When I studied at Sheffield in the early 1970s, SEAS did not exist. We were part of the Centre for Japanese Studies and I read Japanese under the Centre’s founding professor, the late Geoffrey Bownas. The number of students studying the language was small in those days and by the time I graduated in 1976 there were only about six of us receiving our joint degrees in Japanese and a social science, and I was the only person to graduate that year with a Japanese and economics degree. Sheffield was pre-eminent in the teaching of Japanese in those days and it remains so in my view.

At the time of my graduation Japan was the fastest growing major economy and there was a shortage of Japanese speakers. I was in the fortunate position that potential employers contacted the Japanese Centre looking for graduates in the language. I was even more fortunate that the firm that I eventually joined, S.G. Warburg & Co. Ltd., was then arguably the foremost merchant bank in London and one that it was extremely unlikely I would have been able to enter without my Japanese qualification to set me apart from the crowd – I was one of only two graduates whom they took as trainees that year. The four years that followed gave me broad training in many areas of finance including investment management, in which I eventually specialised. I cannot stress strongly enough the desirability of joining a company with a broadly based training programme; in the short term specialisation may seem attractive, but in the longer term a broader knowledge base will generally serve one better. Everything I learnt on my degree course, although not necessarily immediately relevant, has helped me gain perspective over the years. Even my final year dissertation on product cycle theory, served me well in helping me foresee the expansion overseas of Japanese companies, particularly the movement of production bases into China and other parts of Asia.

Today Japan may have lost both its place in terms of economic growth and its newspaper headline appeal, but it has lost little in terms of scale and per capita wealth and as an investment manager I still find value in many Japanese companies, as well as personally enjoying all things Japanese.

Although I no longer live in Japan, I have spent some ten years living in the country over the past 37 years and I still travel there regularly, as well as visiting other parts of the region to assess Japan’s place in Asia at both the macro and micro levels.

Over the years my degree has benefited me enormously, giving me insight into both the financial and cultural aspects of the country. For me it is important to remain supportive of things Japanese at a time when focus has generally moved away from that country towards faster growing emerging nations such as China, India and Brazil. I am part of a group of friends with a long-standing interest in Japan who help to sponsor various cultural projects including the recataloguing of the entire ceramics collection at the British Museum, the largest such collection outside Japan.

More importantly from the perspective of the University, I have been working with a former fellow student of Japanese at Sheffield, Stephen Jones, and with the alumni office and members of SEAS to raise money for this year’s 50th anniversary appeal and the Geoffrey Bownas Memorial Fund, which is designed to help sponsor postgraduate students of the University who wish to study in Japan.

I encourage anyone who can to support this important project.

For details see www.sheffield.ac.uk/alumni/support/bownasfund
The ‘Weakest link’ in SEAS

Who is the ‘weakest link’ among SEAS staff? Thanks to the East Asian Studies Society, one of our student organisations, we now know!

One of the main aims of the East Asian Studies Society, which was established in spring 2012, was to create a more integrated environment in SEAS, between both students of all majors and between students and staff. To this end we decided it would be a great idea to create an event that would allow students to get to know their lecturers better and hopefully to let everyone have a great time, thus the idea to create an event styled on the popular game show ‘The Weakest Link’ was born.

The premise of the show is that, after a brief self introduction, contestants answer questions in turn and attempt to bank money for their team; at the end of a round the contestants vote off who they feel was ‘the weakest link’, giving them a better chance at more correct answers (unless it’s a sneaky tactical vote as witnessed during our event!).

With the idea set, the society appealed to staff to volunteer to pit against each other with the added touch being of half the proceeds going to the winner’s charity. Our willing contestants were Mark Pendleton, Sarah Dauncey, Paul O’Shea, Ra Mason, Marjorie Dryburgh, SY Kim, Graham Healey and Mark Steele. After eight tense rounds of grilling by SEAS Union Councillor Charlotte Mills (who did a wonderful job as Anne Robinson), Professor Dryburgh emerged victorious after a head to head showdown with Mark Pendleton, taking away £70 for her chosen charity. Overall we felt the event was a great success with a decent turnout and everyone having a great time. The East Asian Studies Society wishes to thank everyone who took part, those who came along to cheer on the staff and to the Students’ Union who generously donated a large amount of raffle prizes.

Welcome to Sheffield

Dr Mark Pendleton joined SEAS in January 2012 as Lecturer in Japanese Studies. He is a cultural historian who specialises in twentieth century Japanese history, with additional research interests in memory, gender/sexuality and cultural studies.

Dr Pendleton completed undergraduate studies at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, and his PhD at the University of Melbourne. During his doctoral programme, he spent periods as a visiting researcher at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (2008-10), funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and New York University’s ‘Transitions’ International Research Center in the Humanities and Social Sciences (2010), a joint project with the French government’s Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

Dr Pendleton’s doctoral research focused on the ways in which the 1995 Tokyo subway gassing are remembered politically and culturally in contemporary Japan. He has begun work on a new research project focused on modern and industrial ruins in Japan.

Dr Chen Yu joined the School of East Asian Studies as Lecturer in Chinese Studies in November 2012. Her research interests are in China’s urbanisation and population movement; city development, urban labour markets and housing. She obtained a BSc from the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, MSc from Fudan University and another MSc from the University of Oslo, Norway. Her PhD in Urban Studies from the University of Glasgow examines the labour market experience of migrants in China. Before joining the University of Sheffield she was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Glasgow where she conducted several externally-funded research projects on housing market dynamics. Her current research focuses on labour and housing issues under the context of rapid urbanisation in China. One of her projects explores new-generation migrants’ socio-economic integration in a Chinese city, and the extent to which migrants’ choices and constraints in labour and housing markets influence their integration.

Farewell to Sheffield: SEAS says goodbye to Dr Jeremy Taylor, who moved to Nottingham in September 2012 to take up the position of Associate Professor at the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies. We wish him success in his new position.

Note on names

Following East Asian convention, the family name precedes the given name/s in Chinese, Japanese and Korean names, unless the particular person uses the Western name order (given name followed by family name) in his/her publications and/or everyday life.

Editor’s note

The views expressed in the articles are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the School and the University.

Certain images used in this newsletter are scaled-down, low-resolution images used to illustrate films or books, or to provide critical analysis of the content or artwork of the image. It is believed that these images qualify as fair use under copyright law.
2012 Graduates and Prize Winners

Over sixty undergraduate students graduated this year. Adon Lawley (Chinese Studies) and Andrius Cialka (International Politics and East Asian Studies) won the Robert Sloss Prize for achieving the best 1st-class honours degrees. James Beaver won the Margaret Daniels Prize for the most outstanding performance in Japanese Studies. Wei Fan, Maria Zurkiewicz, Evelina Valchanova and Rosalie Lawrence won the Sheffield Graduate Award for their performance in extracurricular activities. The graduation ceremony was held on 18 July.

Congratulations to all our graduates. We wish them all success in their future careers.

Financial Support for Japanese Studies Year Abroad

An anonymous benefactor has awarded SEAS a generous donation to support Japanese studies students on their year abroad in Japan. It will be used together with an existing benefaction to provide 40 students with a contribution of £500 each towards the cost of their airfare to Japan. This is in addition to existing scholarships our students may be awarded from the Japanese government, partner institutions, or other external sources each year.

The annual scheme starts operation from summer 2013, which coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of Japanese Studies in Sheffield. The support will be awarded on the basis of academic merit and prioritising Japanese Language scores. In addition, a number of awards will be held back for students who are from low income families. It is hoped this will help with SEAS’s widening participation agenda.

Negotiation is currently underway with travel agencies to organise our students’ travel to Japan so that students can enjoy a one-stop shop for their travel plans, plus possible discounts on insurance and other travel products.

Sheffield Students Succeed AGAIN in the Chinese Bridge Competition

On 17 March 2012, SEAS Chinese Studies students Sam Mannakee and Ross MacDonald were awarded 2nd and 3rd place respectively in the UK leg of the 11th Chinese Bridge (Hanyu Qiao) international speech competition. Competing against Chinese language students from other UK universities, the two SEAS students delivered flawless performances at the preliminary round of the contest in the afternoon, and held the flag high for the University of Sheffield during the evening finals at the British Museum in front of a full auditorium including His Excellency Mr Liu Xiaoming, China’s Ambassador to the UK, and his wife.

Among those congratulating Sam and Ross after the finals was Consul Fu Hengsheng of the Education Section at the Chinese Consulate in Manchester, as well as dignitaries from the Chinese Embassy in London. Both Sheffield candidates were invited to attend the televised international Chinese Bridge finals in Changsha (Hunan, China) in July; Sam was among the top four finalists who represented the UK at the contest, along with Owen Churchill and Maximilian Sleigh-Parrott from SOAS and Kenrick Davis from the University of Nottingham. At the finals in Changsha, Sam competed against 120 contestants from 70 countries and made the top 30. Reflecting on his experience, Sam said: “Taking part in Hanyu Qiao was an interesting cultural experience. It certainly was a great way to improve my Chinese, although the busy life of a TV star in China was somewhat overwhelming.”
SEAS Launches New Series of In-House Seminar

Academic research is an important step of knowledge creation. However, doing academic research could be a lonely business; during the course of scholars’ research process, one may want to seek help from time to time in various dimensions. May it be the questions regarding a research paper in progress, seeking potential collaborators for a grant opportunity, or polishing a research idea for a grant proposal? In this regard, research seminars can be an indispensable vehicle for knowledge development and exchanges for scholars and students.

With this mission in mind, our in-house seminar series distinguishes itself from other conventional formal seminar series by including the sharing of scholars’ successful stories about their research, either publishing a book or the process of getting accepted into a journal or a grant, in addition to research paper presentations. The format of the in-house seminar series is designed to provide an open and relaxed, while rigorous, opportunity to share research with fellow members in our school as well as scholars from outside of our school.

Indeed, grounding from a strong group of multidisciplinary specialists in East Asian Studies and with strong external networks with related scholars from prestigious institutions around the globe, our in-house seminar series has benefited from researchers sharing from within and outside our school since semester one in 2011 when it was launched. Among others, staff members Professor Grayson, Dr Peter Matanle, Dr SY Kim, and Dr Marjorie Dryburgh have presented their work-in-progress in the seminar. In addition, to name a few of the distinguished scholars from other institutions, Professor Thomas Gold of UC Berkeley, Professor William Jankowiak of University of Nevada Las Vegas, Professor Jonathan Lipman of Mount Holyoke College, Professor Suisheng Zhao from the University of Denver, and Dr Silvia Croydon of Kyoto University, have also presented their works in our in-house seminar series. Both presenters and participants very much enjoyed the friendly, yet stimulating, discussions in the seminars.

In the Spring seminar in 2013, we will continue to hold another round of seminars, starting from 6 March, every other Wednesday at 1-2pm in our School of East Asian Studies’ room A06. We already have scholars both within and outside our school signed up for these seminars. The upcoming schedule is as follows: 8 May, 15 May, 29 May, and 5 June. Students at all levels are welcome. Please look out for further announcements.

The Spaces of the City: Tokyo’s Streets and Subways

Dr Mark Pendleton’s article, ‘Subway to Street: Spaces of Memory, Counter-memory and Recovery in post-Aum Tokyo,’ (Japanese Studies,(2011)3(3),359-371), was awarded the Best Article Prize of 2012 by EastAsianNet, the European Research School Network of Contemporary East Asian Studies, which Sheffield is a member of. Here he tells us how this article came about and what it is about.

On a wet spring morning a couple of years ago, I caught the Tokyo subway from my home in the west of the city to the downtown hub of the Japanese bureaucracy, Kasumigaseki. I wasn’t on my way to visit some government official however, but to attend the events commemorating the 14th anniversary of the 1995 Tokyo subway gassing, which killed 13 and affected over 6,000.

As I sat on the train I started to think a little about the spaces I was moving through. Now historians like me have not always been very interested in space – in fact, we have historically focused much more on processes of change over time, leaving spatial questions to people in other disciplines, particularly geographers. I began to notice, however, a particular historical relationship between the spaces of the subway gassing – primarily the subterranean underground itself – and the streets above. I thought about how the meaning of these spaces had changed over time and on how these changed meanings infused the ways in which victims both talked about their memories of their experiences and commemorated past losses.

One such process was the ‘Memorial Walking Care’ which took place on the 10th anniversary of the gassing. In this event, victims followed the path of the subway line on the streets above, descending at times to the station platforms to remember the dead. The spatial differences between the subway and the street reflected an interesting analogy to what the victims were going through themselves. Commemorations carry the potential to either work through traumatic memories or to simply repeat through re-enactment of victims’ traumas. For me the different spaces of this particular commemoration were important, with the underground and the street standing in as symbolic markers of two very different processes of dealing with traumatic memory.
2012 sees our colleagues continue to publish. Dr Nicolas Tranter’s and Dr Peter Matanle’s books are two of SEAS staff’s publications in 2012. Here they introduce their books and tell us something behind the scenes.


This book is the latest multi-authored addition to Routledge’s Language Family series. It made sense that Japanese and Korean should be included in a major language description series, because Japanese is within – and Korean just outside – the top ten of world languages spoken, and their share of the internet is even higher. Japanese and Korean are also remarkably similar in structure, having both adopted Chinese to a vast extent, and currently are heavy borrowers of English words. The great structural similarities have led many to suggest that they are related languages.

Routledge’s Language Family series has covered most of the major language families and sub-families, but the inclusion of The Languages of Japan and Korea is rather different. The ‘three’ languages of Japan and Korea – Japanese, Ainu and Korean – are typically regarded as language isolates, or linguistic orphans. In other words, they have no known family to be members of. The situation, however, is more complex for a number of reasons. Firstly, the indigenous varieties of the Ryukyu islands are typically regarded as dialects of each other and of Japanese, but the most effective definition of what is a language rather than a dialect, the mutual comprehensibility test, shows that ‘Japanese’ is actually a language family containing a range of different Ryukyuan languages as well as mainland Japanese proper. Secondly, the great structural similarities lead many to suggest that Japanese (as a language family) and Korean are distant relatives within the same language family, though it has always been difficult for scholars to find many native words in common. The volume, therefore, is presented as containing three language ‘families’ – Japanese, Korean and Ainu – rather than one, though the question of how Japanese and Korean might be related is covered in the second chapter.

The book presents language sketches of thirteen different language varieties, both modern and historical, by various scholars from four continents. Its description of Old Korean is the most up-to-date in English; it contains sketches of three different Ryukyuan varieties (Shuri, Hatoma, and Yonaguni); the chapter on Japanese dialects eschews the usual survey approach, and instead produces two sketches of specific dialects as self-contained varieties; various chapters are based on original fieldwork. In short, it is the first major work to combine comparable descriptions of all these languages in the same volume.


This book is the culmination of more than a decade of involvement in electronic publishing. While completing my PhD and working in Niigata in the winter of 2000-01, I founded the electronic journal of contemporary Japanese studies (ejcjs – www.japansestudies.org.uk) and invited scholars and friends to contribute, either as volunteer editors or as authors. Over the years the journal has attracted a steadily growing readership and some very high quality scholarship on Japan. In particular, the journal has developed as a forum for publishing about contemporary Japanese culture and society, including manga and anime, and otaku culture, among other things. What I wanted to do with the journal was to provide an alternative venue for publishing and discussion about Japan, and in particular, an opportunity for innovative work that more traditional paper based journals might have difficulty publishing.

With one decade of open access electronic publishing under our belt, Tim Iles of the University of Victoria in Canada, and I, decided to celebrate by bringing together the best articles and papers, and ask authors to update their material for publication as an edited volume. Lexington Books in the USA were very keen to publish, so Tim kindly took the project on, and the book was published in early 2012.

The book is inter-disciplinary in its subject matter, and empirical in its focus, and forward looking in its perspectives, and we hope also that it might be seen as a good textbook for undergraduate courses in Japanese studies. Offering new approaches on major issues in contemporary Japanese Studies – soft power, hybridization, social marketing, globalization, mobile technologies, popular culture and more – we hope that the book will open fresh perspectives on global culture and in turn promote discussion and dialogue among scholars and students in many disciplines. Moreover, even in this era of ‘a rising China’, Japan will remain as a very important country in this new century and we believe not only that the chapters collected in this book offer many insights into the changing faces of contemporary Japan, but that they also shine a new light on the cultural and societal development of the rest of East Asia.
Japanese Studies at Sheffield is fifty in 2013. Starting out as the Centre for Japanese Studies and now part of the School of East Asian Studies, members of the Japanese Studies team have continued to contribute to capacity building in the field. In celebration of our Golden Jubilee, we are promoting a range of activities, including fund raising for the Geoffrey Bownas Memorial Fund with the support of Sheffield graduates and the University Alumnus Office. For details see www.sheffield.ac.uk/alumni/support/bownasfund

Japanese Studies graduates have gone on to distinguished careers in a range of fields: in academia, government, business and other sectors of the economy. Below and on the facing page, we introduce five alumnae conducting research and teaching in the UK and further afield. Two are former undergraduates who pursued their graduate studies elsewhere; the other three completed their PhD at Sheffield. All are part of the Sheffield family of graduates working in Britain, Japan and the wider world.

The next issue of the Newsletter will introduce a number of graduates who have entered the other fields.

I have done academically ever since. I was extremely fortunate to be in both the Centre for Japanese Studies and the Politics department as we and others across the world struggled to understand what was happening in Japan and its wider significance. In the changed circumstances that our two countries face in the C21st we need to sustain the vitality of Japanese studies both because of the importance of Japan and for what it can contribute to the discipline of political science. Sheffield University can and should play a central role in that project.” – Ian Neary, Professor of the politics of Japan, Nissan Institute, and Head of the School of Interdisciplinary and Area Studies, Oxford University (BA Japanese and Politics 1973).

‘SEAS was very important for the development of my skills and intellectual approach as a researcher on Japan. It was at Sheffield that I first acquired improved language skills, and an understanding of the importance of applying social science methodologies to area studies. Sheffield and the links that I built up through it with Japanese academics very much helped to launch my career. I very much hope that SEAS will remain strong for the future. It is a unique institution in its collection of different regional expertise within a social science environment. It remains a key asset for understanding the unfolding power dynamics in East Asia which will continue to impact on the UK and Europe.’ – Christopher W. Hughes, Professor of International Politics and Head of Department, Department of Politics and International Studies; Chair of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warwick (MA in Japanese Studies 1994; PhD 1997).

50 Years of Japanese Studies at Sheffield: Capacity Building

‘Studying Japanese, politics, and particularly Japanese politics, at Sheffield University provided the foundation to almost everything I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a serious career or intellectual reasons.' – Hamish Ion, Professor, History Department, Royal Military College of Canada (PhD 1978; Japan Foundation Endowment Fund (UK) Post-Doctoral Research Fellow 1978-80).

The Centre for Japanese Studies was all about opportunities. Opportunities to enjoy numerous adventures and escapades, intellectual and otherwise, in Japan; to make life-long friends, to publish and to do research, so laying the foundations for a future career in Japanese history. The Centre was a grand place in the old days. I was fortunate when it came to receiving

‘I was one of the second intake into the new joint degrees with Japanese. With very few students, it was more like joining a family than a university. Japan was unknown territory for all of us – I suspect that most of us were there because we thought the degree would be fun, rather than for serious career or intellectual reasons. I for one have never regretted it. It changed my life, and has led to a career researching and teaching on Japan’s economic history. Japanese Studies at Sheffield has come a long way over the last 50 years. I wish it all the best in continuing to uphold the original commitment to excellence in disciplinary social science research on Japan.” – Janet Hunter, Saji Professor of Economic History, LSE (BA Japanese and Economic History 1967; Lecturer in Japanese History 1974-80).
2011 saw a watershed in television broadcasting in Japan. From the earliest pre-war test broadcasts to the 1980s when Japan’s more remote islands were brought under the broadcasting umbrella, Japan’s televisual culture has been distributed by means of an ‘analogue’ signal. 24 July 2011 saw the end of this, when the ‘analogue’ signal was switched off and viewers were left with just the digital service. This ‘digital switchover’ was no simple matter. The technology employed in ‘making television’ is the result of decades of research, development and testing, and its deployment and operation the result of five decades of investment.

Experts on the advisory committee that oversaw digitalisation estimated that in the two decades after 2001 when the decision to digitalise was taken, the changes would have an overall economic impact equivalent to some ¥249 trillion. Some effects can already be pointed to with a degree of certainty, others remain – it is hoped – for the future.

The obvious effects first: to keep the licences to operate, Japan’s 127 broadcasters had to switch to digital production and distribution, replacing every piece of analogue equipment with its digital equivalent. This equipment is far from cheap, the television industry itself (NHK and the commercial networks) expected to invest a total of ¥1.4 trillion in preparing for the switchover.

The resulting impoverishment of the television industry – many of the smaller local companies barely break even, even in ‘normal’ times – has meant cutbacks in spending on production, of as much as 20-30%. This seems to have led to an increase in the number of shows that rely on little-known ‘new’ talent (for ‘new’ read ‘cheap’) or video material which is available online, primarily YouTube (it doesn’t come any cheaper than free!).

As for viewers/consumers, the obvious cost has been that of a new television set; during the 2010 winter ‘bonus season’, shipments of new televisions reached roughly 4 million units per month, eight to nine times more than typical months over the previous few years. Of course, one person’s cost is another’s gain and manufacturers of TV sets gorged themselves at the digitalisation banquet (though Panasonic and Sharp seem now to be suffering the pangs of over-eating!).

There have been hidden costs too. A corollary of the purchase of 120 million new digital TVs is the necessity to dispose of 120 million old analogue sets. Domestic production of cathode-ray tube televisions (CRT) in Japan has now ceased, yet it was this industry that previously took up most of the material recyclable from old sets. The glass used in CRT screens contains lead and must be treated as potentially poisonous. Another effect at the environmental level has been the increase in illegal dumping of old TVs.

Indirectly as well viewers have paid for digitalisation through tax; public spending on support services for the switchover – call centres providing advice on going digital, grants to help broadcasters reach sparsely populated areas, and the provision of digital tuners to low-income households – came to ¥66 billion in FY2011-12 alone. If spending in other related areas is included, the cost to taxpayers (in this period alone) of the switchover was in the region of ¥420 billion.

If digitalisation was a step into Japan’s future it is difficult to see how the television industry fits in: the future benefits of the digital switchover are, in large part, seen to reside in the freeing up of radio-spectrum bandwidth for mobile services. However, the actual process of digitalisation impoverished content production and channelled money away from creative industries (let’s include television here for a moment) and towards electronics manufacturers.

So, when the revolution comes you can expect to be watching it on a smart-phone rather than a television, but you may have to come up with the content yourself.

(This article is adapted from Koga-Browes, S. (2012). At the digital watershed: Terrestrial television broadcasting in Japan. Japanese Studies, 32(3):445-468)
‘Gangnam Style’ has been a sensational hit and phenomenon in the music scene. What is behind this song? What is the ‘Gangnam Style’ in reality? How do ordinary Korean families live? Fabio Zaca, our current student on the Msc East Asian Business programme, provides his answers to these questions.

PSY and Korea: A Fierce Satire of Korean Capitalism

PSY’s noisy, cheesy and funny style has finally hit the global charts. His song ‘Gangnam Style’ has hit first place in YouTube trends with 835 million views and the video won the EMA (European Music Awards). More than Samsung or LG, more than the 2002 World Cup, more than K-Pop boy/girl bands, ‘Gangnam Style’ has projected a snapshot of Korea to the world.

PSY (Park Jae-Sang) has been a rapper on the musical scene for a decade and his songs are often praised or criticized for their powerful and sharp irony about the modern Korean lifestyle. ‘Gangnam Style’ makes no exception; the lyrics are arguably meaningful, but the video clip is a fierce mockery of the life style in Seoul, especially the lifestyle of Gangnam-gu, the wealthiest district of the city. In Gangnam, the average real estate price is US$10,000 (11 million won) per square metre, 3 times more than the national average. The concentration of financial assets by big firms in the district reached US$84 billion (90.2 trillion won) in 2010. It is a hotbed for foreign investment and foreign firms that have established R&D centres in the district.

This district has increased its value since the 1980s, thanks to massive investments (domestic and foreign) in the IT sector. A large number of Korean and foreign firms have their branches in Gangnam-gu. On the website of the district, it is proudly defined as the silicon valley of Korea, and they are quite right, Yahoo! Korea, Dacom, LG Telecom, and Samsung SDS have relocated to this region and established their branches.

The explosive popularity of this song comes in the 15th anniversary of the Financial Crisis, a crisis that had different causes from the 2008 crisis in the West but had the same harsh consequences on people, with massive lay-offs and business bankruptcies. The Korean economy recovered quite fast and repaid the IMF package aid in 2001. After 15 years, Korea today is a key global economic player and households have. Koreans have enjoyed the highest income ever, but families have wound up in bigger debt after the banks turned to household lending after the 1997 crisis. In August 2012, the Financial Times reported that the debt pile had reached 164 per cent of disposable income. As a result, consumption decreased in the first half of 2012. Not all the loans taken are for luxury items and a large amount is spent on education. Families are also taking on more debts to put their children through college (PSY, for instance, studied at Boston University and Berklee College of Music). Another source of debt comes from self-employed workers partially funding their business. The consequence is that some of them are not able to repay their debts and default is a rising trend in Korea today.

So the song shows that the opulence of modern Korea rests on flimsy foundations. One last thought: PSY has broken through with a song he has written, produced and choreographed, showing up all the K-Pop groups that have tens of singers, writers, producers and choreographers. And I hope he will keep it like that.
As I struggled through my history degree, I had no idea I would be returning to the University when my studies were over. But I had yet to think about stepping away from a career in advertising to train with and write a book about a non-English-speaking, belligerent, 80-year-old kung fu grandmaster.

My interest in kung fu started in my university years. And when I became disillusioned with the advertising world ten years later, a kung fu tour of Asia seemed a good way to spend a career break. My master was a Chinese Malaysian who had emigrated to England in the 1970s. His master, my grandmaster, was a native Chinese who still lived in Kuala Lumpur. This theoretically put me in an excellent position for my trip, but some challenges remained. Sugong (Grandmaster in the Fujian Chinese dialect) spoke only Fujian and was supposed to have an astonishingly bad temper; his ‘iron palm’ training (which he demonstrated by breaking marble tables and hammering 6 inch nails into planks) made it ill-advised to get on the wrong side of it.

As I made my way out to Malaysia, the thought of meeting this near-mythical character was mildly terrifying and my sense of trepidation was heightened on my first encounter, when I arrived to find him tearing strips off a class of students. My welcome was lukewarm at best and his enthusiasm for me diminished over the following month as my kung fu abilities fell short of his standards. His remedy was to berate me in caustic Fujian for the majority of the 2½ hour training sessions that commenced at 6am daily.

These dressing downs began to wear thin after a month, but at the end of one particularly harsh session Sugong decided there was some worth in me after all. ‘He takes a scolding well and practices hard’. It wasn’t the highest of praise, but it did mark a turning-point in our relationship, and around that corner was an unlikely friendship between a thirty-year-old middle-class Englishman, and an elderly Chinese who had come from the toughest of backgrounds.

This background was gradually revealed through anecdotes translated over obligatory post-training breakfasts. With an opium addict for his first master he had needed to steal from an uncle’s stash from the age of 7 to pay for his lessons. And before he was 16 he was expelled from school for fighting a teacher and embroiled in a family feud that saw him kidnapped and nearly killed.

He left China in 1948 after escaping army conscription in the Chinese civil war, but was then forced into opium running in Singapore to repay the relocation debts. His escape from this predicament saw him confined to a temple, training under a Shaolin warrior monk who was no less fearsome than the gangsters he had escaped. Outside the temple love affairs led to broken engagements, angry mothers and more difficulties for Sugong. His ability to find trouble didn’t lessen when he moved to Malaysia in 1956 and at the end of the 60s he found himself an unwilling participant in the May 13th race riots.

All in all it was very different to my sheltered life in London, but somehow, despite our vastly different backgrounds and inability to speak in anything other than sign-language, Sugong became something of a scary surrogate Chinese grandfather. And it was this closeness that meant he trusted me enough to recount his life so I could turn his story-telling gold into a book.

It was at this point my experience with the University turned full circle. Because Sugong had been caught up in historic events in South East Asia, I felt I needed to provide context to his story. As my studies had focused on the West I approached SEAS for advice. Instead of being palmed off as I had feared, Professor Wright, Dr Taylor and Professor King (from the University of Leeds) were hugely supportive. And the help didn’t stop there as the school’s Yue Liu created the front cover calligraphy.

Altogether it took five years from idea to publication of Sugong. There were times when it looked as though it would not make it to market, but even then the experience was not something I regretted. And now, with millions not made and me back in advertising, I still have a book to be proud of (for all its faults) and memories to savour.
SEAS: A Gateway to Asia

Kehinde Sonola, BA (2003) in East Asian Studies and Business Studies, is a published author of seven books, director of several short documentary films and founder of Westori and the One People One World movement. Here he tells us how studying in SEAS helped shape both his philosophy of life and a path through Asia for the past decade.

Four years enjoyed at the University of Sheffield with SEAS, nine years spent in Japan, East Asia and beyond; it is a wealth of experience for which I will forever be grateful.

My connection to Asia was formulated at a young age with an interest in the samurai, bushido, martial arts and video games. My uncle did business in Asia and would return with wonderful stories. After receiving a Japanese Sega Mega Drive from him, the creativity of the Japanese games wowing my friends and I, my love for Asia and in particular, Japan, was cemented.

Looking back now, it seems like unmei, or destiny, that I went to the University of Sheffield. Initially I had focused more on the courses themselves rather than the universities or cities. I wasn’t to know that taking up a place with SEAS would mean the beginning of lifelong friendships, a deeper love of international culture as well as the city of Sheffield.

A multitude of engaging course modules such as East Asian Cinema, The History of Korea and Religion & Philosophy in East Asia taught by awe-inspiring lecturers like Professor Emeritus Grayson, made learning a joy in addition to setting my future path. Indeed I will never forget Dr Grayson’s words:

“Kehinde, to truly enjoy Asia, you should visit Asia.”

I took his advice, applied for the JET Programme in my last year of study and utilised everything I had learned in the course of my studies during the application process. Lo and behold, I found myself in Japan with some fellow SEAS friends two months after graduation.

Within a year of being in Japan, I was the Osaka Fu JET Advisor and subsequently working directly for the Board of Education as the Native English Teacher (NET) Advisor. The last nine years have been a whirl of teaching English, managing the NET Program and travelling. Teaching and helping to nurture both Japanese students and international teachers has been an excellent endeavour. All those Japanese language and history classes have proved invaluable and the bond with SEAS unbreakable.

Some of the highlights of my time in Asia have been meeting fellow SEAS alumni in Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong and elsewhere. We always marvel about how similar in character we are and how we are not surprised by the number of us based in Asia under the auspices of various employment opportunities.

Each visit to another country, especially the Eastern region, is a delight. Touching and experiencing places and culture you have studied in books and seen on film is priceless. There is a sense of satisfaction saying to yourself, I’m here, I did it. SEAS alumni are driven, thoughtful and free spirits I believe and this should come as no surprise because these qualities can be found in our teachers.

During the past decade, the plight of my fellow human beings has weighed heavy on my mind. Helping the homeless in the Shin Imamiya area of Osaka didn’t seem enough so I started the movement One People One World. This movement is one that seeks to bring together people based on a mutual desire for peace and harmony for all in this world. In conjunction with this, I have published seven poetry, prose and photography books via Amazon, Blurb and iTunes. 50 per cent of the lifetime profits from the ‘Life’s Beauty’ photography book series have been pledged to charity in addition to the sums I am already privately donating to various causes.

Recently I was honoured to have a reunion with Dr Grayson as well as familiar and new faces in SEAS such as Mrs Susie Tranter and Dr Zhong Zhang. Dr Grayson asked me why I felt the need to carry out charity work.

Thanking him for his continued guidance, I explained that I simply took his advice and truly enjoyed Asia by visiting there. Also, I said that a combination of my parents’ philosophy, Nigerian and British heritage and philosophies studied during and after my degree had uniformly shaped my belief that by helping my neighbour, I am helping myself.

Thank you for reading.

You can find out more about Kehinde Sonola at: http://www.westori.com/
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Kehinde-Sonola/e/B00820I5UC
http://vimeo.com/channels/opw or simply search ‘Kehinde Sonola’ on any Amazon site, Blurb.com, iTunes, Shelfari.com or YouTube.

Kehinde Sonola in front of Shitennoji Temple, Osaka
The MA in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), the first of its kind in Europe, was launched at the University of Sheffield in autumn 2010. The programme is run in cooperation with Nanjing University and the Beijing Language and Culture University, which in the first year provided students from their own MA programmes. In 2011, the MA was opened up to graduates and students from other universities in China and elsewhere. The number of students enrolled on the programme has risen steadily: from eight in the first year to 11 in the second year and 13 in 2012.

The MA programme seeks to capitalise on the growing interest around the world in China and its language. It was set up to help meet the demand for qualified TCFL teachers and researchers. It equips students with a thorough theoretical grounding in Chinese linguistics and second language acquisition, TCFL theory and methodology as well as practical TCFL skills such as course and lesson planning, selection and development of teaching materials, effective language teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment etc. Students are also expected to undertake a period of teaching practice in local schools.

The programme is proving successful in its aim: many of our graduates have taken up TCFL jobs or carried on further research in this field. Here, three graduates of the programme give their own feedback.

Hu Xiao (MA TCFL 2010):

The year in Sheffield has changed my life. The well-designed and presented courses and teaching practice provided by the School of East Asian Studies not only imparted the academic knowledge we needed but also offered opportunities to practice our teaching theories. My year of study also broadened my horizons and helped me to develop a more critical way to think and do my research.

After graduation, I felt the MA should be the beginning, not the end of my research. Therefore, I applied to do a PhD in the US. With a strong academic result and support from my tutor and supervisor in Sheffield, I was accepted by the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the best PhD programme in TCFL in the USA. I have every reason to believe that my study in Sheffield will continue to bring me benefits during my future studies.

Wu Yanmei (MA TCFL 2011):

My goal for doing this MA was to find a job teaching Chinese in UK higher education, and I am very pleased that I have met my goal.

The parts of the course that were most inspiring and meaningful for me personally were the more pedagogical modules such as Language Teaching Methodology, Theory and Practice of Language Teaching, Teaching Practice in TCFL and Reflections on Practise of Learning and Teaching. I find myself referring back to the theories and notions I came across while doing these courses often in my daily teaching life.

By expanding my knowledge and deepening my understanding of teaching Chinese as a second language, I now feel more confident to make teaching-related decisions at work. Let me put it this way: I feel that a solid foundation was laid by the MA. As a result, I can build the house properly and am more confident and more at ease now as a teacher.

Teng Hua (MA TCFL 2011):

The MA in TCFL provided me with a good learning opportunity to explore various theories in linguistics, pedagogy and Chinese language teaching. Furthermore, the course offered me a valuable opportunity to conduct lesson observations and to carry out Chinese teaching practice, which is a rare opportunity in a MA course of this kind. I have obtained more practical experiences through the MA in TCFL. In addition, the teaching staff on the MA course provided me with an opportunity to get to know more experts and scholars in this field from all over the world. I attended an International Symposium on Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language in Higher Education while I was studying the course.

I signed an employment contract with a secondary grammar school in England before I finished my MA course. It is the knowledge and skills that I have gained from the MA course that have enabled me to get this job. Thanks to the programme, I have confidence to be a qualified Chinese teacher and also I have more opportunities to expand my career horizons in TCFL.
Supported by a generous contribution from the University’s Alumni Fund, the Hub provides students with a smart new space dedicated to East Asian Language teaching and learning. Dr Sarah Dauncey, who coordinated the project, is absolutely delighted with the outcome: “It really has addressed many of the current and future needs of our students and staff. Although we already had access to the various labs and computing facilities around the University, it was clear that increasing demand for Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages would soon outstrip existing teaching space capacity, so we wanted to make sure that we were prepared and future-proofed! Tutors also felt that it would be advantageous to have a suite equipped with both general language lab software as well as specialist East Asian language programmes that catered specifically to the particular needs of our students and enhanced opportunities for self-directed learning.”

Dr Mei Zhang, Chinese Language Coordinator, has been teaching intermediate and advanced listening classes since the courses were established in the 1990s. As one of the first users of the new space, she has been impressed by the quality of the equipment and the potential offered by the software: “SEAS has always aimed to lead the way in using technology to support East Asian language learning and this new lab has given us a great opportunity to develop exciting and innovative teaching methodologies, not just in listening, but also in other communication skills such as speaking and interpreting which form key elements of our degree programmes. It will also provide a great base to train the teachers of Chinese from around the world who are following our MA in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language.”

Although this is only its first semester of operation, nearly 200 students from SEAS and from around the university who are taking non-specialist language courses have already been using the lab on a weekly basis. Max Marzec, a Chinese Studies with German finalist who has more than a passing interest in language learning having coordinated the highly successful first Sheffield University International Languages Festival in 2011, sums up the student response to the facility: “The new language lab is fantastic! It’s great to have our own lab, with top-notch equipment, right next door to the main department building. I particularly like the pictures on the walls which give the room a very East Asian ambience. It definitely makes our listening classes even more enjoyable.”

New Language Lab Makes Learning ‘Even More Enjoyable’!

Autumn Semester 2012 saw the opening of the eagerly anticipated East Asian Languages Hub, a high-tech language lab facility based in Shearwood Road.

East Asian Studies Degrees

The School of East Asian Studies offers a wide range of single and dual honours degrees, as well as postgraduate taught and research degrees. For further information, contact seas@sheffield.ac.uk, or visit: http://www.shef.ac.uk/seas.