

Japanese Studies in Ireland

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The Ireland Japan Association (IJA), concerned with inadequate resources for Japanese language education at third-level institutions, appointed a subcommittee in December 2012 to compile a report on the state of Japanese studies in Ireland and to make recommendations on necessary steps for improvement. The report adopted by the Council of the IJA in June 2013 was submitted to the Higher Education Authority (HEA). A deputation from the subcommittee was received by the HEA on 30 September 2014. The HEA gave an interim response; this slow progress reflects the pressures faced by the HEA, as well as the delicacy of the issue at hand. While the HEA has a far-reaching role, Irish universities value their autonomy. Perhaps more importantly, the likelihood of progress has been directly affected by severe cutbacks in state funding for higher education. This factor in particular works against funding for minority subjects, as universities seek to redirect resources towards other areas. The good news, however, is that the report seems to have led the HEA to initiate a study of minority languages at third-level education. A negative offshoot of this linking of Japanese to the much broader issue of minority languages in general is that the deliberation and decision making process will take far longer than is desirable.

It is not possible to present the IJA report in full here, as some of it is confidential. However, the key recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- (i) Funding should be confined to Dublin City University (DCU) and the University of Limerick (UL), the two centres of higher learning which at present provide four-year courses in the Japanese language. Any funding for expansion in four-year courses in other centres should be provided only if demand should expand;
- (ii) The two existing centres themselves require extra funding. DCU has a solid staff base, but the viability of the teaching at UL could be in danger if extra resources are not allocated;
- (iii) A full-blown four-year course in Japanese Studies (combining language and other topics) should be instituted, involving appointments of staff in human-

ities and social studies, and including the creation of one post at professorial level. The sub-committee report does not make any recommendations as to the physical location of this endeavour. But if not located in an existing centre, language teachers should be purchased from one of them. This would entail extra expense, but such costs would be smaller than if an entirely new language teaching unit were established.

The HEA has proposed a further meeting with the IJA subcommittee once the HEA's study of minority languages has expanded. It should be noted that, at this stage, reduced state funding for higher education rules out, at least for the mid term, any progress in regard to more expansive Japanese courses in Ireland. The introductory section of the IJA subcommittee report (dated 21 October 2014) follows below.

Introductory Section of Report by Subcommittee as Adopted by IJA Council

The Development of Japanese Studies in Ireland

- A. The challenge of Oriental Studies (para. 1)
- B. Japan's place in Irish perceptions and interests (paras. 2–8)
- C. Development of Oriental Studies (paras. 9–12)

A. The challenge of Oriental Studies

1. Oriental languages have had a very minor place in public attention in Ireland. Japanese did to a modest extent hold such a position in the late 1980s and 1990s, but on a lesser scale than Chinese does today, where the issue has been given added impetus by the establishment of Confucius Institutes. There is no questioning the value of Chinese (Mandarin); interest in it began late, and current interest is therefore doubly welcome. The mistake was made at an earlier date to concentrate exclusively on Japanese, just as now Mandarin is mentioned in current commentary usually to the exclusion of other East Oriental languages. The real case which has to be faced is that Ireland needs to develop Oriental Studies at large. This requires a balanced approach including the language most in demand at any point of time, a secure place for other languages which have an established place such as Japanese, and at this or at some later stage support for other East Oriental languages. Oriental languages are not essentially in competition with one

another. In general, a wider awareness of any one language makes it easier to achieve a balanced approach embracing Oriental Studies as a whole.

B. Japan's place in Irish perceptions and interests

2. The significance of Japan and of the Japanese language is too important to be allowed to slip entirely out of focus. The interest in China is both necessary and healthy in itself, but can have unintended results if it leads to ignoring the importance of Japan to Ireland. The problems of the decade of the 1990s and beyond have dimmed somewhat the image of Japan. However the vibrancy of Japan has been understated in much commentary. Moreover, there have been many recent stirrings within Japan that have potentially major significance for Ireland in both business and academic terms.

3. (i) *Economic issues.* In the mid-noughties the Japanese initiated discussion on the feasibility of a significantly improved trading relationship with the enlarging and integrating EU. The Authorities on both sides took the view that the shared values (human rights, democratic process, rule of law, market discipline) should allow for greatly improved economic and social interaction but a certain reluctance was evident in EU business/industry because of the administrative difficulties and non-tariff barriers impeding penetration of the Japanese market. An extensive scoping exercise of the issues involved was carried out over the past two years and the European Council decided in late November last year to authorize the opening of negotiations between the EU and Japan on an Economic Partnership Agreement ("EPA"). Under the Irish Presidency of the EU negotiations began in mid-April in Brussels.

4. Conscious of the potential for Ireland in an EU-Japan EPA, in recent months senior public and private sector persons have been convening to consider public and private sector initiatives in relation to Japan. This should include private sector institutional interaction (IBEC with Nippon Keidanren through Business Europe, and directly Dublin Chamber of Commerce with the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and renewal of earlier public sector initiatives which had lapsed in recent years (engineering graduates' two year assignments in major Japanese companies; executive training programme of one year intensive Japanese language study in Japan followed by six months experience in a major Japanese company/institution; participation by mid-level managers

in the Industrial Cooperation Centre four month programmes on industrial technology and 'lean' production techniques in Japan).

5. The Japanese Authorities have cooperated with the European Commission in providing European Centres in four Japanese universities. Considerable interest in this initiative is evident in Japanese local authorities and it is likely that the recently established EU External Actions Services will seek to add to, or accelerate, progress in these Centres. Apart from sabbaticals by individual academics there has been little enough interaction between Irish and Japanese third level education. This is in contrast with the vigorous pursuit by Irish academic interests of connections/interactions with Chinese third level.

6. (ii) *Tourism*. While small compared with numbers from established centres in North America and Western Europe, the movement of people in both directions between Japan and Ireland is not insignificant, and has grown. On the estimate of the Japan Association of Travel Agents, the flow of tourists from Japan has fluctuated between 16,000 and 31,000 annually over a decade. In reverse, the number of Irish people travelling to Japan, as estimated by the Japan National Tourist Organisation, has fluctuated between 10,000 and 18,000 per year over the same period. As a very young branch of tourism between the two countries, this movement has a potential for further expansion.

7. (iii) *Cultural issues*. In terms of culture, literature and history a significant number of people in Japan have a keen academic interest in Ireland. The scale and range of this interest compares very well with interest in Ireland by major European countries. It can be measured in the regular publication of books and in a large annual output of articles on a wide range of topics, current, cultural and historical. In Japan the interest in Ireland is larger than that for other countries of a comparable size, and even bears some comparison with Japanese cultural interest in Britain. This disproportionate scale is due primarily to the attention devoted to Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, authors who have a large following in Japan. Yeats was at an early date recognised in Japan. This was initially due at the outset of the 1930s to Shotaro Oshima (who later also wrote a very substantial history of Irish literature); Joyce has a large following, and Beckett completes this remarkable pleiad whose appeal is world-wide. There are active academic societies in Japan for all three writers. Their appeal is helped by the fact that English, as easily the most widely

known western language in Japan, has helped to make them accessible. There is also, on a modest scale, an active interest in the Irish language, and a small number of Japanese scholars speak and read the language. A translation of a collection of poems by Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill was recently published and a wide-ranging and innovative study of Irish literature by Matsuoka Toshitsugu appeared within recent years, *Airurando no bungaku seishin: Nana seiki kara niju seiki made* (The Personality of Irish Literature: From the Seventh Century to the Twentieth).

8. From the Irish side the reciprocation is more muted in terms of literary and cultural themes (in part because of language problems), but at a more popular level it is both lively and growing nonetheless. Karaoke, sushi, manga, haiku, sūdoku are now not only familiar terms, but have their devotees. At a more scholarly level, an awareness of Lafcadio Hearn's role as an interpreter of Japan and of his place in Japanese appreciation of his writing has become widespread. Japanese art too has acquired an Irish interest, and, in part a consequence of the Chester Beatty Library, it has also a practical follow-up: a class in TCD draws regularly about 35 second-year students and 50 extra-mural students. A striking measure of the scale of the popular interest is afforded by the recent "Experience Japan," an annual event, attended in Farmleigh House, Phoenix Park, on 8 April 2013 by 25,000 people. This event, now in its fourth year, was organised through the cooperation of Dublin City Council, 3rd level Japanese Societies (including UCD, Trinity, and DCU) and the Japanese Embassy. It underlines the existence of a widespread interest and curiosity about Japanese culture, whether it be dance, language, food, arts, crafts, or fashion.

C. Development of Oriental Studies

9. In the case of Oriental language at large a combination of limited resources and a comparatively small student demand for serious language study means that the approach has to be at once economical and bold. The example of what happened in Britain in the case of "minority" languages, with the boom in Russian departments in the 1960s, and in Japanese departments in the 1980s, is salutary. Many departments have long since closed down (including what was in terms of resources an impressive department in Japanese Studies in Coleraine).

10. Hard studies in non-linguistic areas (meaning cultural or technical courses which require serious competence in an Oriental language) are negligible or non-existent in Ireland, though the Confucius Institutes, as they become established, may open a gateway for serious Chinese studies. The financial situation of universities offers little hope in the short or medium term of any improvement in support out of their resources. The Chester Beatty Library is of course a real asset. While it adds weight to prospects for Oriental Studies in Ireland without itself making an extra demand on public resources, the real problem is that competence within Irish universities to exploit its resources is limited.

11. The emphasis has to be on hard (i.e. linguistically demanding) studies. Otherwise there is the danger of various streams of Oriental Studies with soft and fashionable options coming into existence. This danger is notoriously well illustrated in many areas of non-linguistic academic studies at third level in Britain, with undemanding programmes and a large take up (precisely for that reason). In the case of Chinese studies, the Confucius Institutes, which have attracted comment (see “Confucius goes to College,” *Irish Times*, 8 September 2012), may give rise to some of these issues. The Institutes have been created by the Chinese government. This of itself in no way detracts from them or their work, but a distinction has to be drawn between a very understandable Chinese interest which may take the form of broad and popular courses to make China and its culture known, and the Irish interest in demanding programmes to create a small base of graduates, with real competence in an Oriental language (for academic purposes, diplomacy or business). These two things are not wholly in conflict, but the priorities are nonetheless different. While the Confucius Institutes provide initial funding, at the end of a short period the funding has to be taken over by the host countries. In other words, though welcome, they have very serious cost implications.

12. Serious language teaching is central to the development of Oriental Studies. But there is also a challenge for the provision of worthwhile non-linguistic courses necessary for the creation now or later of full four-year programmes in Oriental Studies, whether Japanese or Chinese.