

Chapter 1

In the Beginning: 1917- World War II

When did it all begin? When did Australia become aware of Japan seriously enough to contemplate training its nationals in the language and knowledge of Japan? To answer these questions, one has to go all the way back to the beginning of the 20th Century.

The central issue for Australian diplomacy and defence during the 1901-39 was the threat of Japan and the search for security in the Pacific. (Meaney 1996:1)

Australia became a federation at the turn of the century and the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed in 1901. Not long after achieving this new status, Australia's attention was suddenly drawn to Japan. Japan emerged victorious from the war with Russia, the first victory by an Asian nation over a European power.

Secure in the thought of being a part of the British Empire and Commonwealth, Australia hitherto had been complacent, relying on Britain to safeguard its international interest. Japan's victory over Russia, however, rudely awakened the Australians to their vulnerability in the Pacific. The sense of isolation felt was particularly acute, as Britain's attention was turned at the time to more immediate matters in Europe. British naval forces were withdrawn from the Pacific in order to meet German challenges closer to home.

In World War I, Japan fought as a British ally. This action, however, did not lessen Australia's suspicion of Japan. Australians feared that Japan might take advantage of the war and further pursue its ambitions in Asia and the Pacific. The series of Japan's conduct towards China, Japan's claim on the German North Pacific islands, and Japan's pressure on Australia to adhere to the Anglo-Japanese Commercial treaty were all considered cause for alarm. For Australians, Japan's conduct posed not only a military threat but also 'a grave danger to its White Australia Policy' (ibid.:7).

It is with this fear and apprehension towards Japan that the studies of Japan and its language were first introduced in Australia. It was, therefore, no coincidence that the birth of this academic discipline, which was to see in later years the strongest growth in the western world, was instigated, not by academia, but by the Defence Department of Australia.

Although academia did not play a part in introducing the study of Japan in Australia, it is significant to note, that the responsibilities of developing the study of Japan and the teaching of the Japanese language, were given consecutively to two eminent scholars, James Murdoch and Arthur Lindsay Sadler. Each of them, though in a different style, played a vital role in setting Australia's future course in the study of Japan and Japan-related education. It was curious that, despite the major involvement by the Defence Department in their appointment, neither scholar had a disposition sympathetic to the military ideology. In view of future development of Japanese learning in Australia, this was an extremely fortunate turn of events. They were first and foremost conscientious scholars committed to the pursuit of truth, with the added dimension of a genuine affinity for Japan.

1.1 James Murdoch

The appointment of James Murdoch, the first scholar of Japan to teach in Australia, was made by the Defence Department in 1917. Murdoch's initial appointment was to the lectureship in Japanese at the University of Sydney, with the condition to teach concurrently at the Royal Military College Duntroon in Canberra. He was to teach three days a week at Duntroon and two days at the University.

The origin of this appointment was recorded in a document sent from Pearce, the Australian Minister for Defence, to the Chief of General Staff, Brigadier-General Foster, dated 24th April 1916. In this document, Pearce requests 'a suitable person to lecture in Japanese in view of the growing commercial relationship between Australia and Japan' (Sissons 1985). On the account of Murdoch's appointment, the University of Sydney archives also hold a letter from the Australian Commonwealth Department of