

## Japanese Studies in Ireland

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| 雑誌名 | JAPANESE STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD 2000  |
| 巻   | 7   |
| ページ | 67-91   |
| 発行年 | 2001-03-30  |
| URL | <a href="http://doi.org/10.15055/00003918">http://doi.org/10.15055/00003918</a> |

## Japanese Studies in Ireland

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### I

#### Historical and cultural ties between Ireland and Japan

What were the relations between Ireland and Japan before Meiji times and in the Meiji period? Japan featured in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which was published in 1726. It was written therefore before Kaempfer's account of Japan was published. What was the source of his interest and knowledge? This is a small but intriguing point. His close ties with London may have made him aware of Sir Hans Sloane's acquisition of the Kaempfer manuscripts and of the imminent publication in 1727 of the translation. There was some writing again at the beginning of the 1850s. In between these dates, Arthur O'Connor and Wolfe Tone, two revolutionaries of the 1790s, referred briefly to Japan in their writing. The 1790s and 1850s were periods when an interest in the north Pacific and in Japan respectively were fashionable. The Irish interest was slight, but it somewhat paralleled western interest at large, more particularly in the timing.

Who was the first Irishman to visit Japan? We have to make a distinction between seeing Japan and the first landing in it! Ambrose Sutton, the second in command of La Perouse's squadron, the voyage of which was prompted by curiosity about the cold waters to the north of Honshu, certainly saw Japan in 1787, but did not land. Probably the first Irishman in Japan was Willis, medical doctor to the British legation. Willis was an interesting man; a friend of Satow, the Westerner who in the 1860s mastered the language more quickly and more completely than any other foreigner at the time; both men were out of sympathy with Harry Parkes, the impatient and aggressive head of the British legation. Willis helped to care for the Satsuma wounded in 1868, and hence knew Saigo. There were

later some Irishmen in Meiji service, but this is a relatively small aspect of the total outside presence in Japan. The late Sean Ronan, a retired Irish ambassador, has over the years sought to document this aspect.

Some interest in Japan recurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Lafcadio Hearn's books were purchased at the time in Ireland. As the Trinity College Library had English copyright privileges, it rather rarely purchased English-language books from outside Britain and Ireland; however the American first editions are in the library; Synge the dramatist was aware also of Hearn and his work. Yeats had an interest in the *no* theatre and wrote *no* plays. All this testifies to a fashionable interest in Japan, not to a wider or deeper one. There was moreover scarcely any attention in Ireland to Hearn after the first decade of the century until the 1970s or even 1980s when interest grew rapidly. His name is now well known, though knowledge of his work has not quite kept pace with awareness of his name. It is arguable whether Yeats understood *no*, though its sparseness of style undoubtedly had resonances for some one wanting to write theatre, as Yeats did, in dignified and poetic language.

What of Japanese interest in Ireland? Ireland or Irishmen featured in a few novels. The first serious interest in Ireland may have come at the end of the 1910s because of the parallels between Japan's involvement in Korea, and Britain's simultaneous problems in Ireland. There are two recent studies of this interest. One is "Yanaihara Tadao and the Irish question: a comparative analysis of the Irish and Korean questions, 1919-36" by Susan C. Townsend in *Irish Historical Studies* (Nov. 1996), and the other "Yanaihara Tadao to Airurando: fukin kara mita kokumingaku" by Saito Eiri in *Rekishi no naka no gendai: seiyo- Ajia-Nihon*, edited by Nakamura Katsumi (Minuruwa shoten, Kyoto, 1999). Yanaihara was of course a professor in Todai, who was the compiler of the *Catalogue of Adam Smith's Library* (Iwanami Shoten, 1951): some may be aware also of him as one of the parties involved in the conflicts in the Economics department of Todai in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> He wrote about Ireland as late as 1936. In the 1920s Japanese official concern with land reform led to study of the Irish land reform of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Ko Sawamura and Okuda Iku in the Ministry of Agriculture.

The late Professor Matsuo has written at length of it ("Researches on Irish land laws undertaken by Japanese Bureaucrats facing the tenancy question in the 1920s", *Hosei shirin*, vol.xlvi (1978).

Who was the first Japanese who visited Ireland? As in the case of the first Irishman to visit Japan, we can in no way be perfectly sure. It is far from clear that Japanese came to Ireland to study in Meiji times. This question has been asked on several occasions by Japanese. I can find no evidence of such cases, and the college records are structured in such a way that if students were not reading for a degree, their presence was not recorded or at any rate not recorded in the formal record which survives. There were therefore perhaps no examples of the sort of movement of students that can be found from Japan to Scotland, for instance. Of course such students were prompted by the prestige of the physical sciences in Scotland, and Irish universities were not the leaders in these areas.

In academic study of Irish themes, the first serious scholar was Oshima Shotaro, later professor of English literature in Waseda University. He was also one of the first foreign scholars to appreciate Yeats' significance. He visited Ireland, and renewed the contacts in the three years he spent in Oxford at the end of the 1930s. He knew Yeats and among his many books he later wrote a magnificent *Gendai Airurando bungaku kenkyu* (published in 1956). Yeats dedicated a poem to him, and Shotaro also published a collection of his own poems in English, many of which were on Irish themes.

However, Shotaro and Yanaiharu aside, active Japanese academic interest in Ireland is substantially post-war. It can be dated of course to the continued growth of Yeats studies in Japan (in which Shotaro was central) and to the invitations to Professor Roger McHugh, a specialist in Anglo-Irish studies in University College, Dublin, to Japan. I think McHugh visited Japan on a number of occasions, and his address to the Japan Yeats Society in 1970 was the occasion of a poem by Oshima dedicated to him. An interest in Irish history began much later than that in Irish literature. Indirectly it seems to lie with Otsuka Hisao, who was such an influential figure in the postwar development of European history at Todai, and who

attracted many students. He did not have a direct personal interest in Irish history. He was primarily interested in Weberian historical thought, and in early European economic history. A collection of his essays was put together and a translation published in 1982 as *The spirit of capitalism: the Max Weber thesis in an economic historical perspective*. Otsuka, like others at the time of the Occupation and afterwards, was also concerned with Japan's place in the modern world and with the western countries with which Japan would have to compete in the post-war world and whose history would provide lessons for Japan's success, even survival. Hence he was, as a post-war teacher in the age of reconstruction interested in British history. Interested in such, he was necessarily aware of the Irish question, perhaps the major nineteenth-century problem of England. Hence he had one of his students, Matsuo Taro, study the Irish question and England as a Ph. D. subject. From this came Matsuo's interest in Ireland, which, after he completed his thesis, became a country which he studied in great detail. He was already well-informed about Ireland when he arrived in 1972, and at that time he spend two years in Ireland. He was interested primarily in rural history, but at the outset, given the English perspective of some of his preceding study, he was also interested in other aspects of Irish history which bore on Britain: he already had an absorbing interest in the northern problem: with the help of a librarian he compiled a bibliography of the soaring volume of writings on the question, and his own later studies ( additional to his work on rural history ) were to cover not only current northern events but the historical background and the rural roots to the Orange Order. He is in my opinion the Japanese who has come closest to Oshima Shotaro in the range and depth of his Irish knowledge. A collection of his essays, published in Japanese, brings out the range of his interests (but it was so wide that it does not cover it fully). His final article moreover, one that appeared just after his death in October 1997 was an essay on Otsuka.

Japanese who knew Ireland were few; those who visited it apart from known cases such as Yanaihara and Oshima even fewer; the long period of war, the high costs of travel, international economic problems all combined to slow the development of an interest. Matsuo was to remark in a paper reporting his 1990 visit how little knowledge of Japan there had

been in Ireland, and how little contact existed between the two countries at the time of his first acquaintance with Ireland in 1972. There was, he noted, only the presence each year of a Japanese student financed by the Irish government, and a very few Japanese scattered across the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, University College Dublin and the New University of Ulster. The student in 1972-3 we can identify as Matsuoka Toshi, engaged in studies in the Irish language, who was later a colleague in Hosei Daigaku, a fluent speaker of Irish and a researcher in medieval Irish. Among the others in the Republic of Ireland he met were Professor Imaeda Kuni who was at the Institute of Advanced Studies, and Dr and Mrs Ushioda (Dr Ushioda was a member of the Department of Chemistry in University College, and his wife was part-time curator of the Japanese collections in the Chester Beatty Library). These were the only Japanese in academic life in Dublin. There was also a department of Japanese in the New University of Ulster Coleraine; but forming part of the British system, it had little wider impact in Ireland, south or north. When Matsuo arrived in Dublin in 1972, he had no advance practical knowledge, no introductions to the universities and no details of their requirements for student admission, simply a plan of studying in Ireland. He arrived in Ireland in April, when in Japan a university year was beginning, but in Ireland one was already coming to an end. He was turned down in one university which he had approached as he saw it as the one best provided to make contact with the dominant cultural and religious tradition on the island. As a result of this rejection, he then applied to Trinity College, which he had seen as an Anglo-Irish institution and where at that time, as he later noted, more than half the students were protestant and many moreover non-Irish.

In 1990 he recalled the extent of the changes since his first visit in 1972. Compared with some 30 Japanese in Ireland in the early 1970s, there were about 500 at the later date. In 1972 there had been no Japanese contacts with the modern history department in Trinity; at the later date there were one or more Japanese in the department every year, and one had submitted a Ph.D. thesis in 1990. In his 1980 book, *Airurando mondai no shiteki kozo*, he recalled that in the field of economic studies he was the first Japanese historian to make a long stay in Ireland. It is impossible for

young Japanese scholars to-day to appreciate how difficult intercontinental contacts were even into the early 1970s, and how little direct personal contact many distinguished scholars had had with Europe. Otsuka, Professor Matsuo's professor and mentor, a great figure in European history in *Today*, for instance, visited Europe once only and then, late in his career, in 1962 and briefly.

There were of course others in the 1960s who were beginning to have an interest: some were specialists working quietly in their own institutions, others were anxious to create a network of scholars, Japanese and Irish, like Professor Doi of Nagoya who with little financial support was to publish for many years an excellent journal of Celtic studies, *Studia celtica japonica*. The number of scholars interested in Ireland is still not large of course, but the measure of vitality of this interest is less its numbers than the fact that it has created students, and there is now a corpus of young scholars who visit Ireland, and who research Irish topics. This interest is of course much more evident in literature, where Yeats and Joyce stand in some ways preeminent in the English-language literary influences in Japan. But more modestly—much more modestly—it also exists in History. The measure of that is of course the appearance of monographs of quality in Japanese, and regularly articles on Irish subjects in periodicals. I can think of a half dozen books in Japanese on Irish studies in the last eighteen months. Japanese study of Ireland is now in a second generation, and some of these scholars of the second generation are now old enough to be instructing students who will, we hope, provide a third generation.

This pattern of growth of course corresponds to the general post-1945 development of Japanese universities. The Irish interest is a small segment of a serious and very broad study of the outside world. The one exception within Irish studies in Japan is of course study and research in Anglo-Irish literature, where the knowledge of English and the importance of Anglo-Irish literature in English studies world-wide combine to give it a range and strength which can not be matched in other aspects of academic study. Lafcadio Hearn is of course another theme. This is a theme in which there is an interest on the Irish side. Sean Ronan and Paul Murray

have published books, and Hearn himself is of course a subject of ongoing debate and polemics. An article in the *Japan Times* on 20 Jan. 2000 shows how this argument is capable of ongoing development. It is in a sense now an academic industry. Hearn can be seen also as fitting into the interest in the exotic or unspoiled. While he is usually seen as an interpreter of Japan, his significance in some respects springs from trends in literature, which sought to look at unspoiled life and values. Perhaps Hearn has been isolated too much in debate in Japanology, also in the complexities of his life and the contradictions of his statements and instability of temperament and views, and has not been looked at sufficiently as a teacher of literature, and a rather good one apparently. He was essentially, despite a Japanese wife and an involvement in Japan, an international man of his age, and corresponds closely to the themes which come up in Loti (notably in *Pêcheurs d'Islande*), in Synge and Yeats, Lady Gregory and so on. Moreover, his influence in Japan, through his lectures at Todai, was related to the rise of a Japanese interest in world literature, just as in another medium, painting, work like Asaichu's seems to reflect a not dissimilar interest (even down to his Japanese painting—quite different from his French painting—which captures old houses and rural scenes). They fit, despite the nuances in their work, into a cosmopolitan rather than national setting (Chamberlain, a figure in the Hearn saga, great scholar of Japanese culture though he was, does not really fit into it), and perhaps conveniently in terms of Japanese awareness of outside literature around the figure of Natsume Soseki. Because Hearn was temperamental, and his moods varied, it is perhaps too easy to pay more attention to superficial things in his life and his fluctuating opinions rather than to the wider context. In other words, Hearn studies would gain from being put in a wider context.

## II

### Irish study of Japan

Hearn is the association with Japan which is now fairly well known in Ireland. That brings me to the main topic of this talk: What of the Irish interest in Japan? It was much smaller and more superficial than Japanese



interest in Ireland, and slower to develop. The Olympic Games of 1964 gave Japan much publicity and some focus in Ireland; in that decade also, scientific organisations began to hold some of their international conferences in Japan, which of course were also attended by Irishmen. Hence, a modest corpus of knowledge of Japan began to develop, and especially in the sciences there are a significant number of people who have at least visited Japan for this reason on one or more occasions in a lifetime. As tourism developed, no real current of Irish tourism to Japan developed: a measure of this is the fact that the long lists of air fares in Irish (or for that matter British) newspapers still rarely quote fares to Japan. The primary reasons for the lack of growth of course is that Japan is seen as a very expensive country the hotel prices quoted in comments are often of hotels of the level of the new Otani or the Four Seasons in the Chinzan-so (which would strike fear into the average Japanese as well and empty his pocket)! It is also perceived as a country in which the foreigner would run into serious language difficulties: in contrast to Japanese tourism to Europe group travel in the reverse direction is very small. In all these circumstances it is hardly surprising that scholarly contact itself was slow to develop. In the 1960s and early 1970s, I think the only Irish scholar with some first-hand knowledge of Japan, who also met Japanese scholars in Japan, and on whom they regularly called in Ireland was Roger McHugh, primarily a specialist in Anglo-Irish literature. In history there were no contacts (though one or perhaps two professors did visit briefly Ireland around 1970). Irish Historical Studies, of which at the time I was treasurer had a single subscriber in Japan at the outset of the 1970s. That subscriber was Matsuo Taro. Others began to appear later.

My own awareness of Japan began only from the time that Professor Matsuo, though already a university lecturer, decided to register for one year as a student in Trinity College in 1972, and it became a serious interest only from the time of my first visit in 1985. While the visit was mainly confined to Tokyo, I went as far afield as Kakunodate, then a much more remote and unknown place than it is now, to visit the thatched samurai houses, and Hagi, because of its association with Yoshida Shoin. Both visits were instructive. So was the magnificent museum of Japanese history in Sakura. These visits convinced me of the need in seeking to

understand Japanese history of going back well before the Meiji period. Travelling in Japan, one became aware that, while Japan's success in the mid-1980s was in some measure due to the circumstances of the decade, it also drew on strong historical roots. I had read almost two decades earlier a remarkable book by Ishikawa Shigeru, *Economic Development in Asian Perspective* (Tokyo, Hitotsubashi University, 1967), which underlined the fact that at the time of the Meiji Ishin, output per hectare was as high as a century later in the 1960s in many parts of Asia, a cautionary lesson indeed against assuming as economists at the time did in the west that Japan's development could be easily and effortlessly reproduced in other countries. While not a historical text, it implied strongly that Japan's history was different to the model of a less developed country in which in the west its history was often cast, and hence after reading the book I began to give Japan more attention in a course which in the 1960s I gave on economic development to students in economics.

The historical basis of Japanese success was very evident: as a society it had a coherence, and its modern success was based less on imitation (the patronising western explanation) than on its own inner resources, human and economic. I began to teach myself Japanese, and then decided to teach a course in Japanese history. That course began in the autumn of 1988. It was until recently I think the sole humanities course in Japanese studies in universities in the republic. At much the same time, courses in Japanese language began to appear. The emphasis was however on Japanese language linked to business. There have been two such courses in the Republic, one in Dublin City University, the other in the University of Limerick. The former course has been highly successful with an intake of 10 students a year (though, apart from a course in specialised translation work, it has never outgrown the link between Business and Japanese); the latter has been less successful.

The overall situation of Japanese studies was unsatisfactory. Japanese was taught in only two universities, and solely in the context of Business Studies. That was itself of course a big advance, and the universities concerned deserve warm congratulations in taking the first step in an area making serious demands on students, and in which student numbers

would necessarily remain small. There remained a need both to develop Japanese studies elsewhere, and to extend teaching to the humanities. A criterion would also be that one should aim not only to teach students a range of knowledge, but eventually that some students should go on to do graduate work, preferably in Japan so that in the future there would be a small group of academic specialists, who as far as possible would also have a command of Japanese, and who would at a later date be able to teach from first-hand knowledge courses in humanities subjects.

A Japanese Studies Committee was established in Trinity College in 1989. The first outcome of that was to provide language teaching within the university. That teaching has been successful in the sense that it has now lasted a decade; it is now conducted at three levels, which means that some students have persisted over three years. However, very few undergraduate students have taken the courses, because their study programmes are already heavy, and attendance at the courses does not give any academic credit. In Ireland as well as in Britain, knowledge of foreign languages is poor. The same problem has arisen even with European languages. Hence, increasingly in recent years language courses for which credit can be obtained have been designed to fit into teaching programmes: in particular full-blown degree structures courses integrating language and special study (a language and law, a language and business studies; a language and engineering etc) have been devised. There is still however an urgent need to ensure that students acquire and improve a knowledge of at least one foreign language. In both countries the capacity has fallen noticeably behind enhanced linguistic skills in other European countries. Of course, in Europe increasingly this has taken the form of students learning "global" English, and knowledge of French, for instance, among Spanish, Italian, Scandinavian and German students has fallen quite dramatically. Three decades ago by and large one dealt with professors and civil servants of the older generation in Italy or Spain for instance who spoke their native language, and French as their first or only foreign language. English is a part of a process of linguistic globalisation, in which English is coming to be seen as the world language: this encourages other students to learn English and hence to become effectively bilingual.

Perversely this has reinforced the existing poor record of existing English

speakers in the United States, Britain or Ireland in learning other languages. There is unfortunately a qualitative difference in the motivation which prompts, say, young French men and women to acquire a knowledge of English, and the relative lack of interest in foreign languages among Irish, English and American students. This shows up very strikingly in the movement of Socrates students, i.e the excellent EU programme intended to enlarge the number of students spending one year out of their undergraduate studies in an university in another European country. The preference by Socrates students by and large is strong for places in English-speaking universities; and in Britain and Ireland there is a serious imbalance between a large inflow of students and a much smaller outflow of students: in other words there is a persistent structural deficit in the balance of student linguistic trade.

This linguistic problem also affects the development of language teaching in Japanese or in other Asian languages. In proportion to the many Asians who speak English, and English is ever more the global language of transcontinental communication, it becomes harder to convince European students of the value of mastering a language entirely from outside the European linguistic groups. Global English is to be deplored: whatever about the superficial ease in communication it creates, its effects in purely academic terms are likely to hinder the proper development of serious and well-informed study.

### III

#### Linguistic problems in the development of Japanese studies

There are several problems in relation to Japanese studies which strike one. The first is the question of language. The role of global English apart, Japanese is perceived as a difficult language (though for a European, a language with only two irregular verbs can not be described as in all respects difficult). A practical problem in building up an interest in Japanese studies is that, unless good prior Japanese language teaching exists, students at present will have no knowledge of Japanese when or if

they actually go to Japan. That limits the range of work that they can choose: they will perform be limited at least at the outset to choosing subjects in which many of the sources are in English.

Moreover, specialist programmes apart, the language problem means that the teaching in many, although of course not in all courses on Japan in Ireland or in Europe, is superficial. Not only may the students not be learning Japanese but they are often taught in non-linguistic areas by people who themselves have no knowledge of Japanese. Hence much teaching will reflect a rather general interest, it will be superficial, and it will ultimately be dominated by western values. If not all students are taking language classes (and there is no reason why they should), it is all the more important that those who teach them can at least read Japanese. However, even in the country in the west in which Japanese studies are most developed, the USA, of 500 lecturers teaching Japanese history, Japanese reckon that half of them know the language. In history that in turn compounds the limited and superficial knowledge of Japan. In particular, study tends to concentrate on the twentieth century, more accessible in readily available literature and apparently more relevant because it touches on recent problems. It also tends to concentrate on the question of why Japanese industrialised rapidly. Hence it deals with superficial questions, is based on western and at times patronising assumptions (notably the imitation one), and disregards the Japanese past as an essential part of the story. Arguably, such an approach perpetuates old assumptions rather than creates teaching which leads to real insight

Even in the USA, the western country with the most comprehensive interest in Japanese studies, the range of recruitment of teachers has often been narrow. In the post-war upsurge in Japanese studies, many of the scholars were of Japanese origin, or sprung from parents who lived in Japan or were themselves married to Japanese. These things are of course in themselves strengths rather weaknesses, but ones which emphasised a rather narrow base for recruitment. Moreover, the post-war development of Japanese studies enjoyed an once-off artificial support from the wartime necessity of creating a corps of western officials with a knowledge of Japan. There was then in 1945 a small corps of people with an extraordi-

narily high intellectual competence, and often, despite the war-time background against which their competence had been nurtured, a remarkable sensitivity to Japanese culture. One has to think only of Donald Keene or Louis Allen, to appreciate the importance of their later contribution to understanding of Japan in the west. It has however been concluded by one observer that even in this favoured area most of the development took place in the 1940s, and some reservations have been expressed about the linguistic competence of students "after the generation from the U.S. military language school [which] produced the most studious and genuine body of disciples in this field".<sup>2</sup> In recent times, the upsurge in Japanese students in Australia, which sees its future in the Pacific, is very noticeable and welcome, though the strength of this upsurge makes it unusual in the English-speaking world.

The backing for Japanese studies in depth does not seem strong in Europe. The ASEM conference, held in Fontainebleau in November 1999, on maximising student flow between Asia and Europe brought out how limited was the emphasis on language. The importance of language teaching and of developing teaching in depth of Asian studies was, to put it simply, ignored. Perfunctorily some speakers conceded that it was desirable, but did not pursue the issue or put priority on the development. These moreover were European; Asians at the conference displayed not such interest at all, and seemed to take it for granted that contacts would be in English. The conference, organised by the Singapore-based secretariat of ASEM was to a large degree driven in an Asian perspective by an urge to give Singapore a higher profile in cultural exchanges, and in a European perspective by an urge to maximise the flow of Asian students to European countries. The European stress was on the implications of the fact that the United States attracted the bulk of Asian students going abroad, and that generally Asian students were likely to go to English-speaking countries (United States, to less extent Britain, and even Ireland). The task therefore for Europeans was to even up the terms of exchange (as they had of course economic and political implications) and to ensure that non-English-speaking countries attracted more of the movement. The politics of this meeting were interesting. China played a low-profile role (no doubt sensing an anti-American urge behind the meeting), and neither

Japan nor Britain (if we except an English professor of globalisation!) were represented at the meeting. In other words, the two countries of the Eurasian land mass who have the most successful programmes were absent. Japan already has highly developed programmes of exchanges, which had wider perspective than the aims of this conference, and Britain could not but be distrustful of a programme motivated in part by an urge to balance movement not only into a more even two-way flow but by a shift of some of the movement from English-speaking to non-English-speaking countries.

Second, interest in Asian studies, and I have chosen to use the word Asian at this point rather than Japanese, tends to go in cycles. The interest was strong in the late 1980s, reflecting the extremely high prestige of Japan's technological and economic success; it declined significantly in the mid-1990s to a nadir point just after 1996 or so, and is growing again at the moment. Student interest reflects external perceptions in society, which in turn are driven by ever shifting views of the importance of countries and hence of the utility of knowledge about them. In the 1990s, apart from Japan's economic problems, interests in the west have been influenced even more directly by a perception, true or false, that the 21st century would be China's century, and that contacts with China would be the most fruitful. One aspect of this is of course simply a resurrection of a belief that had influenced policy in the nineteenth century, that the size of the Chinese market is so huge, that it will prove a source of vast returns to investment and endeavour, and that it was important to get in first, or at least on the ground floor as China's century came upon us. In the narrow cultural field, China's importance is illustrated by the number of Chinese students abroad especially in the US where the number of Chinese Ph.D. students is quite striking. Britain has sought also to attract this outflow and has had much success in doing so. It has greatly expanded the British Council role and staff in China, and a figure of 2000 scholarships a year by Britain was mentioned at the Fontainebleau conference. Even in Ireland, with minimum effort to develop language teaching tailored to Chinese students and an almost total lack of policy to attract them, some 2000 Chinese students come each year for language-learning courses, and, recognising this demand, a recent Irish government mission

to China ( September 2000) included education among its priority ends. University College, Dublin, recently launched a Centre of Asian Studies. However, the lecture at the inaugural meeting was given by an Irish newspaper correspondent in China (a very good one, I hasten to add). The China perspective was dominant, the concern was primarily with the economic significance of events, and with the benefits which would be reaped by taking an interest in them. Again on this occasion reference to generating serious study of Asian society or languages was scarcely in evidence.

All this brings one to the third point, the prospect of studies being conducted in global English, the spread of an insidious belief that English can be the vehicle of study of the east, and that the creation of western linguistic competence is wholly secondary. The development of exchanges of itself is of course welcome, and there are, it goes without saying, positive elements in creating new centres of Asian studies, or in enhancing the flow of students between Asia and Europe. However, from the point of view of serious academic study, it has the danger of perpetuating or even deepening a superficial study of society, and of keeping alive a western-centered emphasis in teaching and writing. There has certainly been a proliferation of courses in Japanese history in history or economics departments ( revealingly, they tend to be largely courses on economic history). Outside the small number of centres which had already developed serious Japanese studies and which, if new, were founded rather early in the post-1945 period, courses have been prompted by Japan's success in the 1980s and by the advice being given at that time that European management should be remodelled on Japanese lines (that idea is certainly not in fashion at this moment as recent events have provide that Japan is fallible like the rest of the world and that Japanese success could hardly be explained simply by a succession of wonder businessmen or by harmony in the work place). Thus, the courses concentrate on the period from the late nineteenth century, and the text books with few exceptions are geared to the history of the last hundred years. The courses were thus dominated by current times, and ultimately by the single question as to why did Japan industrialise successfully. If taught on this basis and by people who know no Japanese the dangers of oversimplification are enormous. There is also far less attention than there should be to the whole range of political implica-



tions raised by western relations with Asia that nineteenth-century events in China, and, in more recent times, the Great Pacific war and its aftermath suggested.

#### IV

### Non-linguistic problems in Japanese studies

The general problem is all the more serious because even if teachers have linguistic competence, knowledge is often western-oriented, and can falsify understanding. It is particularly insidious in this context, because much writing in Japanese history has itself been heavily influenced by western values and assumptions. For instance, *sakoku* is often seen as an unnatural policy. In fact, it can be seen as rational, and only with the presence in Asia of outsiders in growing numbers in the nineteenth century did it become a policy which was likely to prove impractical. I know of no western book which regards *sakoku* as a rational policy, though it has to be said that on certain economic and political assumptions it was so. The debate within Japan from the late eighteenth century, reflecting a change in external circumstances, likewise was rational, especially if it is divested of the ideological content and divides in which both western and Japanese historians have usually cast it. The question was in essence a simple one: was the external danger serious and, if serious, how far should Japan go in making concessions in order to avoid war? Some historians—Ronald Toby and others—argue that *sakoku* as a clear-cut policy did not originally exist: only countries with a christianising zeal were excluded from Japan, and the policy as generally understood, was a new or redefined one of 1800 and later. They are correct in stressing that the original *sakoku* was itself simply a series of measures in a crisis-decade (1630s), not a complete policy. In any event there is no clear-cut documentary basis for the reasons suggested for the Japanese rebuff of the English approach in the 1670s (the fact that the English king was married to a Portuguese princess). Moreover, the discussion of policy in 1800 arose in a context of coping with problems: it makes more sense to see Japanese policy as clear cut on the principle, and divided on the question on the scale or seriousness of the external challenge. Japan also is taken to have suffered econom-

ically under or because of *sakoku*. Even Thomas Smith for instance on occasion seemed to say that Japanese foreign trade grew rapidly simply because *sakoku* ended (in other words, the post hoc propter hoc principle). It is not difficult to show that foreign trade would not have grown at an earlier date, and that when it did grow after 1868, it did so because of radically altered circumstances in the north Pacific (the resonances of which exist even in our own day). The image of Tokugawa performance and policy alike tends to be negative. Conrad Todman's text book, much admired and rightly so because of providing for a large cultural background and a long chronological spread (reasons why I strongly recommend it to my own students), often projects, beside many favourable comments, a somewhat negative overall image of the Tokugawa economy.

It is important to identify the assumptions involved in the study of history. Japanese studies at large tend to be an ingrown community. Japanese history also tends to be taught by specialists; in addition, Japanese historians who study western history do not teach Japanese history. In other words both Japanese and foreign historians of Japan seem to represent a group who approach issues in isolation from general historical study. Historical or economic models from other areas of study are sometimes brought into the picture of course, often however very artificially and on a slight knowledge of their implications. These models were and are arguably not relevant to explaining Japanese history. The most notorious example is Maruyama Masao who quotes Hegel on the second line of the first paragraph of his most famous book. Thereafter he tied himself in knots trying to explain why Japan did not behave like European society. Maruyama is more interesting to us to-day as a Japanese intellectual who began to teach in the late 1930s and to cope with the pressures of politics at that time than as a scholar of that past. The basis of his historical study is tied up too with the reliance on Ando Shoeki as a great thinker of Tokugawa Japan. There is too the interplay between Maruyama and E.H. Norman, the latter more and more a totally discredited figure. Again on a different plane, the peasant unrest or *ikki* theme is false. Aoki's statistics of *ikki* are hard to take seriously, and Borton's long essay in the 1930s studies, still often quoted in English sources, is chronically simplistic. Recently, the American scholar James White has argued that *ikki* sprung,

not from misery as usually argued, but from improvements in society. That is interesting as an argument, but as he presents it, the argument has simply been shifted from an economic context to a political one. It is the state, not the economy, which is falling apart: he presented not simply a negative view of the Japanese state but a sweepingly negative image: "by the middle of the century the state had for all purposes capitulated to popular resistance" and "in the mid-nineteenth century... respect for the state was at an all time low".<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese state was however far from this condition: what was the purpose of the *Tsuko-ichiran* for instance? It is used as a documentary source, but rarely integrated into the political and administrative framework. It was an ambitious task launched in 1849 in preparation for an inevitable challenge, one which was anticipated. It also enabled the head of the Hayashi family to lead the Japanese deputation to meet the Americans in 1854. Were the negotiations a triumph of western diplomacy, or where they a triumph of Japanese diplomacy? I incline to the latter. Japan negotiated well with the west precisely because it was, despite the context of the *bakuhan taisei*, a coherent and well-organised state, and was in the process of reordering itself to meet new challenges in a world in which the old certainties of *sakoku* no longer held.

Because study of Japan has often been isolated from wider study of administrative institutions, and more particularly because it has been cast in a context of ideological divides, the administrative story that can be read from the surviving Japanese documents has not been seriously teased out. In a sense with the appointment of the five *gaikoku bugyo* in 1858, the Japanese administration went in a radically new direction. (While of itself a positive and necessary step, it of course added to tensions within Japan as it had implications for the future shape of the *bakuhan taisei*.) Yet radical though the step was it was but the culmination of many smaller changes. Again the surviving documents of the *bugyosho* in Nagasaki help to give one an impression of how Japan functioned. In fact, their scale suggests that there is a case for reappraising the importance in the *bakufu* of the Nagasaki *bugyosho*. Moreover, the study of Dutch and the operations of the Banshowakaigoyo (or Office for translating barbarian

books) from 1811 have not been integrated into the overall picture of Japanese policy and administration. How much reference is there in western text books (and for that matter in Japanese ones) to Sugimoto, Katagiri, Shuzo Kure, Uehara? The story is also divided into a tale of clashes between different philosophies. This is largely meaningless. Sadanobu's purpose in 1790 was essentially to strengthen or tidy up central administration. From this time the Hayashi family were brought more centrally into the picture, especially in foreign policy (though all policy is of course, because of a poor documentary base, hard to study for the Tokugawa period). It meant in essence an eclectic use of the services of the Hayashi and of Takahashi's Translations Bureau. If this was more professional than in the past (and it dealt very effectively and without conflict with the Golownin jiken), it was still open to professional rivalries, in other words factionalism. In fact, the problem with administration was less inadequacies (though they existed) than interference from opinionated outsiders. The *rangakusha* of the late 1830s can be cast in this role of opinionated and interfering outsiders (and the issue at this stage, one should remember, was the highly technical one of coastal defence, not the administrative one of diplomatic risks): this contrasts, under the assumption that *sakoku* was inherently foolish, with the halo of sanctity or virtue which they invariably and undeservedly enjoy. Hence by the late 1840s, they were well and truly frozen out, and for very good reasons, and Japanese administration had become more unitary, better able to respond to crisis. It was further professionalised in 1858 with the Hayashi, themselves a form of contracted service to the bakufu, in turn being replaced by an administration of officials directly under the control of the roju. Moreover, the weight of foreign affairs had been progressively shifting from Nagasaki to Edo from 1806-7 onwards. The Resanov affair in 1804 was the end of the glory days of Nagasaki diplomacy: the process of centralisation had begun. These comments may seem a digression, but they are not in the sense that they are features argued in the book I have been writing and which is nearly finished. It in turn grew out of the lecture course I began in 1988.

In that course, the emphasis was put on Tokugawa times rather than on recent times. The course has produced three *mombusho* students (two

Irish, one German). One problem is that, with little or no knowledge at the outset, they have to choose recent subjects with much literature in European languages. Two of the three students promise to be a success; one of them shows a striking linguistic aptitude. There are two observations which I would make. First, the Mombusho, faced with a need of making economies in the wake of the economic crisis in 1998, framed its policy for placing its foreign students in an insensitive and impractical way. This is especially so in the case of humanities subjects, where particular teachers and source bases of information are important. It was not without its benefits, though unintended. The student who was sent to Yamaguchi is the student who made the most progress in Japanese. The source base was limited there but he was in a totally Japanese-speaking environment. That does raise a central language problem in relation to the language training of students. While the Mombusho provides an essential and very welcome half-year language course before academic study begins, the teaching is not motivated by a powerful driving force to make as much progress as possible. The teaching is far too easy paced, and the approach needs to be recast.

## V

### Japanese Studies in Trinity College, Dublin

Having introduced Japanese combined with business studies, we are now in Trinity College contemplating the development of studies leading to a four-year programme of area studies. I am the chairman of a working group on this issue, and we hope to have finished our scheme and estimated the requirements by this autumn. There are several problems that arise. One is the question of resources, and that is a subject of importance, though not I think the most serious one. The bigger questions are intellectual ones, also the different alternatives in structuring courses, and the availability of expertise. We have of course that benefit of the Chester Beatty Library, which has a magnificent collection of Tokugawa art, probably the best in Europe. That is already a resource for the existing history course in Japanese history. In one term the students taking the course are divided into two groups for tutorials, half the total class attending a term's

tutorials in the Chester Beatty. This will prove a useful resource in devising a full blown course in the history of Japanese art. Currently the planning of a course in the history of art which would parallel the existing course in Japanese history is being projected.

There are two problems which arise in planning Japanese courses. The first is that if a four-year structure of Area studies is devised, it by definition creates something of the isolation which affects Japanese studies throughout the west. There is real conflict between the need to concentrate study of a difficult area, and the aspiration to draw into study of Japan students from a wide range of disciplines or backgrounds. Some of the problems arise from the fact that student choices of future studies and careers are not well defined at the outset of their university studies. How can one accommodate a student whose interest in Japanese studies emerges only in the course of his four-year programme of undergraduate studies?. Teaching in a full-blown four-year course is dependent by definition on a specialist intake: I think the regular intake will be small, and will also - something which cautions against either premature complacency or feelings of failure—vary very widely from one year to another. There is a case for seeking to create as an adjunct to a four-year structure a framework which makes it possible for students to begin in their third year: in other words to chose a Japanese vocation halfway through their studies. Their language learning will necessarily be small. However, more important than that is the motivation of students, and the prospect of highly motivated students with a wider background who may pursue their Japanese interests after they complete their primary degree.

The second problem to my mind is the need of study in Japan, a requirement probably of a year spent in Japan (in the third of the total four years of study). That brings up the question of how they can be catered for in Japan. One aspect is simply the economic cost for students. Another is that international centres are far from reassuring if English is the general vehicle of communication, or if they are switching to English as the best vehicle for teaching outside students (western and Asian alike). There is a tendency too for western students to be accommodated with other western students. All that may be satisfactory for an easy-paced year

abroad for students who want to have a good general training in a foreign country, but it is less than satisfactory for students who want to learn Japanese (and who can in the right circumstances learn it very rapidly indeed). It should be noted however, that as Japanese is the first foreign language of many Chinese students coming to Japan, and they often have a good command of it, they provide a good environment for western students determined on language progress. However, it is not realistic to throw students, with a mere two prior years' study of the language behind them, into ordinary lectures. I am not sure how best that can be handled. Likewise, if there is an exchange basis with Japanese universities, a not dissimilar problem arises with Japanese incoming students, who would face the same problems in reverse.

An aspect of a semester or of a year abroad, already referred to, is the cost. The School of Business Studies in Trinity College sends up to 10 students to Senshu each year for a three-month stay (the overall costs are in the region of £3000 to £5000 per student). These are not at present language students. However, precisely because it is a elective possibility open to a very large class, it is possible to find students whose family or personal circumstances do not deter travel. In the case of students whose primary interest is Japanese culture however—where we are dealing with a small number of students, a situation quite in contrast to a small number of places open to members of a large class—one can not assume that private means and interest in the language go side by side. I confess that I do not know how we solve this problem, but I do not think Japanese studies will work satisfactorily unless assistance towards the costs can be provided in some way.

Undergraduate studies of course are essential. However, in envisaging the future, the prospect of developing post-doctoral work is also envisaged: e.g. invitations to Japanese in different areas to spend some time in the college, primarily to develop research contacts, but in some instances also to play some part, while they are in Ireland, in general teaching. That brings one on also to the question of comparative study.

## VI

**Comparative studies in history**

The development of studies necessarily raises questions of comparison. I will confine myself to the area I am familiar with: history. Comparative history sounds good and it is fashionable. However, it is far from easy to conduct, and comparative conferences between two different groups do not advance our knowledge greatly. The conferences produce collections of good and readable essays. But on the specifically comparative theme the progress is often limited. Over the years I have been involved in four such conferences of Scottish and Irish historians, and some five of Irish and French historians. The results, while not a failure on the basis of conventional comparison with other such meetings, have greatly disappointed in terms of getting to grips in depth with comparative studies. The smaller the country and the less the diversity of scale between two countries, the greater the success in terms of interaction. Thus, the Scottish contacts have had a permanent ongoing result; the French contacts have had a smaller and less tangible one. Japan, big and different, presents the problems on an even greater scale

At the moment, with comparative work in mind, a project on "Comparative themes in history" is being considered under the tentative title: "Comparative concepts in history: a case study based on Japanese and Irish history."

Concepts are "traded" internationally in an intellectual sense. Concepts which originate in one culture are used either in interpreting or in describing social and cultural phenomena in another culture: this reflects many things, for instance the spread of western ideas (e.g. notably the influence of German philosophy in Japan), or simply an effort to explain to outsiders in terms familiar to them the phenomena in another society. However, the consequence is either that the explanation of events is forced into a straitjacket, or similarities are assumed by transplanting familiar terms from one context to another.



The object of the project is: (a) to identify the concepts used in historical study, (b) to examine how they variously enhance or handicap interpretation, and (c) to develop or redefine them in a comparative sense, using Irish and Japanese history as the basis. While comparative themes have been widely pursued either explicitly or implicitly, they can prove misleading by being applied simplistically to historical situations, or the similarity of concepts often conceals some of the key differences in the actual historical contexts. The problem may arise either in their application to actual situations or simply into a misreading of analyses by a literal acceptance of the terms, which originated in one context and are never perfectly suitable for a second one. It is one might say a peculiar problem of intellectual globalisation.

A notable case is Maruyama's study of political thought, which often seems to distort Japanese history by an application of western philosophical concepts to the defining of Japanese politics, resulting in a somewhat forced seeking in history for western-style behaviour in Japanese political action. To take another example, the expansion of Japanese foreign trade in the early seventeenth century was part of a world-wide growth of foreign trade at the time: however, the similarity of language and phenomena conceals real differences (this has an important knock-on effect on the debate as to whether *sakoku* or "national seclusion", introduced in the 1630s. was damaging, and leads to a more favourable interpretation than is customary of both the motivations and results). The schooling system was much more dynamic than assumed because it lacked the centralised institutional basis which at least intellectually was common within European societies (a feature comprehensible to Irish students, but overlooked either by students from western societies, or by Japanese who model comparisons on western ones). Comparisons of archival and fiscal systems have surprising implications for understanding. In general, it may be added that the study of Japanese history in the west has been conducted in several countries (principally two, the United States and Britain) with a past of imperial and colonial expansion: this itself has an impact, sometimes obvious, sometimes more subtle: what this means is that study conducted by personnel from a non-colonial power has itself sometimes a surprising liberating influence on standard

western interpretations.

Japanese study of Irish history often gives a sharper focus to features in Irish history, which are a source of revisionist or post-revisionist debate in Ireland, and where informed outside observation is important: it seems to stress a surprisingly high degree of dependence on external trade, the absence of local rights by rural communities, and the sheer scale of structural change in rural communities over the nineteenth century.

The ultimate object would be to explore these themes, and to make them the basis of a collaborative book exploring some of these themes from the history of both countries. This could be preceded by a small conference: however its timing and funding would be a matter for later decision.

It had been hoped to get state financing for this project. Unfortunately, the large funding available in this year's spring has been changed in emphasis to concentrate on large projects rather than on smaller ones. It is however likely from internal resources in Trinity and some outside supplementation that it can be launched on a more modest basis..

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<sup>1</sup> B.K. Marshall, *Academic freedom and the Japanese imperial university 1868-1939* (Berkeley, 1992), pp.110-111, 119-120, 160-2, 184.

<sup>2</sup> Niki Kenji, "Japanese studies in the US; historical development and present state", *Kyoto conference on Japanese studies*, vol. IV (Kyoto, International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, 1994), pp.127, 128,131.

<sup>3</sup> James W. White, *Ikki: social conflict and political protest in early modern Japan* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995), pp.78, 302; see also p.191.