

Chapter 4

The *Tsunami* of 1988

In the autumn of 1988 a tsunami of students swept across Japanese (and Japan-related) Departments in universities and language schools across Australia. (McCormack 1988:39)

Thus begins the now famous article by Gavan McCormack, then at the University of Adelaide. This article gave the name to the remarkable phenomenon which occurred in Japanese studies in Australia in 1988.

The dimension of the *Tsunami* wave staggered Japanese academia in all Australian universities. Student enrolments in the first-year Japanese course at Monash University, for example, jumped by one hundred fifty per cent (150%) in the single year between 1987 and 1988; at ANU the increase was by one hundred and ten per cent (110%). Every university surveyed by McCormack in 1988 recorded over a hundred per cent increase in the first-year Japanese enrolments. Of the eleven universities surveyed, the average increase between 1987 and 1988 was one hundred and thirteen per cent (113%)(*ibid.*:39).

The increase in the enrolment of first year students in the major Japanese programs across the country is shown below. This has been extracted from the results of the survey conducted by McCormack in 30th April 1988 (*ibid.*:39). McCormack clarifies that the figures were not complete, as official figures were not available. The data here, nonetheless, gives sufficient indications as to the extent of the *Tsunami*.

Table 2: Increase in the First Year Students between 1987 and 1988

	1987	1988	% Increase
University of Queensland	157	314	100
University of Sydney	120	270	125
ANU (Japan Centre)	53	110	107
Monash University	100	250	150
University of Western Australia	110	158	43.6

Drysdale reported in 1989, that the number of first year students enrolled in Japanese language programs Australia-wide had risen to two thousand six hundred and ninety five (2,695) in 1988, compared with eight hundred and ninety four (894) students who had completed the first year program at the end of 1986. The first-year enrolments further increased in 1989 to three thousand three hundred and forty (3,340) (Drysdale 1989:3).

The shift in student enrolments from 1983 to 1989 is presented below. The table shows the number of students successfully completing or enrolled in first and higher years of Japanese language study programs in Australia's tertiary education institutions. Data here has been extracted from the 1989 *Japanese Studies in Australia* (Australia-Japan Research Centre 1989:5).

Table 3: The Shift in Student Enrolments between 1983 and 1989

	1983	1986	1988	1989
First Year	550	894	2695	3340
Higher Years	523	731	1331	2179
Total	1073	1625	4026	5519

4.1 Reasons behind the *Tsunami*

It still baffles Japan specialists in Australia today why the tsunami-like increase of students occurred in a single leap between 1987 and 1988, and with such momentum. Japanese academia in Australian universities, however, had been aware for sometime that the demands for Japanese studies courses were increasing.

Awareness that the future of Australia lay with Asia had been gradually spreading in the Australian community since the 1970s. With a strongly Asia-focused policy and multiculturalism, recognition came from the government, industries and general educated communities.

The establishment of the Asian Studies Council in 1986 demonstrated a