



United States • Japan

FOUNDATION



Richard J. Samuels Dissertation Award in Japanese Studies

Laudatio

August 2026

Dr. Gene T. Kim's doctoral dissertation on "Upwellings of Oceanic Decolonization: Coastal Governance in Japan and Korea, 1894–1958," submitted to the Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, is extremely well-sourced and researched, highly original, and beautifully written. It examines contested processes of "oceanic decolonization" in which complex and fraught debates over maritime territory and international law emerged from fisheries competition and conservation efforts between Japan and South Korea. Drawing on a rich variety of sources in Japanese, Korean, and English, and combining the meticulous archival research with site visits, Kim vividly describes how, over the course of a bit more than half a century, competing claims over territory gave way to competing claims to the wealth of the ocean's living resources that were increasingly recognized as limited and dwindling.

Addressing key economic, environmental, legal, and political questions not only of the early twentieth century but our time as well, Kim shows how the perceived threat posed by a resurgent Japanese fishing industry to an emergent South Korean fishery rekindled lingering resentment over coastal dispossession during the Japanese empire. Defending what Koreans, then, claimed as their marine resources, resulted in the Japanese being pushed out from what they had previously claimed as their fishing grounds and, ultimately, prompted a change in the global maritime order and a more equitable regime of access to them.

Committee members:

- **Sabine Frühstück**, (Committee Chair) Distinguished Professor and Koichi Takashima Chair in Japanese Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- **David Leheny**, Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Waseda University.
- **Kiyoteru Tsutsui**, Henri H. and Tomoye Takahashi Professor of Japanese Studies, Professor of Sociology, and Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University.

About the Award

Administered by the United States-Japan Foundation, this annual dissertation award aims to provide vital recognition to young social scientists in the United States and encourage emerging scholars entering the field. Originally launched in 2024 as the USJF Scholar Dissertation Award, the prize was renamed in 2026 to honor former USJF Trustee Professor Richard J. Samuels for his lifelong dedication to Japanese Studies.

About the United States-Japan Foundation

The United States-Japan Foundation (USJF) is an independent philanthropic organization dedicated to strengthening bilateral ties and addressing shared challenges. Since its founding in 1980, USJF has supported diverse initiatives through over \$100 million in grants in both countries. Today, alongside its grant programs, USJF oversees the US-Japan Leadership Program (USJLP), a network connecting over 500 leaders from both nations.

