Advising the Government on East Asia

The School of East Asian Studies’ partnership with Leeds in the White Rose East Asia Centre (WREAC) has allowed us to interact with many stakeholders outside the University. An important collaboration has been with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

Over winter 2014–15, WREAC is organizing a new series of seminars with the FCO dealing with East Asian issues. This follows a successful earlier series arranged in the lead-up to the 2013 Lough Erne Summit of the Group of Eight, which resulted in a publication entitled *East Asia in 2013: A Region in Transition*, available through the School’s website.

Professor Hugo Dobson, our Head of Department, summed up the role these activities play in our operations: ‘As academics, we have a duty to ensure that our research has some tangible benefit, whether to government, the cultural life of the nation, or in schools and education. This series of seminars provides a valuable opportunity for the School’s researchers to influence the government’s thinking on how the UK can most effectively engage with the East Asian region.’

The first seminar of the new series was entitled ‘Japan’s Security Reforms: Will They Bring Balance to the Region or Stoke Flames?’

Professors Hugo Dobson and Glenn Hook explored recent security reforms – including the recognition of the exercise of collective self-defence – that suggest Japan is shedding its anti-militarist roots. Both speakers discussed the motivations behind these reforms, asking whether they are a knee-jerk reaction to China’s rise or part of a long-term strategy. In particular they examined how the security reforms are being ‘sold’ within Japan and in the region more generally.

A second seminar focussed on the roles of China and Japan in Africa. Dr Zhang Zhong concluded that Chinese investment in Africa may in the end contribute to the rule of law and consequently to economic development on the continent. In a third session on Sino-Japanese relations, Dr Marjorie Dryburgh explored the extent to which the very well-publicised disputes over island ownership in the East China Sea affect other economic or cultural interactions.

Upcoming seminars will address topics such as China’s regional diplomacy in Southeast Asia, North Korea and its nuclear programme, and China’s outward direct investment.

These events have been co-organized by one of our graduates, Chris Bond, who completed an MSc in Chinese Business and International Relations with distinction in 2007. He was awarded a PhD in 2012 for a thesis on foreign investment in Qingdao. He recalls: ‘It was a circuitous path that got me here: as a science graduate with a goal of pursuing a military career, heading off to teach English in a remote Chinese oil-field town (complete with nodding donkeys outside classroom windows) was supposed to be “filler time” rather than a trigger for a wholesale change in career aspirations. However, I was hooked.’ After his PhD and a couple of years doing business analysis, he was appointed as a research analyst at the FCO: ‘One of my responsibilities is to help policy makers within Whitehall stay tuned in to the latest research on China – being able to use my Sheffield guanxi (connections) to invite academics from WREAC has certainly made my job easier.’
At the reception afterwards, the Head of Department, Professor Hugo Dobson, pointed to the many other activities undertaken by our students – in addition to studying hard to master East Asian Languages and push back the frontiers of knowledge of East Asia. So, some hitchhiked to Croatia as part of the world’s biggest, student-organized charity hitchhike. Others supported their studies through their domination of the bingo halls of South Yorkshire.

The high standard of the students was shown in the fierce competition for the School’s two prizes – the Margaret Daniels Prize and the Robert Sloss Prize.

The Margaret Daniels Prize, presented by Dr Gordon Daniels, who used to teach Japanese history at Sheffield, is for the best performance in Japanese Studies. This year it was shared between Eszter Papai and Sonja Bobrowska. Eszter is an outstanding linguist, who won the Faculty-wide prize for the best performance in her first year, and has added Chinese and Korean to her major in Japanese. She can often be found in the Library where she has the reputation as the unofficial error-finder. Sonja completed an internship with the University’s Enterprise Unit and organized an event, ‘Venture in East Asia’, to promote business opportunities in the region. Her dissertation was described as ‘exceptional’ by the examiner.

The Robert Sloss Prize, for the best performance in Chinese, East Asian and Korean Studies, was shared between Rhianna Martin, Emily Hill and Owen Stampton. In addition to her outstanding results in Chinese Studies, Rhianna made a great contribution to the Department at open days and by speaking to prospective students. Emily, who graduated in East Asian Studies, was the driving force behind a week-long, University-wide series of events publicizing East Asia, as well as the East Asian Studies Ball. Owen has a passion for Korean literature and his excellent results have allowed him to win a scholarship to undertake a masters degree in Korea.

At the postgraduate degree ceremony in January, the Xiaoling Hu Memorial Prize was awarded to Andrew Castro, the first non-native-Chinese-speaker to take our MA in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. His achievements were not limited to his work for the degree but also included a 427-page book in Chinese on the minority Shui language in south western China, published by the Guizhou People’s Publishing House in 2014.

The School wishes all our graduates every success in their future careers.

Farewell to Jamie Coates

After a year making a great contribution to the teaching and work of the School, Dr Jamie Coates left to take up a position at Waseda University in Tokyo. Many of us will continue to collaborate with him on a number of research projects and we wish him all success in his future career.

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 her/his 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.
Japanese Studies undergraduates hear a lot about the mythological ‘Japanese Salaryman’. With almost superhuman endurance and samurai-like deference to the company, he battles his way through the myriad of life’s problems daily thrown at him without even as much as taking a breath. Packed commuter trains, customers baying for blood and the obligatory post-work drinks (one-way lecture) with the boss are all just in a day’s work. All, of course, handled with Japanese precision to detail, impeccable punctuality and exactly the correct level of honorific language and degrees of bowing.

But jokes (and stereotypes) aside, what is the reality actually like? How do Japanese companies really operate on the inside and how do these men (and, of course, women) feel about their jobs? I began asking myself these questions during my language year in Japan, as I observed real Japanese society up close on a daily basis. Upon returning to the UK I made up my mind – the only way to understand was to try and join a Japanese company. In essence, to become the ‘Japanese Salaryman’ myself.

This was a challenge I was willing to take up for good reasons. I knew that gaining a permanent ‘new graduate’ position at the right Japanese company would guarantee me access to a plethora of training programs. On entry they provide the almost universal school-like daily lessons in Japanese business manners, IT, finance and so on. Many large companies also offer a lifetime of ongoing follow-up courses and vigorous on-the-job training.

Accordingly, during my fourth year at Sheffield I took a gamble and travelled to Boston, Massachusetts to attend the three-day Career Forum for Japanese-English bilinguals. With over 170 companies and 10,000 job seekers, the competition was tough. However, with the language skills I had picked up studying at Sheffield and in Japan, I impressed several companies enough for them to offer me final interviews in (and, thankfully, flights to) Japan.

Fast forward nine months and I was joining my current company as the first Japan-based Western employee in its sixty year history. I was heading into the world of the ‘Shōsha’ (a kind of commodities-based trading company peculiar to Japan), which was known even amongst Japanese people for being ‘rather Japanese’ to say the least. Walking through the doors and starting my first day at work I was filled with the same thoughts as when walking into high school a decade earlier – ‘Will I be able to understand what they teach me? Will I be able to keep up? Will I be able to make new friends?’ It was a humbling experience.

My fears were, of course, unfounded. The past two years have provided me with a wealth of chances to learn and grow. From being on a tight schedule hopping from train, plane and automobile to cover six countries in as many days, to having the chance to talk with and hear the opinions of Japanese and foreign business leaders, time and time again there have been so many opportunities to learn from successes – and failures!

The typical image of the ‘Salaryman’ might be an exaggeration of the reality, and they don’t have superhuman powers. But I found that the sense of group identity existing within the company, the camaraderie of your colleagues and their willingness to lend a helping hand when times get tough is the glue that keeps everyone going. Suffice to say, I am glad I made the jump from Sheffield to Salaryman.
Automatic translation from Chinese to English and vice versa is immensely difficult. The two languages belong to two different and distant language families. Recently, a method called Statistical Machine Translation (SMT), used for example in Google Translate, has become the leading approach in the field and has begun to make some inroads into the problem.

At its most basic level SMT uses what is called a parallel bilingual corpus. This corpus is made up of a vast number (sometimes millions) of single sentences that have been ‘accurately’ translated by humans. The system divides text it wishes to translate into separate words and phrases. These are then translated into the target language on the basis of rules guided by statistical models. The computer analyses each parallel sentence and then aligns the words and sentences it uses. These large numbers overcomes problems caused by errors or noise and should provide the statistically most likely (and current best) translation. As shown in the illustration, Google Translate actually does give a statistical analysis of different translations, for example listing ‘sure’ as a common translation of ‘kending’ but ‘definite’ as a rare one.

In fact, in the end Google Translate renders the example sentence as ‘The answer is yes.’ Although this is not an exact match it shows how the strength of the general sentence pattern still comes through in the final translation.

SMT is venturing beyond basic word-by-word or short phrase translation. Some of the focus is now turning towards linguistic elements, such as conjunctions, that give statements coherence and structure. This should enable translation systems to better capture meaning and context. The future of using SMT to help translating Chinese looks very bright indeed, though there will always also be room for human translators.

Translations of 肯定

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>肯定, 确切, 确, 准儿</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sure</td>
<td>肯定, 确切, 确, 准儿</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain</td>
<td>某些, 一定, 某, 必然, 的确, 肯定</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affirmative</td>
<td>肯定, 有希望, 乐观, 正面</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite</td>
<td>肯定, 确定, 肯定, 确切, 具体, 明确的</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noun</th>
<th>肯定, 肯定语</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affirmative</td>
<td>肯定, 承诺, 断言, 占, 树立</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affirmation</td>
<td>肯定, 接受, 断言, 占, 树立, 确说</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certainty</td>
<td>肯定, 把握, 某几个</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>肯定, 的确</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affirm</td>
<td>肯定, 确, 断言, 占, 树立, 确说</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confirm</td>
<td>确, 证实, 肯定, 验, 证</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be certain</td>
<td>肯定, 的确</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be sure</td>
<td>肯定, 确, 证实, 肯定, 占, 树立</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part of a screenshot from Google Translate. Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc., used with permission.
The reason I originally became interested in Japan was my fascination with Asian art. I still remember how intrigued I was when – it must have been during my high school days – I first saw Japanese calligraphy and painting scrolls by Zen monks from the Edo period (1603–1868). My fascination with Asian art continues today. Over the years, I have amassed a sizeable collection of antique scrolls and sencha tea wares, participated in antique study groups, visited antique shops, auctions and fellow collectors around the world, and built up a considerable library on Asian art. Indeed, visitors to my house might wonder whether I am not really an art historian rather than the lecturer on Japan’s economy and management that my colleagues in the School think I am.

Over the years, my professional research interests and hobby have had little in common. This changed when I recently spent a few months on study leave in Kyoto and started to look into the economics of the antique art trade in Japan. There was hardly any academic material on the subject, so I decided to research it myself. Over the years, my professional research interests and hobby have had little in common. This changed when I recently spent a few months on study leave in Kyoto and started to look into the economics of the antique art trade in Japan. There was hardly any academic material on the subject, so I decided to research it myself.

Economists, to which strange species I belong by training, often tend to make some rather peculiar assumptions. For example, they commonly assume that individual market actors are rational beings who aim to maximize their own profits. Prices are simply a result of supply and demand, reflecting how people value particular goods.

I acknowledge that economic models have contributed significantly to our understanding of economic phenomena. However, once we start to look beyond our own nose, we realize that other disciplines, such as economic sociology, also offer very useful tools. For example, sociologists do not take it for granted that people always act rationally. They focus on groups rather than individuals and are interested in how factors like inclusion/exclusion, hierarchies and networks shape economic activities. They also distinguish between values and prices in markets and analyse how social structures shape market arrangements, rather than accepting such arrangements as a natural reflection of economic necessity.

Once I started to look at the Japanese antique art world through these new disciplinary lenses, I realized how much this market is actually shaped by both economic considerations and social factors. For example, the antique art dealers’ world is a very hierarchical, guild-like structure and hard to penetrate by outsiders. At its apex are exclusive art dealers’ associations that have developed unique price-setting mechanisms where dealers combine auctions with lotteries, something found nowhere else in the economic literature.

These unique practices fulfill important economic functions. But they are also complex social processes which define and resolve inherently ambiguous assessments of what constitutes desirable art objects. I also found examples of collusive practices, facing-saving acts, collaborations and networks, in short, everything that makes markets and the economy such a fascinating and complex object of study.

No doubt Japanese art dealers, like the rest of us, are interested in money. But they are also driven by an appreciation for art and a need for social interaction that is beyond rationality. In my view, art and money is a particular exciting combination – not only to own, which is certainly advantageous, but also to research.

This is not the place to go into further details, but please contact me if you are interested and I will send you my findings once they are published (h.conrad@sheffield.ac.uk).
A quarter of a century in the Library

Gill Goddard, the East Asian Studies Librarian for well over two decades, retired at the end of July 2014. She started to work in what was then the Japanese Studies Library in 1989, and over the past quarter of a century has provided invaluable support to generations of students and staff.

Here she shares with us some of her reminiscences of her time at Sheffield.

It might seem inconceivable now, but only twenty-five years ago when I first opened the door into the then Japanese Studies Library in the Arts Tower, the most advanced technology present was a microfiche reader, used for searching the English-language catalogue. The catalogue of Japanese material was housed in a set of handsome seven-by-five-inch loose-leaf binders, red leather-bound with gold tooling, and finished with brass fittings. ‘Hmm,’ I thought. ‘Not seen one of those since Library School.’

And yet the system did work, and students and academics did find the material they needed for their studies and research. I rather think it worked better for Chinese, Japanese and Korean scripts than did its successors, the early online library management systems, as really only within the last few years has it become possible to store, read and search using characters.

Before internet access changed the academic world for ever, students and staff naturally spent a lot of time in the library, and sometimes unintentionally brought with them extra visitors. I well remember chatting to two final year undergraduates one sunny afternoon, about how much the lovely weather reminded us of being in Japan, and how much we wished we were there. We could almost hear the nostalgic sound of crickets chirruping. Suddenly, a very real cricket hopped out on to the jacket of one of them, evidence of their picnic lunch in the park next door. (That student is now a well-known Japanese Studies academic with an obsessive interest in trains and planes!)

Our regulars then included young postgrads called Dobson, McAuley and Tranter – I wonder what happened to them? Nic Tranter used to produce some wicked pencil portraits of his then teachers, for example Graham Healey, beard nearly filling the paternoster, etc. Amongst the more memorable undergraduate students in those days were the invisibles, those who only appeared in the library in the last few weeks before the dissertation deadline. A sheepish ‘I know I ought to have been in here before...’ usually preceded a desperate request for supporting material, or sometimes even just for an idea for a topic. Copies of their dissertations at one time used to be stored in the back room of the library, and my favourite has to be one entitled ‘Zen’ by A.N.Onimasu. The pages were all blank, naturally.

Korea conference held at Sheffield

The annual conference of the British Association for Korean Studies (BAKS) was held at Halifax Hall on the University of Sheffield’s campus from 21 to 23 November 2014. The main theme of the conference was ‘Korean identities in a global age’, and twenty-two scholars and doctoral students from Europe, North America and South Korea presented papers covering a wide array of issues from the medieval history of Sino-Korean relations to recent trends in K-pop. The conference started with a congratulatory message from Mr Sungnam Lim, the South Korean ambassador to the UK, which was followed by welcome messages by Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Gill Valentine and the School’s Head of Department, Professor Hugo Dobson. This year’s conference invited the award-winning documentary producer Stewart Binns to give the keynote speech in recognition of his creation of vivid images of the Korean War in his masterful documentary Korea: The Forgotten War in Colour (2010).

Ambassador Sungnam Lim welcomes participants to the conference
Professor James Grayson, Emeritus Professor of Korean Studies and one of the School’s longest serving members of staff, shares his memories of Gill.

Administrators may forget, but students and academics know very well that subject librarians are key to the research climate and activities of any department. Over the past two decades, the School of East Asian Studies has been blessed by having an exceptional librarian working alongside its staff and students. Gill Goddard was unusual among librarians in having a grasp of the three major languages of East Asia, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, as well as a solid knowledge of the needs of researchers both in the contemporary social sciences and in classical and modern humanities.

Gill’s breadth of background and experience made her stand out amongst colleagues. She was also outstanding for her vigorous promotion of the development of East Asian library and information sources both at Sheffield and nationally. She played a key role in the China, Japan and Korea Library Groups and promoted the dissemination of sources through her many contacts. At Sheffield, academics always knew that they could turn to Gill for support in finding research sources, and she also gave invaluable assistance to individual final year students in helping them find where to look for information for their dissertations.

She was also a researcher herself, looking into the issue of British POWs in the Second World War. When Sheffield hosted the 2005 meeting of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe, it was Gill who organized a special exhibition of the rare materials held in our Library. Gill Goddard was an exceptional multi-faceted colleague, and she will be sorely missed. As I’ve said before, she was the kind of librarian who flung wide the doors to the banquet hall and invited everyone to the feast!

The new team

After Gill’s departure, students coming to the East Asian library office will find two new faces eager to help – Youn-hi Hughes and Jiani Liu.

Youn-hi graduated from our School in 2005 with a degree in East Asian Studies, and has helped out in the library as Korean cataloguer since 2004. In addition to her native Korean, she has studied both Japanese and Chinese at Sheffield and in Japan and Taiwan. She is now taking responsibility for the Japanese and Korean collections. Jiani graduated from China’s oldest and most prestigious school of library management at Wuhan University and earned a distinction for a masters in management at Lancaster. She started to take charge of Sheffield’s China collection from mid 2013.

Jiani and Youn-hi are looking forward to working with future generations of students to introduce them to the library collections and to literature searches. Both have been very impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge shown by our students, and Jiani was amazed when one undergraduate asked about the works of early twentieth-century Chinese philosopher Hu Shi.

Our two librarians have ambitious plans to develop our Chinese-Japanese-Korean collections to meet the needs of our students and researchers. Of course in the modern world electronic sources are an important focus, with Jiani looking to expand our access to the CNKI database of Chinese journals and Youn-hi planning to acquire the Japanese Asahi Kikuzo II database and restructure our Korean databases to support our increasing numbers of Korean Studies students. But old-fashioned print materials also remain important, and Jiani is keen to build up our collection of editions of Chinese literary works.

All the signs are that future generations of students will find Youn-hi and Jiani every bit as invaluable as past generations found Gill.
My year in the land of kimchi

A year’s study in-country is an integral part of our degrees in Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Here, Munny Dhillon, a third year student of Korean with Japanese, tells us about her experience in 2013–14 studying in Seoul’s Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU), which was originally established in 1398.

I still remember the sweaty mess I was when I was first landed at Incheon airport. I didn’t realize I was flying with a silver-medal-winning Korean sports team. So my first steps out of the baggage area and into the actual airport were greeted by cheering Koreans with flashing cameras. I was genuinely confused and thought to myself ‘is this how Koreans welcome everyone?’ Then the sports team went over to the camera crew and started signing autographs. And that’s how my journey in South Korea began!

My average week consisted of attending classes, Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm with an hour’s lunch break in-between. But there was also a lot of eating at all the delicious food places and going out drinking. The intensive language classes at SKKU allowed me to make rapid progress, though in some ways they were a bit like being back at high school again – but definitely minus the whole popularity contest, militant PE teachers and detentions if I didn’t do my homework.

Although I was only required to stay and study up to level 4, I decided to go all the way and complete the entire language programme (to graduate level 6). And by doing that, I got the chance to wear a graduation-gown, or ‘Harry Potter clothing’ as my Korean grammar teacher called it, and do various victory poses in front of the University’s ceremonial hall.

My classmates came from all over the world and almost all the classes were entertaining and engaging as we talked about topics, comparing the similarities and differences between each of our countries. For example, my Thai classmate said that they have massive water fights on the streets when it is Thai New Year’s day. I also learnt how to say ‘I need the toilet’ in Thai from that same wonderful classmate.

After class, I would go to a cute little café, order a drink and do all my required work. I would usually go with a Dutch classmate as we actively motivated each other with the promise of going out for a drink and karaoke afterwards.

Some of my closest friends are people I met in class and I’m deeply missing them now. Being an international student meant that I got that rare opportunity to meet students of various nationalities and enjoy opportunities to travel to new places that I would not have gone to otherwise. When I went solo-travelling in Japan, I got a lot of support and help from the wonderful Japanese friends I met at SKKU.

The things I miss the most about South Korea are the food and the lovely people I met during my time there. In amongst all the intensive studying, I still found time to go out and explore South Korea; visiting places such as the picturesque and very scenic Jeju Island... and attending the various festivals around Seoul.

If I was able to, I would do the year abroad again in a heartbeat. Though it can seem a bit difficult at the beginning, with the language barrier and feelings of being homesick and helpless, my year abroad experience in Seoul helped me grow so much as a person and achieve things I would not have been able to do otherwise. I also would go again just for the food. I gained quite the pooch. No regrets.
The year abroad is the climax of the language degrees, particularly in Japanese Studies where we go in the third year instead of the second. My year at Keio University in Tokyo helped me make significant improvements in my Japanese.

First of all, the language classes were excellent and gave us the opportunity to work with everything from classical literature to modern-day Japanese comedy. However, great as the classes were, all the opportunities to learn outside class are where the year abroad really shines. Living in the country you get to have experiences and interactions which would not be possible back in the UK. During the year I befriended old Japanese women on the bus, participated in theatre, taught chess to Japanese businessmen, and cracked jokes with the Japanese police after they realized that, no, I really did not have a weapon in my bag.

I think one of the best decisions I made was to join a society for regular Japanese students rather than one aimed at foreign students. I’m sure the Keio chess society didn’t expect a foreigner turning up to one of their meetings in September, but you wouldn’t be able to tell that by how welcoming they were. Joining this society gave me the opportunity to regularly speak Japanese with friends in an informal setting, and on a more personal level made me feel for a time like a ‘proper’ part of the university rather than just a ‘foreign student’.

‘Exemplary scholarship in contemporary East Asian Studies’

Congratulations to Dr Florian Schneider for winning the 2014 EastAsiaNet Award for his book Visual Political Communication in Popular Chinese Television Series (Leiden: Brill 2012).

Florian completed his PhD in the School of East Asian Studies in 2008 under the supervision of Drs Lily Chen and Hugo Dobson. He is now Lecturer in the Politics of Modern China at Leiden University.

The jury unanimously praised Florian’s ‘highly persuasive analysis of the political implications’ of Chinese TV dramas. A crucial finding of the book, which was based on his PhD study at Sheffield, was that self-censorship and commercial incentives are more important than official censorship in explaining the nature of the political discourse found in the programmes, which are the most popular entertainment format in China.

Florian’s research interests include questions of governance, political communication, and public administration in China, as well as international relations in the East Asian region. He is currently working on a project on ‘Digital nationalism in China’, looking at the crucial question of how Chinese online networks discuss Sino-Japanese history.

The website www.politicseastasia.com, which Florian established and manages, is a rich source of information, material and ideas on Chinese politics. It contains useful guidance especially for postgraduate students, for example on ‘the difference between method, methodology, and theory... and how to get the balance right’. Florian has also recently launched a new interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal Asiascape: Digital Asia to ‘keep readers abreast of developments in the cyber cultures and digital networks of Asia’.

Ash Spreadbury is a final year student in Japanese Studies. At the end of his language year in Japan, he achieved a perfect score in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, which our year abroad coordinator, Dr Tom McAuley, describes as ‘an unbelievable achievement’. Here Ash gives us his insights on how to make the best use of the opportunities of the year abroad.

Language learning through chess in Japan

Ash Spreadbury is a final year student in Japanese Studies. At the end of his language year in Japan, he achieved a perfect score in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, which our year abroad coordinator, Dr Tom McAuley, describes as ‘an unbelievable achievement’. Here Ash gives us his insights on how to make the best use of the opportunities of the year abroad.

The Chess Society’s stall at the Keio campus festival

Congratulations to Dr Florian Schneider for winning the 2014 EastAsiaNet Award for his book Visual Political Communication in Popular Chinese Television Series (Leiden: Brill 2012).

Florian completed his PhD in the School of East Asian Studies in 2008 under the supervision of Drs Lily Chen and Hugo Dobson. He is now Lecturer in the Politics of Modern China at Leiden University.

The jury unanimously praised Florian’s ‘highly persuasive analysis of the political implications’ of Chinese TV dramas. A crucial finding of the book, which was based on his PhD study at Sheffield, was that self-censorship and commercial incentives are more important than official censorship in explaining the nature of the political discourse found in the programmes, which are the most popular entertainment format in China.

Florian’s research interests include questions of governance, political communication, and public administration in China, as well as international relations in the East Asian region. He is currently working on a project on ‘Digital nationalism in China’, looking at the crucial question of how Chinese online networks discuss Sino-Japanese history.

The website www.politicseastasia.com, which Florian established and manages, is a rich source of information, material and ideas on Chinese politics. It contains useful guidance especially for postgraduate students, for example on ‘the difference between method, methodology, and theory... and how to get the balance right’. Florian has also recently launched a new interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal Asiascape: Digital Asia to ‘keep readers abreast of developments in the cyber cultures and digital networks of Asia’. The Chess Society’s stall at the Keio campus festival

The Chess Society’s stall at the Keio campus festival

Congratulations to Dr Florian Schneider for winning the 2014 EastAsiaNet Award for his book Visual Political Communication in Popular Chinese Television Series (Leiden: Brill 2012).

Florian completed his PhD in the School of East Asian Studies in 2008 under the supervision of Drs Lily Chen and Hugo Dobson. He is now Lecturer in the Politics of Modern China at Leiden University.

The jury unanimously praised Florian’s ‘highly persuasive analysis of the political implications’ of Chinese TV dramas. A crucial finding of the book, which was based on his PhD study at Sheffield, was that self-censorship and commercial incentives are more important than official censorship in explaining the nature of the political discourse found in the programmes, which are the most popular entertainment format in China.

Florian’s research interests include questions of governance, political communication, and public administration in China, as well as international relations in the East Asian region. He is currently working on a project on ‘Digital nationalism in China’, looking at the crucial question of how Chinese online networks discuss Sino-Japanese history.

The website www.politicseastasia.com, which Florian established and manages, is a rich source of information, material and ideas on Chinese politics. It contains useful guidance especially for postgraduate students, for example on ‘the difference between method, methodology, and theory... and how to get the balance right’. Florian has also recently launched a new interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal Asiascape: Digital Asia to ‘keep readers abreast of developments in the cyber cultures and digital networks of Asia’.
China was the third largest investor overseas in 2013, even though the policy of encouraging companies to invest abroad is only in its early stages. The recent phenomenal growth of China’s overseas investment has led many to ask how far the pattern of this investment reflects the nature of the country’s domestic economy, with its predominant role for the state. In other words, do Chinese multinational enterprises (MNEs) differ from those of other countries?

My current research focuses on how the institutional background of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) affects their strategies for foreign investment and particularly their preference for overseas mergers and acquisitions (M&As).

SOEs, as ‘national champions’, accounted for 55% of China’s stock of overseas investment in 2013. Domestic competition and privatization have impelled such companies to adopt more market-based strategies and improve their productivity. But the government still continues to protect the central role of state ownership in strategically important industries such as raw materials, energy, telecommunications and banking.

SOEs are often seen as inefficient and bureaucratic because of their weak corporate governance structure and because their dependence on the state for finance introduces political objectives into their decision-making. The Chinese government hopes that investment overseas will contribute to achieving a mix of national political and economic objectives. It encourages companies to develop overseas sales and manufacturing sites in order to promote exports. It wishes to secure access to natural resources, especially those which are in short supply domestically. Foreign investment can also support Chinese companies in developing the most advanced technology as well as in acquiring brand names and managerial know-how. Finally, the government sees investment as one way to strengthen China’s relationships with other countries.

Few incentives and capabilities to establish new subsidiaries of their own as a way of tapping into local resources. In fact bureaucratic managerial practices mean it is often difficult for them to translate investments in technology or branding within their own organizations into useful outputs. Nor do they find it easy to undergo the learning experience necessary for an MNE to set up a new foreign subsidiary. Finally, because of their obligation to meet national political objectives, they are more likely to enjoy preferential access to state financial assistance, which further increases their preference for acquisitions.

Thus my study concludes that Chinese MNEs, especially the SOEs, are in some ways different from those of other countries, particularly through the influence of the state in compelling them to meet national objectives. This leads to a pattern where Chinese companies tend to buy foreign companies rather than set up their own subsidiaries abroad.

My research has studied the overseas investments made by the 500 largest Chinese manufacturing firms. I conclude that different levels of state ownership result in different degrees of government influence on the companies’ development of strategic assets. This in turn determines their strategies for foreign investment and overseas M&As.

Specifically, Chinese firms with higher levels of state ownership are more likely to enter a foreign market through taking over local companies than through setting up their own subsidiaries. This preference is shown in the example of Lenovo, one of the best known Chinese companies abroad, whose largest shareholder is the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It has expanded overseas through acquiring first IBM’s personal computer business in 2005 and most recently, as shown in the illustration, Motorola Mobility in 2014.

SOE preference for acquisitions is partly because, as ‘national champions’, they face pressures to fulfill national objectives to obtain foreign strategic assets and natural resources. The government protection and support they enjoy domestically also means SOEs have
Dr Tom McAuley, Lecturer in Japanese Studies, is particularly well known for his work on waka poetry. Here he tells us how he shared his work with a new audience – Year 8 school students in Rotherham.

About a year ago, I was invited to take part in a ‘Virtual Social Sciences’ project with Rawmarsh School in Rotherham, with the aim of widening participation in higher education. The project started with several colleagues from the Faculty visiting the school to present our research to 200 pupils in Year 8 (12–13 year olds). The event was to be a ‘Pecha-Kucha’ (a rapid-fire form of presentation first developed in Japan), so we had only three minutes to talk, with only ten PowerPoint slides. Time keeping was going to be strict, with a bell rung when our time was up. Even more intimidating, the kids were invited to vote after each pair of presentations to say which they thought was better (the ‘red tomato’ on one side of their card, or the ‘green apple’ on the other)!

My colleagues talked on topics as varied as redesigning cities to cope with flooding, Spanish high-school students’ use of Facebook in educational discussions, or how banter is used for interpersonal interaction. My own research on medieval Japanese poetry, with a focus on poetry competitions, seemed rather esoteric and out of place by comparison. But I went ahead with a talk I called ‘How do you tell if a poem is any good?’, using as my example a single round from the Poetry Competition in 600 Rounds in 1194, where the poets Kenshō and Jien presented poems on the topic of ‘Frogs’.

Kenshō’s poem was:

yamabuki no / niou ide o ba / yoso ni mite
kaiya ga shita mo / kawazu naku nari
Golden kerria
Glimpsed afar;
Beneath the heated hut, too,
The frogs are calling.

While Jien proposed:

mada toranu / sanae no hazue / shuiku waku no / koe no hibiki ni
As yet unpicked.
The rice seedlings’ tips
Seem to stretch forth;
The swarming frogs’
Calls echoing...

Kenshō’s poem lost roundly. He was asked about the ‘heated hut’ and replied that it was for raising silkworms. But then it wouldn’t have been built anywhere frogs could get to it, and so the poem doesn’t describe a real situation, which was a key requirement for poetic quality at the time. In fact, the judge finished by saying ‘the only conclusion is that he should cease to circulate his poem!’ It was that bad!

As I’ve said above, this is quite esoteric stuff, but imagine my surprise when there were more red tomatoes for me, than there were green apples for the presentation I was paired with! It seems frogs and poems won the day!

The second stage of the project took place a couple of months later, when pupils from Rawmarsh visited the university and interviewed academics about our work. I got a range of really good questions on how medieval Japanese poetry is put together, the culture behind it, and how it relates to more familiar poetic forms like haiku. Other questions were more wide-ranging, such as what Japan is like, or what names would look like in Japanese writing. Overall, it was a pleasure to interact with such a keen group of interviewers.

Finally, after visiting the university, the pupils worked with local artists to produce artworks of various kinds inspired by the research they had heard about – some examples of their poetry can be found on the Virtual Social Sciences blog (www.virtualsocialscience.wordpress.com/poetry-banter/) along with more information about the project as a whole.

The experience has shown me that, presented in the right way, even the lives and words of a group of aristocrats in Kyoto 800 years ago can strike a chord with people today – and provide some inspiration, education and entertainment.

Frogs rule!

www.temcauley.staff.shef.ac.uk/introduction.shtml
Finding the best works to read on China

Emeritus Professor Tim Wright is Editor-in-Chief of the Chinese Studies module of the Oxford Bibliographies. Here he discusses the aims of the bibliographies, and the issues that arise in relation to Chinese Studies.

It’s been exciting to be part of this ambitious project run by Oxford University Press in New York. Wholly online, it combines the quality control inherent in the use of top scholars and a system of peer review, with the flexibility in both use and production (for example in updating) of the online format. The overall project is much bigger than just Chinese studies, covering thirty-eight major subject areas, ranging from Buddhism through Linguistics to Public Health, with a current total of 5,111 articles, each of 5–15,000 words, on specific topics. In the Chinese Studies subject area, at present 99 online articles cover topics from ‘calligraphy’ through ‘the Needham question’ to ‘poverty and living standards since 1949’. All these numbers will expand considerably in the future.

What are these bibliographies trying to do? We want to provide a selective, expert and evaluative guide to the literature on a particular topic – to some extent functioning as the ‘anti-Google’. A Google search generates a vast amount of materials but without any advice on their quality or importance. By contrast, we do not aim to be comprehensive, but to provide guidance from leading experts to identify the most important works on specific topics. The experts both locate their chosen readings within the broader field and annotate each citation, highlighting its particular contribution.

It’s been challenging but fun to find experts able to write articles on a wide variety of topics within Chinese Studies. To do so we have combed the whole world. So our authors include globally-leading scholars such as Professors Dwight Perkins (Harvard) on ‘the economy 1949–1978’, Fang Lee Cooke (Monash University, Australia) on ‘management style in Chinese capitalism’, Zheng Yongnian (Singapore) on ‘central-local relations’, Wu Xinzhi (Chinese Academy of Sciences) on ‘human origins in China’, and Olga Lomová (Charles University, Prague) on ‘traditional Chinese poetry’.

The bibliographies are aimed at a wide audience. But we can identify a few core target groups. Advanced students, from undergraduates, through masters to beginning doctoral students who are embarking on a new project will find the articles on their chosen topic an invaluable resource. Likewise academics aiming to extend their research or teaching into new areas – whether a new discipline for Chinese studies scholars or adding a China dimension to their work in the case of academics in other disciplines – will also find the articles an excellent starting point. Beyond that, practitioners in government, NGOs or the private sector may want to use the bibliographies, perhaps more selectively, to catch up with the leading scholarship in their particular area of interest.

The nature of our market has implications for what we try to do, especially in a subject area like Chinese Studies. Our audience is mostly in English-speaking countries, and many users probably don’t read Chinese. At the same time, it is crucial to make even those who are monolingual aware of the important scholarship on all topics in Chinese and on many topics in languages such as Japanese or the other European languages. In particular, of course we can’t hope to do full justice to the range of Chinese-language scholarship – that is a task awaiting a future project by a Chinese publisher. So we have to strike a balance, making English-language pieces our core, but also directing readers to key works in other languages. Where translations exist, we can cite the translation, but also include information about the original in the annotation.

The first part of each bibliography is free to view at www.oxfordbibliographies.com/obo/page/chinese-studies. Sheffield’s library subscribes to the Chinese Studies and Political Science bibliographies, so anyone with library access can consult the full version through the StarPlus catalogue.
What is ‘Japanese horror film’?

Dr Aimee Richmond’s PhD, successfully completed in 2014, focused on British audiences’ understandings of Japanese horror film. Here she explains what Japanese horror film is and how it fits into our understanding of cinema.

When I started researching my PhD, it quickly became clear that the term ‘Japanese horror film’ was itself a subjective concept. Of course, in Japan there is no genre called ‘Japanese horror film’. However, perhaps more surprisingly, neither is the Japanese genre of ‘horror’ equivalent to what is commonly discussed in the UK as ‘Japanese horror film’.

Within the Japanese film industry, contemporary horror is a strictly defined genre, which revolves around rules about aesthetics and the portrayal of ghosts. It is often equated with the works of particular screenwriters and directors such as Nakata Hideo (The Ring, The Ring 2, Dark Water) and Shimizu Takashi (The Grudge). This definition excludes films outside the genre that still feature horrific elements such as gore or violence. Just as it is common for horror films to contain elements from other genres, it is not unusual for films of other genres to contain elements of horror. Japanese critics and distributors use a wide range of descriptive labels, such as baiorensu (violence) and sasupensu (suspense), many of which are not used in the UK.

Defining Japanese horror film in the UK context is more difficult. With the success of The Ring, distributors such as Tartan Asia Extreme picked up on the marketability of this genre, into which they began to shoehorn other Japanese films containing horrific elements. For example, films such as Ichi the Killer and Battle Royale were not regarded as horror films in Japan. But they were marketed as such in the UK, and have subsequently been discussed in that way by audiences, critics and academics. As a result, UK audiences have been steered towards thinking of such films as ‘Japanese horror films’. To paraphrase Rick Altman’s idea about arbiters of generic taste: if academics, reviews, distribution labels, and the shelves of a DVD store or categories of an online retailer all tell us that these films are to be grouped together, who are we to disagree?

In fact, however, audiences do disagree. Throughout my research I found varying opinions as to which films were classifiable as contemporary Japanese horror film, and various interpretations of meaning within individual films, making it clear that the genre as we know it in the UK is an unsubstantive one — that is to say, the defining features of its films are not recognizable enough to qualify as a distinct genre.

Shared characteristics involving semantic and syntactic elements are the most common way of defining ‘genre’ and, if an audience cannot agree on the characteristics shared by a body of films, the concept fails to serve its purpose. When grouping together ‘Japanese horror films’ which originated from a number of different domestic genres, the audiences I interviewed struggled to identify shared characteristics which were not conflicting. Evidently, the UK-constructed genre of Japanese horror film is an unstable one.

A transnationally-constructed genre is not necessarily less valid than a domestic one, but we do need audience-led approaches to such definitions. An academic analysis of a film’s syntactic and semantic elements can tell us about it theoretically and what makes it belong to a genre. But it can’t tell us about how it is enjoyed or interpreted, or account for individuality amongst viewer interpretations. Issues such as these come to the forefront particularly with transnational films. The UK-constructed genre of Japanese horror film draws attention to the importance of individuality and varying levels of cross-cultural competence within the audience itself. It also highlights the role of context, and in particular cross-cultural context, in relation to film viewing.
Sheffield has launched an innovative new degree that brings Chinese chemistry students from Nanjing to our University for their final year of study.

Sheffield’s top-ranking Chemistry Department has been keen to expand and diversify its student body. So when Nanjing Tech University approached them looking for a collaborative degree, Professor Mike Ward jumped at the chance. The result is a unique degree, where the students study for three years in Nanjing covering the Sheffield syllabus for Levels 1 and 2. Then (always assuming they pass the exams!) they come to Sheffield to join local Level 3 students in the final year of the BSc. Sheffield’s departments of mathematics and physics are following suit, and in three years well over a hundred students from Nanjing will be studying their final year in the Faculty of Science here.

World-famous chemists, including two Fellows of the Royal Society and one Pro-Vice-Chancellor, travel from Sheffield to Nanjing to teach their areas of expertise. And each spring Dr Julie Hyde goes out for twelve weeks to upgrade the students’ often limited laboratory skills, focussing her teaching on demonstration and formative feedback.

The Sheffield contingent all enjoy their time teaching in Nanjing. Apart from feeling able to ignore their emails for a few days, they plan to walk round the surviving 21 km of the Nanjing city wall – the longest in the world. Julie enjoys eating Chinese steamed buns for breakfast, while others confirm good Guinness is available in Nanjing! Chinese students and colleagues are always more than willing to help, whether in showing them round the city, introducing them to Chinese food, or helping them solve technical problems or implement Sheffield’s laboratory safety standards.

The process has been an exciting learning experience. Over the past three years, everything they have done has been for the first time. Bottles of champagne are already on ice to celebrate when the current cohort of twenty students now in Sheffield graduate and complete the first cycle of the degree.

The experience also involves understanding cultural and educational differences. The Chinese students tend to be absolutely excellent at calculations, however complex, but more hesitant about discursive questions or thinking outside the box. Mike experimented by challenging prospective students with a ‘Fermi problem’ (a problem requiring back-of-the-envelope calculations to come up with a reasonable approximation – try to estimate the number of piano tuners in Chicago without using Google or other reference works!). His audience underlined how much the exercise gave them confidence to embark on unfamiliar problems.

Since arriving in England in August, the Nanjing students have been determined to make maximum use of everything that Sheffield offers. Catherine Hu told me how much they appreciate the accessibility of their professors and teachers and the contribution of the personal tutor system. The careers service also helps them develop useful skills for future job-seeking in China or elsewhere, for example suggesting they look beyond chemistry for possible jobs.

According to Eric Wu, they really enjoy the easy availability of facilities and equipment, whether infra-red spectrometers in the labs, the computers in the Information Commons, or more generally the ability to download software and access databases on their own computers. Moreover the electricity is not switched off at 10.30 p.m.!

The University’s cosmopolitan atmosphere helps them to broaden their horizons and their project teams involve not only local students but also some from countries relatively little known in China, such as Cyprus.

In everyday life, English weather is not always to their taste, even though they take pictures of the blue sky to send back to friends in China. Although students enjoy a cup of coffee everywhere, in China they tend to eat their meals in the canteen, while in Sheffield they are encouraged to cook for themselves and their flatmates. As May Zhu told me, this makes for a more family atmosphere. But George Zhou emphasized that they still don’t like marmite!

The University’s cosmopolitan atmosphere helps them to broaden their horizons and their project teams involve not only local students but also some from countries relatively little known in China, such as Cyprus.

Some of the Nanjing students taking advantage of the blue sky to sightsee in Leeds
After graduating, I was keen to develop the knowledge I gained at Sheffield by pursuing a masters degree in classical and modern Korean literature in South Korea. There were several attractive possibilities, but I decided at the last minute to accept an offer from the Academy of Korean Studies in Bundang, roughly twenty minutes from Gangnam in Seoul. The focus of the Academy is on developing both national and international research on Korean studies. The postgraduate institute where I study is settled nicely between mountains. Campus life is tranquil with beautiful persimmon trees during the autumn, mounds of snow in the winter and cherry blossoms in the spring.

Classes are totally in Korean and are focussed this semester entirely on the earliest forms of Korean literature. So the texts we work with are often in Classical Chinese or Middle Korean. Not only is fluency in Korean expected, but also sufficient literacy in dead languages too. This poses a challenge as most of the institute’s students are Korean or Chinese and are already literate in these older styles of writing once used in Korea. But, as the only Westerner currently in the literature department I receive a lot of support from the lecturers. Even in such a short space of time, they have helped me to read confidently in Middle Korean (although Classical Chinese grammar is still a work in progress!). It’s a tremendous sense of satisfaction reading and translating some of Korea’s oldest works such as Hyangga poetry from as early as the Three Kingdoms era (first to seventh centuries) through to the first novels composed entirely in the Korean alphabet (Hangul) during the Former and Latter Joseon periods (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries).

Despite the masses of reading and lots of new (or as is often the case, very, very old) vocabulary, I’ve settled in well and feel that the expertise gained in Sheffield and the academic knowledge I am currently building at the Academy is helping me move closer towards an academic career related to Korea. Since Korean literature is still little known in the West, my long-term ambition is eventually to return to the UK and lecture on Korean literature and poetry. In the short term I am seeking work in translation and publishing to earn money to fund a PhD (if I have the strength to carry on!).

A highlight of my time studying in Korea so far was a recent fieldwork trip with my department to Jeollabuk-do. Jeollabuk-do is a southwestern region of Korea famous for beautiful scenery, fresh seafood and, of course, literature. We spent a number of days seeing the sights, visiting temples and literature museums, and learning about regional authors and important literary works. In the evenings we took to the beach to watch the sunset before eating a feast of raw fish, snails, crabs and spicy stews – naturally washed down with bottle upon bottle of Korean beer and soju, an important part of Korean culture and a natural aid to improving fluency while conversing with academics!
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: www.sheffield.ac.uk/seas.

BA degrees

Unless otherwise stated, BA Degrees involve four years of study.

Single honours

- Chinese Studies
- Japanese Studies
- Korean Studies
- East Asian Studies (three years)

Dual honours

- Chinese Studies and /History, Management, Music
- Chinese Studies with /French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish
- Japanese Studies and /History, Linguistics, Management

Japanese Studies with /German, Russian, Spanish
French/Germanic/Hispanic/Russian Studies with Japanese
Korean Studies and /Management, Music
Korean Studies with Japanese
East Asian Studies and Music (three years)

Postgraduate taught degrees

- MA/Diploma/Certificate in Contemporary China
- MA/Diploma/Certificate in Contemporary Japan
- MSc/Diploma/Certificate in East Asian Business
- MA/Diploma/Certificate in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL)

Postgraduate research degrees

PhD supervision is available in a wide range of subject areas on China, Japan, Korea and intra-regional studies. In addition, scholarships may be available through the University of Sheffield.

EastAsia@Sheffield

is published by the School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield.

Enquiries to:
Prof Tim Wright, Editor,
School of East Asian Studies,
University of Sheffield,
Shearwood Road,
Sheffield S10 2TD, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)114 222 8406;
Email: T.Wright@Sheffield.ac.uk