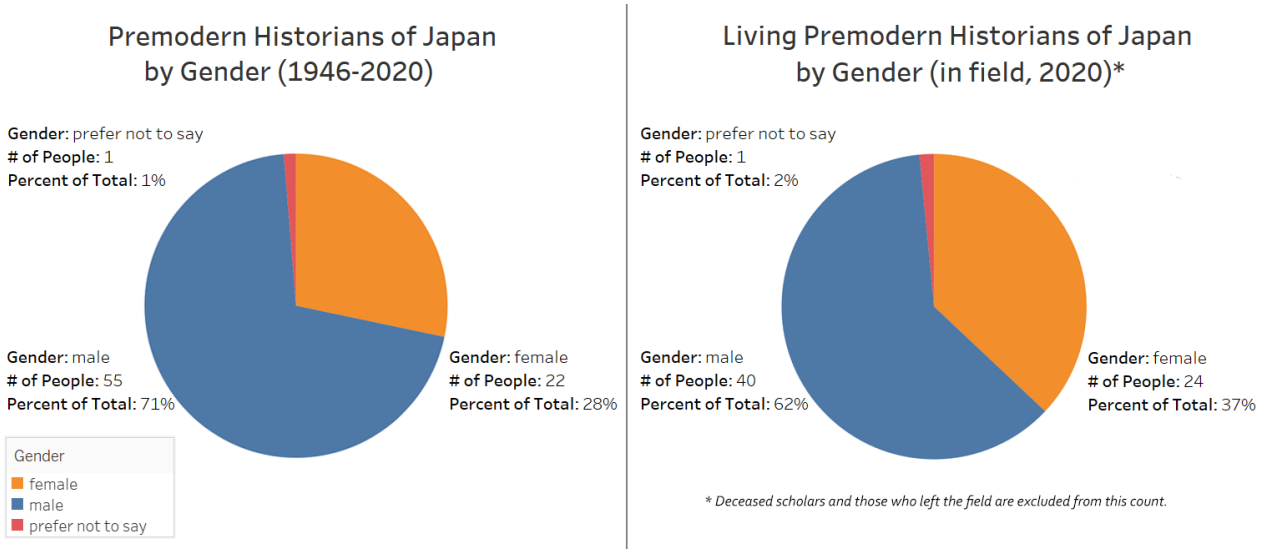
*Figure 2*




***Gender, Tenure Status, and Training***

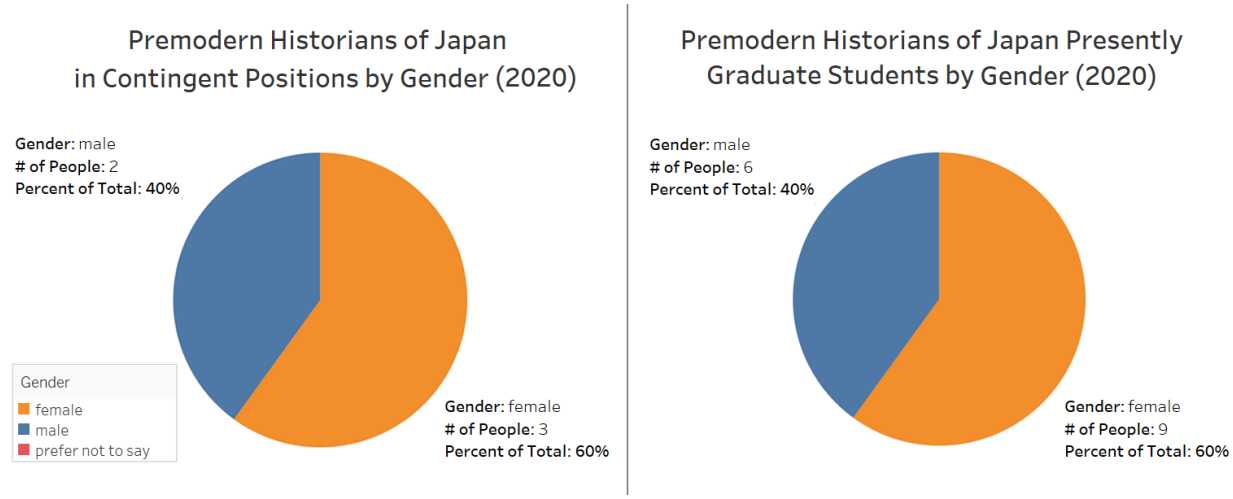
Of premodern historians of Japan that completed degrees between 1946 and 2020 (78 in total), 71% (55) were male, 28% (22) were female, and 1% (1) preferred not to say (Fig. 3). This includes those who have passed away and those who have left the field. Narrowing this examination to only those living scholars as of 2020 who are still working within the field, this disparity is slightly improved, though men still outnumber women 40 to 24.

*Figure 3*




Turning to contingent faculty, of the five individuals accounted for, 3 are women and 2 are men. Among graduate students (15 total) women outnumber men at 9 women and 6 men (Fig. 4). This uptick in female graduate students reflects the overall increase in the last two decades of female scholars of premodern Japanese history.

*Figure 4*

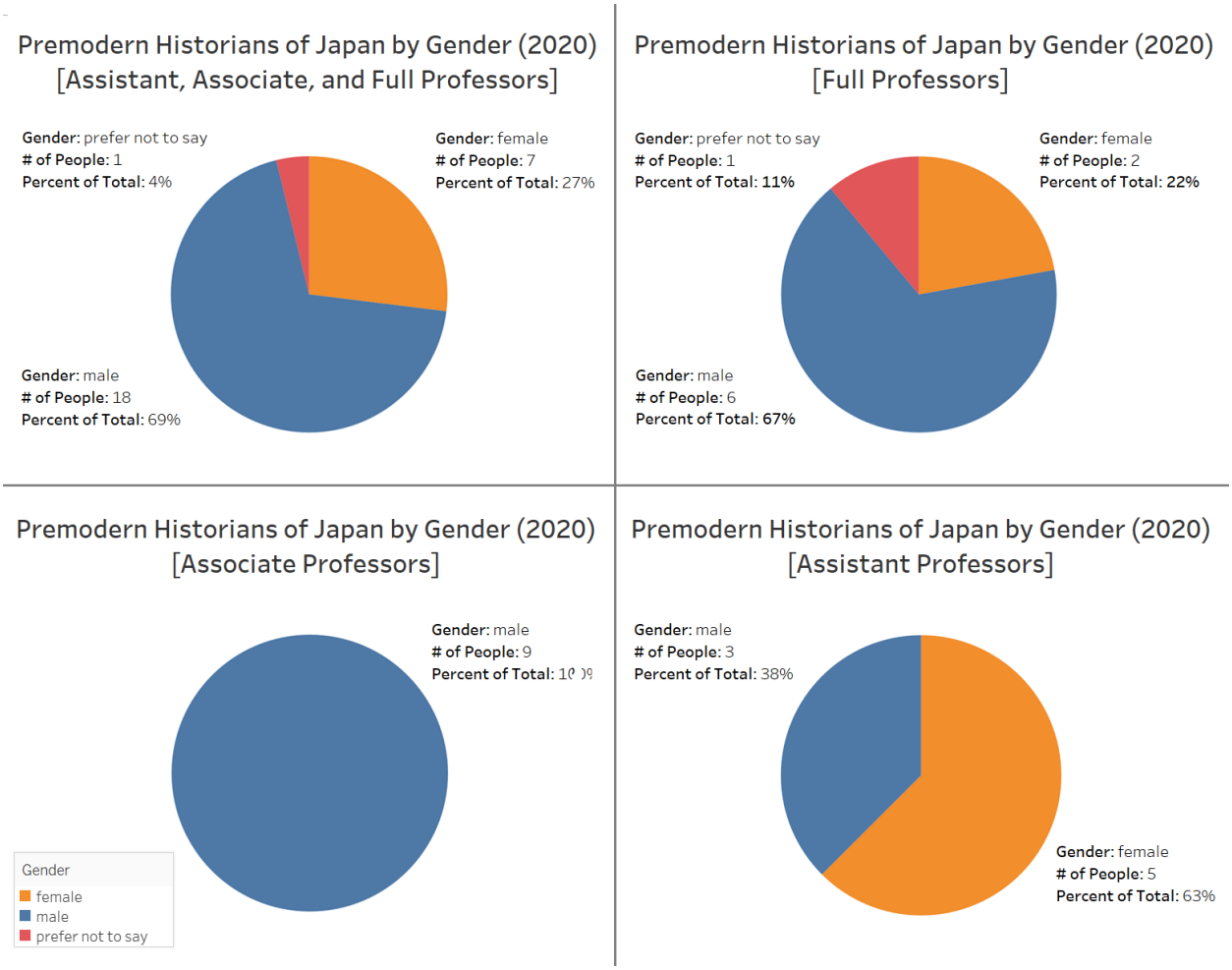



The gender breakdown of assistant, associate, and full professors currently employed across various institutions reveals a roughly 4:1 ratio of men over women, with women (7) accounting for 27% of the total professors, men (18) accounting for 69%, with 4% (1 person) who preferred not to identify (Fig. 5). Among full professors, this ratio remained approximately the same, with

only 2 female full professors, 6 male full professors, and 1 who preferred not to identify, a total of 9 individuals. The 2 women with full professor status are nearing retirement.

There are currently 9 associate professors in premodern Japanese history (the status at which most professors begin being allowed to take on graduate students); they are all men. Among assistant professors, there are 5 women, outnumbering 3 men. Excepting those presently in contingent positions, these 8 assistant professors are those with the least job security. Between the collection of this survey data and its publication, two assistant professors at small liberal arts colleges had their tenure-track positions eliminated. One was reinstated to tenure-track several months later, the result of an external grant.

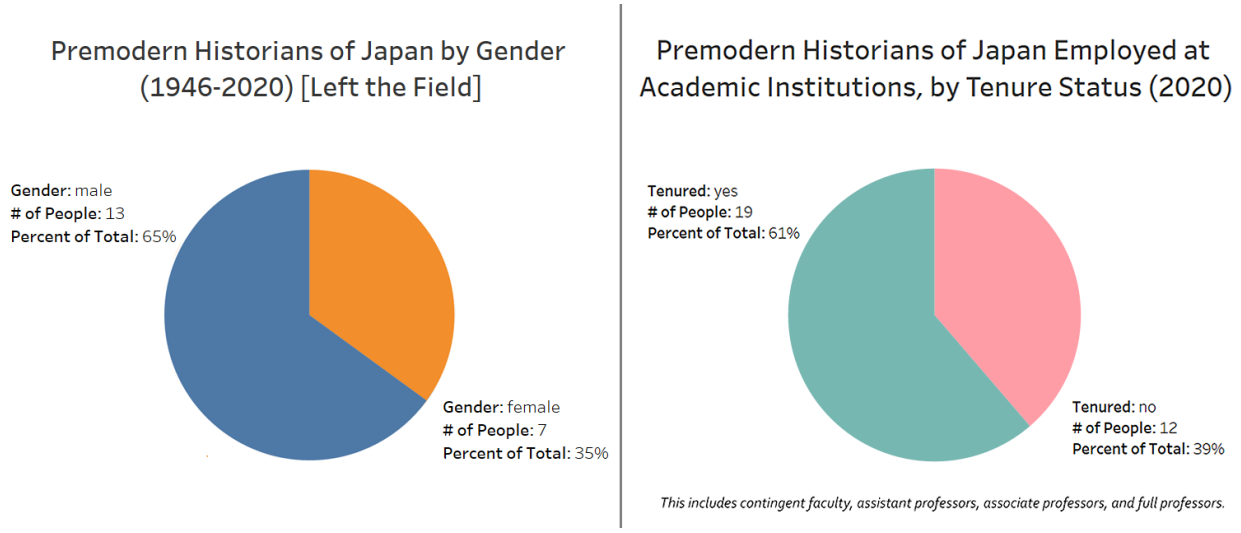
*Figure 5*




Of the 20 people who have left the field of premodern Japanese history, 65% (13) are men and 35% (7) are women, a result that is in keeping with the overall gender ratios seen in the field at large (Fig. 6). Only a small number of these individuals could be located to complete the survey. Research into their present whereabouts and anecdotal responses from their contemporaries and former advisors revealed that at least three men and one woman went on to pursue careers

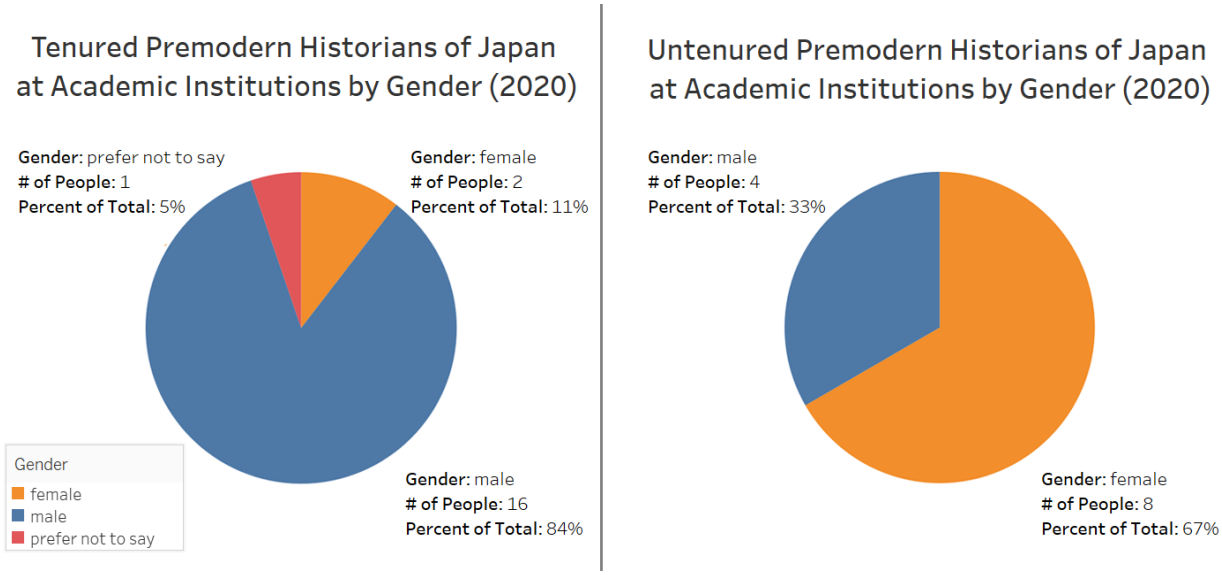
within academia in different fields and time periods of study. Others are either unknown or moved on to radically different professions in finance, the arts, and other areas.

*Figure 6*



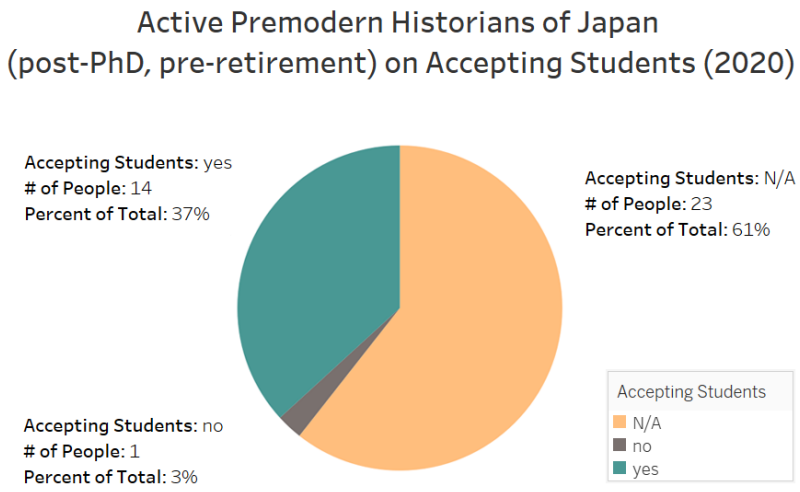

As for those who stayed within the field and are currently employed at academic institutions (31 total), 61% (19 people) are presently tenured, versus 39% (12) who are not (Fig. 7). Among tenured faculty, men (16) comprise 84% of the total and women only 11%. Among untenured faculty, women are 67% of the total (8) and men 33% (4). As such, men remain the majority of faculty members in more secure employment positions.

*Figure 7*



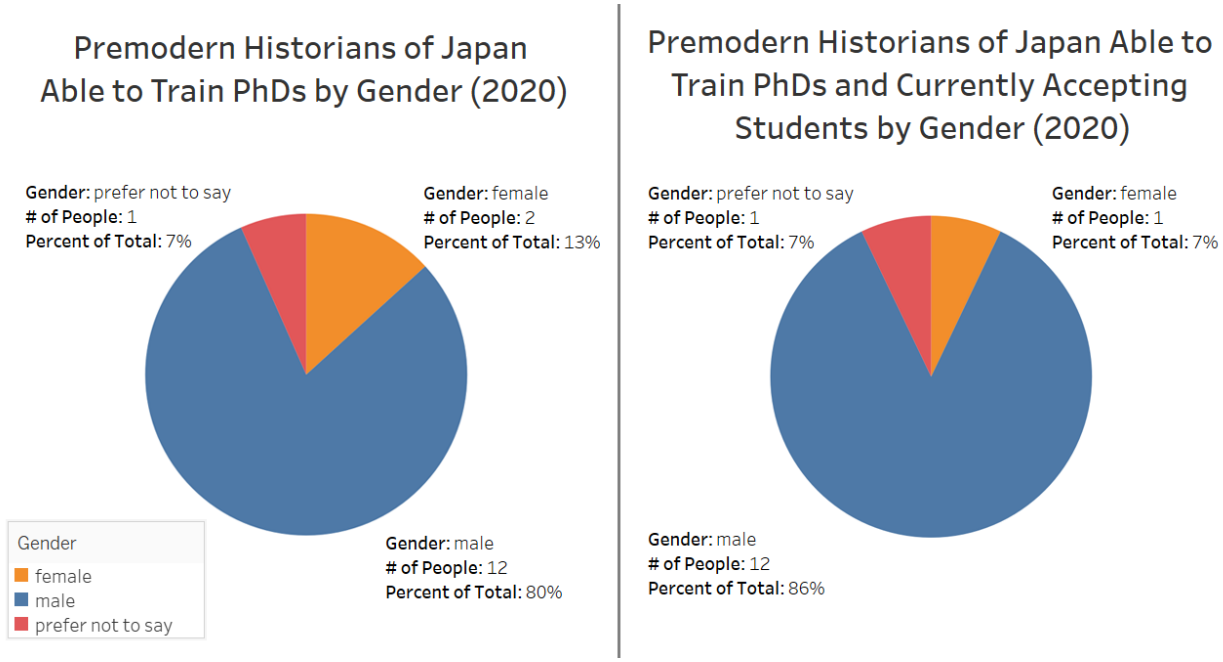
Of the 38 active premodern historians of Japan who are post-PhD but pre-retirement, 23 of them (61%) are not in positions where they have the ability to train students for PhDs (N/A) (Fig. 8). Among the 15 people with the ability to take on students, 37% (14) are currently accepting students while 1 nearing retirement no longer plans to take more students. One scholar (counted among the N/A category) is accepting students but not likely to train students of history in their current department.

*Figure 8*




Among the 14 individuals still capable of and willing to accept students, 12 of them (86%) are male, 1 preferred not to say, and only 1 person identified as female (Fig. 9). There is a stark gender imbalance in formal advising in premodern Japanese history.

*Figure 9*



## Future Prospects

Of the 23 people unable to train PhD students because of their present employment status, 13 of them (6 men and 7 women) said that they would train students in premodern history if given the opportunity. This includes 3 associate professors, 3 assistant professors, 3 independent scholars, and 4 contingent faculty. There is therefore no shortage of interest in participating in the perpetuation of the field, if only the ability presented itself. The reasons provided for being unable to train students despite their interest included a lack of tenure-track positions, PhD programs not being offered either at the individual's institution or specifically in history, or being situated in a department where one is unable to train history students. One person expressed wariness of admitting any student to a program without assurances that the market had recovered, job opportunities would be available, or that the student was considering alternatives to academic positions.

There were 6 "maybe" responses (1 full professor, 1 administrator, 3 assistant professors, 1 independent scholar) on the desire to train students, with one person remarking that their previous institution in North America did not allow them to train PhDs, nor does their institution in Japan. Additionally, 4 respondents did not indicate their preference.

Of the 5 contingent faculty in premodern Japanese history, 4 responded to the survey and are known to be actively seeking tenure-track employment. All four would train students if they could, though most expressed unease about the possibility of new tenure-track positions with a preference for premodern history appearing in the near future, citing a strong likelihood that they will have to pursue other career options out of necessity.

Graduate students surveyed on their intentions to continue in academia, the 14 of 15 who responded, expressed similar anxieties. Of the 15 currently pursuing their PhDs, 11 explicitly expressed their desire to become professors and stated that this career path was their priority. Similarly, 12 of them said they want to mentor graduate students in the future. The individual who responded "maybe" specified that the current climate of academia is making it impossible for them to envision a future in which they have job security, while the person who responded "no" stated that it was "grossly irresponsible to train people… knowing that there is no stable work available that will respect this investment of time, energy, and lost income." These data reveal that despite a growth of interest in and the greater number of graduate students training for specialized positions in the study and research of premodern Japanese history, the current economic circumstances and precarity experienced in academia over the last two decades may lead to an increased number of scholars who will leave the field after graduation.

Those graduate students who responded identified desired career alternatives in teaching secondary education, freelance writing, government service, consulting, librarianship, museum work, corporate work in international business overseas, and other areas where their language and pedagogical skills could be put to use.

## Conclusion

Over the last sixty years, the field of premodern Japanese history has experienced a steady growth in interest, mentorship, and representation.[11] And yet, the uncertainty of our current academic climate and the limited number of scholars capable of training the next generation, wary already of negative employment outcomes, makes a niche field like premodern Japanese history endangered. This is not to suggest that other scholars in literature, religion, or other areas of study are unqualified to mentor students of history; however, without premodern historians of Japan situated at large research institutions (particularly those with equitable and substantial funding to support a graduate education), history departments are unlikely to accept students with academic interests in this subfield over those whose interests more closely align with their faculty. To date, history and area studies departments with specialists invested in training the next generation of historians have been responsible for the field's survival.

These data have shown several trends that appear in many other fields as well, but that I see as particularly perilous for a specialist subfield like premodern Japan history when they occur in tandem with the broader decline in academic hiring and the devaluing of early history as a specialization. First, training for premodern history has historically been conducted at large research institutions (namely Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, Michigan, and Columbia). After obtaining their PhDs, postgraduates have moved on to small regional schools that lack the funding or institutional support to continue mentoring in their trained field. Presently, comparatively few of the largest and most financially solvent institutions employ premodern historians of Japan.

Second, given the last two decades of budget cuts and hiring freezes, many tenured scholars that have retired are not having their lines replaced; several currently at major research institutions known for supporting premodern Japanese Studies are nearing retirement and have expressed concerns that their line will be eliminated when they leave, putting the ability of young scholars to move into those positions in peril and, in some cases, delaying their retirement.

Third, although more job opportunities are becoming available in Asia (particularly with the growth of international education there), as Matanle and Euan McIntosh's evaluation of British scholars in Japanese Studies has shown, these positions are largely precarious ones that are difficult to acquire and that operate on limited-term contracts. If one were to include the data of those who have left the premodern Japan field for other academic positions, the previous 4:1 male/female ratio of scholars employed in Japan would rise to 6:1, suggesting also a greater international mobility for male researchers.

Furthermore, even if an increasing number of scholars relocated for new opportunities in Japan, China, Korea, or Hong Kong, where many general cluster hires in history have been taking place during the 2020-2021 cycle, their ability, or the ability of PhDs training under them, to reenter the North American and Anglophone market can be significantly hindered by the incompatibility of expectations for research and teaching or the general unfamiliarity many Anglophone institutions have with overseas programs.

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[11] Although not surveyed for this article, ethnic and racial diversity in East Asian Studies at large (including the premodern Japan field) remains low and is a crucial area of equity and inclusivity that needs both study and active work towards addressing. An approximate examination of the 93 scholars representing premodern Japanese history here from 1946-2026 shows at least 85% of individuals as white-presenting.

Fourth and finally, despite the growth in gender equity seen within the field of premodern Japanese history in the last two decades, without proper investment in up-and-coming scholars these gains may be quickly lost.[12] More women than men occupy positions at small liberal arts colleges (and consider this an attractive career option), reflecting an unsettling gendered segmentation of positions that are seen as requiring more teaching and interpersonal mentorship and fewer dedicated opportunities for research and archival travel. Of the graduate students surveyed, women spoke more readily about the need to have career alternatives, their willingness to consider them, economic precarity preventing them from pursuing the academic market for more than one or two years, and their moral apprehensions regarding training a new generation of scholars who may have no future. If we do not find ways to support women financially and intellectually in the field, we may lose an entire generation of female scholars.

Historical knowledge of premodern Japan is no less relevant today than it was sixty years ago; this is the expertise that debunks nationalist claims to homogeneous ethnic and racial origins, that reminds us that patrilineal imperial practice is a modern invention, that draws students into the classroom to problematize representations of "feudal" Japan in their latest movies and video games. Though our goals as educators and scholars are often to break down the disciplinary, temporal, and regional barriers that ostensibly divide us, specialized training remains valuable and critical. For the field of premodern Japanese history to survive, the next five to ten years will require strategic support for current and future scholars.

Organizational and individual sponsors who readily celebrate Japan's traditional arts and culture in the public sphere must also invest in the careers of academic specialists who contextualize these practices in the distant (and recent) past. We need partners with the ability to link academic research with public-facing exhibitions. Academic institutions and departments that wish to promote initiatives related to diversity, inclusion, and thorny subjects like identity must recognize that these issues are not modern phenomena, but are often part of sociopolitical, cultural, and religious debates that stretch back centuries. We need allies and colleagues to recognize the relevance of the past and integrate it more fully into their enterprises.

Scholars of premodern Japan who desire to further our research and demonstrate its significance must also practice effective outreach, making their scholarship legible and accessible to broader, non-specialist audiences. We must communicate the relevance of our work beyond our small community and advocate for the importance of premodern Japanese history in global and local contexts beyond our constructed notions of periodization.

Action must be both collective and individual, and it cannot wait. Supporting historical scholarship on premodern Japan is a crucial facet of a dynamic Japanese Studies community, whether creating innovative scholarship or diversifying curricula that attract students from around the world to consider the past, present, or future from manifold perspectives. Though we should not be entirely alarmist about the future of the premodern Japanese history field, it behooves us to be aware of how training, hiring, and retention have changed over the last six decades and become engaged advocates in our own institutional and interpersonal to ensure that another six decades of scholarship will follow.

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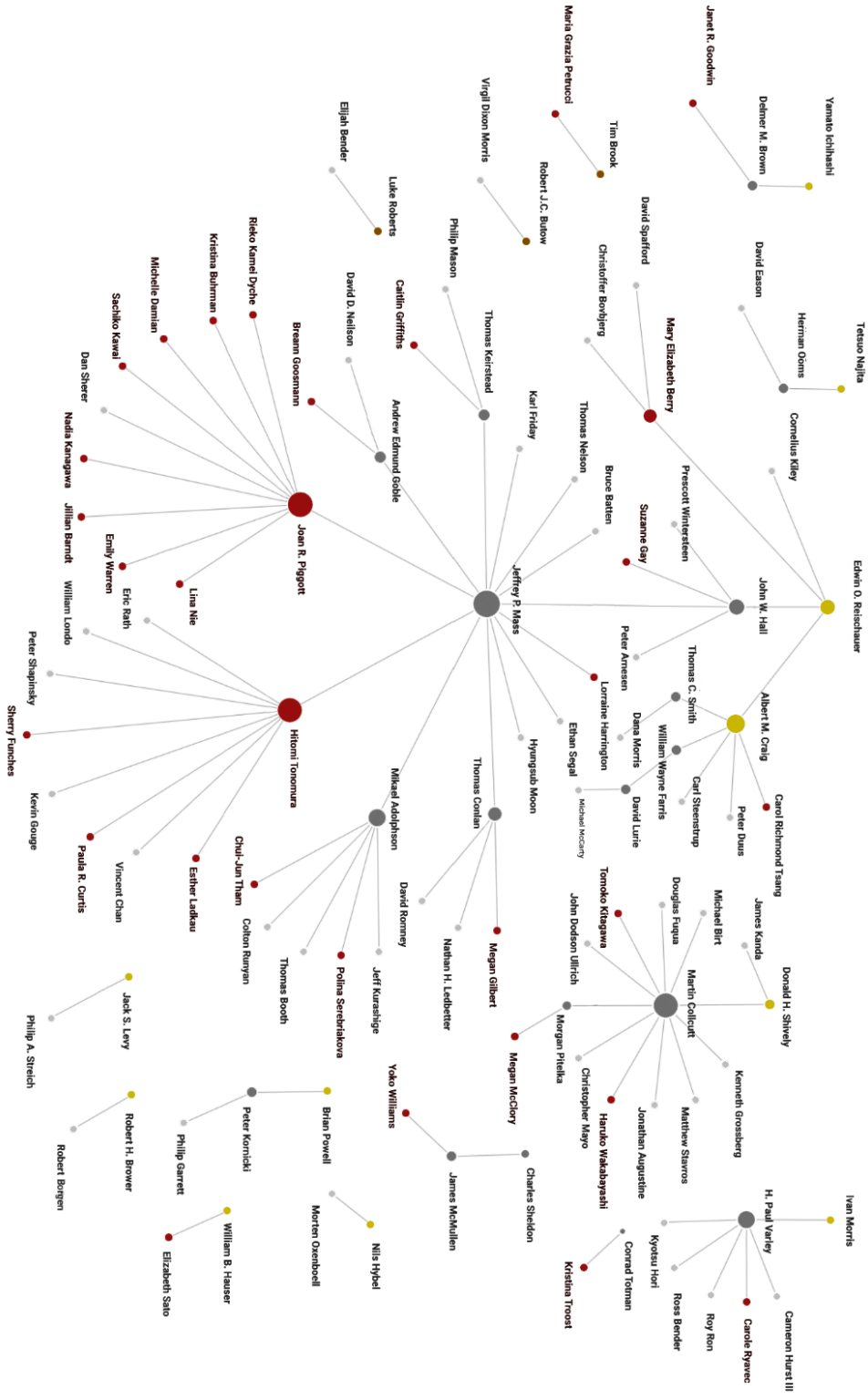
[12] It is already well-recognized that progress in gender equity in the academy has been slowly eroded, something that is intensifying in the face of social and familiar constraints exacerbated by the pandemic. For a comprehensive essay on this issue, see Troy Vette, "Sexism in the Academy."

# Appendix A: Network Visualization of Mentors and Mentees, 1946-2026

This visualization shows mentors and mentees in pre-1600 history. In order to represent data on training and mentorship as a network graph, some scholars in other disciplines or temporal foci are included and are marked accordingly. While this type of academic tree reflects (largely formal) advising relationships, it is important to remember that mentorship and intellectual development occur through much broader communities of colleagues.



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