

# Japanese Studies at the University of Otago

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## Introduction

This article covers Japanese Studies at the University of Otago from the inception of the Japanese language programme in 1993 up until 2008. The program at the University of Otago made a relatively late start compared to other universities in New Zealand, which started their Japanese language programmes decades earlier. For instance, Massey University began offering Japanese in 1965, the University of Auckland in 1968, the University of Canterbury in 1971, and Victoria University of Wellington in 1989. The Auckland Institute of Technology began part-time evening courses in the 1960s and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology had a one-year course in the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

However, before the Japanese programme was established in 1993, the University of Otago already offered several courses that were Japan-related or had Japan-focused contents. For instance, “Politics of Selected Asian States” (taught from 1982 to 1991), “International Trade” (taught from 1961), “The World since 1945” (taught from 1992 to 1996), “Modern Japan” (taught from 1992), “Japanese Politics and Society” (taught from 1989 to 1991), “Japanese Politics and Foreign Relations since 1945” (taught from 1992), “High Religions of the East” (taught from 1968 to 1975), “Religions in India and the Development of Buddhism in Asia” (taught from 1976 to 1991), and “Introduction to Eastern Religions” (taught in 1992 and 1993) all explored and contributed to the understanding of Japan’s history, economy, politics and religion.

Although the Japanese programme at the University of Otago is relatively new in New Zealand, there are many aspects of the University of Otago’s education and research during these thirteen years that warrant further examination. This paper aims to first provide an outline of the courses offered at the University of Otago, and then to mention a number of the research results produced by its academic staff, and finally to introduce

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2 The Japan Foundation, the Australia-Japan Research Center. *Directory of Japanese Studies in Australia and New Zealand*. Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 2004, pp. 97–114.

relevant educational activities by other institutes and the community.

## The Japanese Programme

In 1993, when the Japanese programme was established and the first Japanese language course was offered, approximately 155 students enrolled in “Introductory Japanese Language 1.” In the first two years, four language courses focusing on Japanese language acquisition were offered, and from 1995, Japanese literature and films were introduced via the course “Selected Texts and Films” which was taught mainly in Japanese. In 1998, “Japanese Culture” was offered with fifty-two students attending the class. Part of the “Introduction to Asia” course has also included content on Japanese literature and environmental issues, and the course “Topics in Asian Studies” focuses on either Japan’s nationalism or Sino-Japanese relations from the 1890s onwards.

At the end of 1995 fifteen students gained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Japanese, and by the end of 1996 eight students finished their studies towards a “Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Subjects (Japanese).” In 1999 the first M.A. student graduated from the programme, and in 2002 a Ph.D. degree was awarded for the first time. While undergraduate student numbers have remained almost unchanged during the last thirteen years, post-graduate student numbers vary from year to year.

In 2006, seven Japanese language courses for undergraduate students, from an introductory to an advanced level, were offered, including one course on Japanese culture, one on Japanese literature, and one on Japanese film, all taught in both Japanese and English. For post-graduate students (mostly honours students) the programme offers one language course and two research courses, as well as one course which requires the students to study at a Japanese university, participating in an “in-country study programme.” In the first semester of 2006, there were 131 students at 100-level, 57 at 200-level, 35 at 300-level, and 9 at 400-level which included three honours students, two M.A. students and one Ph.D. student.

Since 1993, the Japanese programme, with substantial assistance from teaching fellows and tutors, has concentrated on Japanese language education. With sufficient language proficiency, some graduates from the University of Otago have furthered their studies by embarking upon M.A. and Ph.D. courses at Japanese universities. Four University of Otago staff members created the English version of two textbooks, *Preparing for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test Level 3* and *Preparing for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test Level 4* (edited by Nanyan Guo), published by Heinemann Education in 2004.

The Japanese programme now belongs to the Department of Languages and Cultures. In 2006, it had four academic faculty members (one associate professor, one senior lecturer and two lecturers) and two tutors. The varied research interests of the teaching staff have helped stimulate students' intellectual curiosity. Research topics chosen for post-graduate diploma research essays, honours dissertations, and M.A. and Ph.D. theses range from Japanese literature, film, drama, arts, language, gender, religion, and folklore, to education, tourism, law, sports, and social issues.

Exchanges with Japanese universities allow University of Otago students to study in Japan for either six months or one year. The University of Otago has signed exchange agreements with the Otaru University of Commerce (1992), The University of Tokyo (1995), Bunkyo Gakuin University (1997), Rissho University (1999), Hirosaki University (2000), Ochanomizu University (2003), Yokohama National University (2004), Keio University, and Kansai University. Scholarships from the Japanese government and the University of Otago have helped alleviate travel costs and living expenses for students. Four of these universities, Tokyo, Hirosaki, Ochanomizu and Yokohama, within their existing teaching programmes, also provide an "in-country study programme" for honours students.

The research interests of the teaching staff of the Japanese programme are broad, including Japanese literature, film, intellectualism, environmental issues, Sino-Japanese relations, and linguistics. Since 1999, the Japanese programme has hosted three major international conferences that have resulted in publications. The 1999 NZASIA Conference produced two books edited by Roy Starrs, *Asian Nationalism in an Age of Globalization* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2001) and *Nations under Siege: Globalization and Nationalism in Asia* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2002). A further book edited by Roy Starrs resulted from the 2002 Otago Conference on Japanese Cultural Nationalism: *Japanese Cultural Nationalism: At Home and in the Asia Pacific* (Folkestone, U.K.: Global Oriental, 2004).

In the same year, the "Ogasawara Forum 2002, Nature and Humanity in the Asian-Pacific: The Search for a Sustainable Way" was held in the Ogasawara Islands of Japan, often dubbed "the Galapagos of the East," and a collection of papers presented at the conference, edited by Nanyan Guo and Gavan McCormack, was published in Japan, under the title *Ogasawara no kankyō: Ajia Taiheiyō kara miru* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2005). All these conferences received generous support from the Japan Foundation and the University of Otago.

Academic exchanges between the University of Otago and Japanese universities such as Hirosaki University, The University of Tokyo, and Yokohama National University have been beneficial to all the parties involved. Tsugaru, the northern

periphery of Japan, where Hirosaki University is located, has been the focus of a collaborative research project over four years. Henry Johnson and Nanyan Guo contributed to the book *Tsugaru no rekishi to bunka o shiru*, edited by Kanako Kitahara and Nanyan Guo (Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 2004), which is the result of research on Tsugaru culture. The English version of this research, co-authored by N. Guo, S. Hasegawa, H. Johnson, H. Kawanishi, K. Kitahara and A. Rasch, was published by the University of Otago Press. A book on a comparison of Tsugaru and Otago was edited by N. Guo and was published by Hirosaki University Press in 2007.

Furthermore, The University of Tokyo and Yokohama National University have conducted collaborative research with the University of Otago, as well as other universities in Australia, the United States and Canada, on Japanese language education for foreign students at The University of Tokyo. Nanyan Guo contributed her research on University of Otago students' learning experience to the research report *Tanki ryūgaku seido no takokukan hikaku kenkyū* (University of Tokyo, 2004), edited by Atsuko Kondō.

## Education on Japan-Related Subjects

Apart from the Japanese programme, other Japan-related subjects began to flourish at the University of Otago in the 1990s. These educational subjects can be divided into two groups: Japan-related and Japan-focused.

In 2008, there are various Japan-related courses at the University of Otago. Currently the Department of Economics offers "International Trade" (including Japan's trade policies) and "Asian Economic Development" (including Japan's economic growth); the Department of Management offers "Interpersonal/Intercultural Business" (including Japanese business communication), "International Management" (including Japan's environmental management) and "Management in Asia Pacific" (including Japanese management attitudes); the Department of Tourism offers "Global Tourism" (including Japanese tourists in the Pacific); the Department of History offers "the Twentieth Century World" (which includes Japan's role in World War II and its post-war economic development); the Department of Political Studies offers "International Politics: Asia-Pacific" (including relations between the U.S., China and Japan), "Comparative Politics: Asia-Pacific" (including Japan's political structure), "Regime Change in East Asia" (which includes state-managed capitalism in Japan); the Department of Religious Studies offers a "Special Topic: The Body in Asian Religions" (including Zen), "Special Topic: Asian Religions and the West" (including Westerners' perception of Japan and Japanese understanding of Western religion); the Theatre Studies Programme offers a special topic on Kabuki; and the Faculty of Law offers

“International Human Rights Law” (including New Zealand WWII veterans’ demands to Japan for compensation, and capital punishment in Japan), “Special Topic 10: International Environment Law” (including Japan’s whaling policy), and “Information and Data Protection Law” (including the new Japanese data protection law). Some Japanese horror films are studied by the Department of Film and Media Studies. Natural Science courses, such as “Marine Botany” (including the invasion of the Otago coastline by *undaria pinnatifida* and Japan’s farming of marine algae) and “Ecology of World Vegetation” (including Japan’s forests) are also offered.

There are, however, relatively few Japan-centered courses. The Department of Political Studies offers “Japanese Politics and Foreign Relations since 1945,” which examines the protagonists and institutions of the Japanese political system, major diplomatic policy areas, and Japan’s international relations in the post-Cold War era. The Department of History offers “Modern Japan,” which aims at providing an introduction to the history of Japan between 1800 and 1952, and a “Special Topic: Wrought by Defeat: Economy and Society in Japan since 1945” which examines the origins and consequences of Japan’s sustained economic growth since 1945 and the immediate causes of its economic downturn in the 1990s.

The Department of Music offers several courses that contain a significant amount of teaching content on Japanese music. “Music in World Cultures” partly deals with several different themes of Japan’s court music and the transmission of music from China to Japan. Another topic covered is Japan’s folk music. “Ethnomusicology” partly deals with the concept of sound in Japan with examples of how sound is used aesthetically (in a garden, at a tea ceremony, a Shinto festival, a Buddhist ritual, etc.). Part of “Music in Asian Cultures” is centered around the music and performing arts of Japan with an emphasis on the context of music making and the genres in which the *koto* is found, as well as how music works within Japanese society. Students learn how to use the *koto* in order to understand various aspects of Japanese culture. In this course, the *shamisen* and the *shakuhachi* are also covered briefly. The Department has seven *koto*, and students are given an opportunity to play them. In 2004, Henry Johnson released an extensive book on the subject, *The Koto: A Traditional Instrument in Contemporary Japan* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2004) to be used in courses from 2005. Dr. Takashi Shogimen of the Department of History published *Seiji shindangaku e no shōtai* (Kōdansha, 2006).

The University established an Asian Research Centre in 2002 to promote the research of University of Otago academics and their international collaborative projects. Staff members with expertise on Japan-related subjects have been making important contributions to the development of the Center.

The education and research on Japan at the University of Otago would not have been possible without the support from the university libraries. With the arrival of Asian studies librarian Timothy Woo in 1994, the collection on Japan has increased remarkably. Currently, there are more than six thousand books on Japan in Japanese, and there are more than eight thousand in English. The University of Otago has allocated substantial resources to purchase Japan-related books, journals and newspapers. The Japan Foundation has also helped to increase the collection for the past several years. The promotion of Timothy Woo to the position of “assistant collection management librarian” has ensured the further success in the development of this collection.

## Education at Other Institutes in Dunedin

The Dunedin College of Education offers “Music of the World’s People,” which partially looks at Japanese music; “Japanese Language and Culture,” which equips social studies teachers with the skills to deal with Japanese themes in their respective centers of education, includes an introduction to the basics of Japanese language and society. The course “Japanese (NZQA Level 7)” develops teaching competence in Japanese at secondary schools from year 7 to year 13. The College operates exchange programs with Miyazaki University, Gifu University and Ehime University. Students from Japan also contribute to the teaching of Japan-related courses at the College.

The Otago Polytechnic occasionally offers part-time courses on the Japanese language, which are open to the local community. The Otago Museum has held several Japan-related exhibitions during the last several years. The main exhibition has been “Otaru: Past To Present” (8 August 1998–14 February 1999), which featured a collection of antiquities—finely crafted tribal art and artefacts of the Ainu people, and early Japanese historic artefacts and photographs from northern Japan. In addition, the exhibitions “Otaru Youth Art Exhibition” (14 November–12 December 2001) and “Viewpoints: The Work of Kan Shimada and Yasuo Uno” (26 April–27 July 2003) have been held.

Dunedin became the sister city of Otaru in Hokkaido three decades ago. The Dunedin-Otaru Sister City Society often organizes various events to deepen the Dunedin community’s understanding of Otaru, and of Japan as whole. These events include a Cherry Blossom Day, Youth Forums, a World Youth Fest, and the Southland-Otago Japanese Speech Competition. The Dunedin City Council developed a Japanese Festival concept which took place in conjunction with the “Japanese Art and Artifacts” exhibition, held at the Dunedin Art Gallery to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Dunedin’s sister city relationship with Otaru in 2006.

## Conclusion

Although education on Japan at the University of Otago has a short history, the efforts and resources put into Japan-related education and research have been significant, and will continue to develop. With the support from the University of Otago, other tertiary institutions in Dunedin and the community, the Japan Foundation and the Japan Information and Culture Center of the Embassy of Japan, the quality of Japanese education in Otago will only go from strength to strength in the future.

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