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Our Funders
– The Academy Of Korean Studies
– Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation
– Economic and Social Research Council
– Japan Foundation
Endowment Committee
– The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation
– Korea Foundation
– Japan Foundation

30+
Publications

33
Members of staff

38
PhD students

400+
Taught students
Graduation 2017

The School of East Asian Studies was proud to see its final-year students graduate at a ceremony held on 17 July 2017. This year saw the award of four prizes in total, including two new prizes thanks to generous donations from Emeritus Professors Tim Wright and James Grayson.

Jonathan Walton and Deng Wenzheng shared the first ever Tim Wright Prize awarded to outstanding students on an East Asian Studies degree programme. Jonathan is currently teaching on the JET programme in Japan and Wenzheng has gone on to postgraduate study at the University of Oxford.

In Korean Studies, I-Rin Intrasea was the first student to be awarded the James H. Grayson Prize for her impressive performance across both language modules and her dissertation and was delighted to have the opportunity to be presented with her award by Professor Grayson.

The Robert Sloss Prize in Chinese Studies was awarded to Melissa Pilgrim for an outstanding performance on her dual honours degree in Chinese Studies with French. Melissa was President of the East Asian Studies Society in her final year and also attended the G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China as a policy analyst.

Finally, the Margaret Daniels Prize in Japanese Studies was shared between Christopher Sturgis and Victoria MacDonald for their first-class performances on our single-honours degree in Japanese Studies. Both Christopher and Victoria are planning on continuing their studies to the postgraduate level.

Professor Hugo Dobson, Head of School, commented that “we were delighted this year to be able to award prizes in the four areas we focus on as a School – China, Japan, Korea and East Asia more broadly. Each of the prize winners has demonstrated excellence through their time at Sheffield and are part of a cohort that has continued to demonstrate the wide-range of academic and extra-curricular activities SEAS students undertake”.

SEAS wishes all its graduates every success in their chosen careers and looks forward to keeping in touch with them.

Farewell to much loved SEAS staff

It is something that hopefully comes to us all. Something we look forward to and make plans for. Nevertheless, SEAS was sorry to see a number of staff retire at the end of July 2017.

Lynne Whydle

Lynne Whydle was often the first person staff and students would meet when entering the main SEAS office. She always greeted people with a smile and willingness to help them whatever their enquiry. In particular, she made an important contribution to the success of our open days by welcoming applicants and their parents to Sheffield.

Dr Judith Cherry

Dr Judith Cherry was one of the longest serving members of staff and personified the School, Hugo Dobson). It was also with great sadness that we said goodbye to Ms Michelle Nicholson who has moved to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning to take up the role of Learning and Teaching and Operations Administrator. Michelle originally worked in the Distance Learning Unit, eventually becoming Administrative Team Leader in the main SEAS office. We will all miss a much-loved and respected colleague who approached her many roles with a smile and infinite patience.

In addition, Dr Seung-Young Kim was appointed to a professorship at Kansai Gaidai University in Japan at the beginning of 2018. SY – as he was popularly known – was popular with our Korean Studies and East Asian Studies students both for his teaching on the history of international relations in East Asia and his pastoral care.

Dr Seung-Young Kim

SEAS Facts and Figures 2017

£88,000 Funding awards

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30+ Publications
38 Taught students
33 Members of staff
400+ PhD students

Last but not least, Professor Glenn Hook was another long-serving member of staff whose name came to be synonymous with Japanese Studies at Sheffield. Glenn had a truly international profile as seen in his research and leadership in establishing the White Rose East Asia Centre. Glenn’s most tangible legacy is through his supervision of generations of PhD students who now occupy positions across UK, European and Asian universities (including the current Head of School, Hugo Dobson).

We hope that Lynne, Judith and Glenn all enjoy a well-deserved retirement from academic life but still keep in touch.

Professor Glenn Hook

It was also with great sadness that we said goodbye to Ms Michelle Nicholson who has moved to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning to take up the role of Learning and Teaching and Operations Administrator. Michelle originally worked in the Distance Learning Unit, eventually becoming Administrative Team Leader in the main SEAS office. We will all miss a much-loved and respected colleague who approached her many roles with a smile and infinite patience.
Excellence in Learning and Teaching

We are often recognised for our commitment to developing innovative learning and teaching practices thanks to the dedication of our staff, and our students’ hard work can be seen through their ability to compete at international levels in language proficiency tests and through the award of competitive scholarships.

Over the past year a number of our staff and students have been recognised for their hard work.

Staff success

Faculty prize for outstanding learning and Teaching for Sukyeon Cho

Sukyeon Cho, Korean Language Coordinator in the School of East Asian Studies, has been awarded a Faculty of Social Sciences TESS Award for Outstanding Practice in Learning and Teaching 2017. Sukyeon came to Sheffield in 2005 and, over the past 12 years, has revolutionised the way in which we teach Korean language in SEAS. She has led the way in moving our teaching practices away from traditional methods of grammar explanation, drills and translation exercises and towards a variety of dynamic communicative activities, including: discussions, games, role-playing simulations, songs, student presentations, research and reading projects, and online study of her own custom-made audio and video materials.

Recognition for the Global Leadership Initiative

Professor Hugo Dobson’s work on developing and implementing the Global Leadership Initiative has been recognised a number of times through University and independent awards.

> BISA and HEA 2016/2017 Award for Excellence in Teaching International Studies
> Senate award for collaborative activities
> Faculty Learning and Teaching Award

The Global Leadership Initiative offers high achieving students from the Faculty of Social Sciences (undergraduate and taught postgraduate) the opportunity to attend major international summits, such as the G20.

Dedicated Outstanding Thesis Mentor

Dr Mark Pendleton has been recognised as a Dedicated Outstanding Thesis Mentor for the third successive cycle. Thesis mentors are trained and experienced early career researchers who volunteer to help students explore their situation, identify their strengths and resources, and navigate their own way forward with their thesis.

In 2016, the University Library successfully applied for an award from the Korea Foundation Support for Libraries with Korean Collections program, and received $20,000 USD to improve catalogue records and access to the Korean Collection at the University.

Improving access to the Library’s Korean collection

Since 1979, cataloguing has transformed beyond recognition. The Korean collection currently contains 12,284 books/monographs, 320 serials/journals, as well as rare Korean books dating back to the Chosun period (14th – 19th centuries). Whilst the most recently catalogued books are to the current world-wide standard due to the introduction of new cataloguing system Alma, in which all records are searchable in both Korean (한글) and Latin (McCune-Reischauer Romanisation) script, the older 10,590 books were recorded using previous software, and were not searchable in Korean.

The Korea Foundation funding, which has been matched by the University Library, will enable all of the collection to be searchable in Korean, as well as in the Latin script of McCune-Reischauer Romanisation. The records will be accessible to scholars and students throughout the world.

The records will be accessible to scholars and students throughout the world.

Student Success

First prize for Korean Studies Student

In June 2017, level 2 BA Korean Studies Student Catherine Maddox won joint first prize in the Korean Speech contest held in London.

“I thought that the standard was incredibly high and definitely didn’t expect to win! Seeing so many people who were so good at Korean made me want to work even harder to improve my Korean. I also think preparing for the competition helped to develop my skills and gave me an opportunity to work on my pronunciation, which is one of the elements of Korean that I find most difficult. I’m excited to continue trying to improve in the future!”

Catherine Maddox

SEAS Student takes gold in Chinese language finals

BA Chinese Studies with Russian student David Geary was announced as the winner of the Grand Prize at the UK Chinese Bridge Competition held in London on Saturday 22 April 2017.

His language performance, which impressed the judges and members of the Chinese Embassy, included a rap in Mandarin Chinese, Chinese dialects and English.
Researchers working in arts and humanities disciplines in SEAS, such as history, film, literature and media studies, meet regularly to discuss and advance our research in the Arts and Culture research cluster. 2017 was another stellar year in the cluster’s work.

The year saw the publication of several pieces of scholarship, including Kate Taylor-Jones’ landmark book Divine Work: Japanese Colonial Cinema and its Legacy (Bloombury), which explores the intertwined histories of East Asian cinema and Japanese imperialism across multiple sites in East Asia, along with several research articles and book chapters by academic staff and PhD students. Special congratulations go to doctoral student Carolin Becke who published her first academic article on Japanese music videos.

Taylor-Jones has continued her work with major film festivals, including the Japan Foundation Touring Film programmes, the London Korean Film Festival, and the London East Asian Film Festival, taking students to screenings, providing introductions to films and hosting question and answer sessions. We look forward to more exciting film collaborations in the coming years.

The cluster welcomed new doctoral students into the School, including Xi Liu, who is working on Chinese cinema and aesthetics; Georgie Thomas-Pire, working on transnational notions of girlhood; and Cathryn Ladd, who is pursuing a joint PhD with the School of Architecture on Japanese micro-houses. Our cluster also hosted several international visitors over the year, including John Whitlver Treat (Yale) and Gitte Marianne Hansen (Newcastle), who presented exciting new scholarship on East Asian literature.

Collaborative initiatives across the university continued in 2017, particularly with the Centre for Contemporary and Modern History (CoMo), a joint initiative with the departments of History and the School of Languages and Cultures. CoMo launched in May with an exciting roundtable discussion about the global history of partition, timed to mark the anniversary of the partition of India. Owen Miller (SOAS) joined the discussion with a focus on the Korean peninsula.

With colleagues from the Sheffield Methods Institute, Dr Yu Chen co-organised a conference on ‘Urban Segregation and Inequality in Europe and China’ on 21st July 2017, and a subsequent summer school on ‘Analysing Segregation: Applied Statistical Methods for Analysing Segregation and Inequality’ during 1st and 4th August 2017. Both events were held in Sheffield, funded by the ESRC-CASS project entitled ‘Urban Transformations: Urban Development, Migration, Segregation and Inequality’. They were well received by the delegations from both China and the UK.

Dr Peter Matanle received a Special Commendation from the Japanese Ambassador to the UK for Services to Anglo-Japanese Relations in July, in recognition of his contributions to the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programmes. He was also awarded a Visiting Research Fellowship in June/July 2017 at the German Institute of Japanese Studies in Tokyo to study regional depopolulation and recovery in Tohoku. In October he presented at a Sponsored Research Leader Session at the International Population Conference (IPC2017) in Cape Town, organised by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSPP).

Dr Markus Bell was invited to talk on North Korea at SOAS in London, Goethe University in Germany, and Babes-Bolyai University in Romania. He presented the papers entitled ‘Socializing a nuclear North Korea: Human security in Northeast Asia’ at AAS-in Asia Conference in Seoul, and ‘Remembering homes left behind: North Koreans’ reimagning of Japan’ at the AKSE 2017 Conference in Prague. He also wrote several articles for high profile public outlets such as the Conversation, Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition, and the Fortune Magazine.

Dr Harald Conrad was invited to two ASEAN career fora in Osaka and Tokyo to talk to Japanese companies about ‘best practices’ in the employment of foreign graduates in Japan. On 6-7 November he organized an international conference at SOAS in London on ‘Foreign Graduate Employment in Japanese Companies – Implications for Japanese Studies Teaching and Research.’ Based on this conference and research conducted over the summer with undergraduate student Lindsay Hirst as part of the ‘Global Opportunities in the Social Sciences Research Associates’ Award, he will over the coming months produce a ‘best practices’ brochure, which discusses how departments can better address employability in the studies and language curriculum. He has also used the insights from his recent research to develop a career session for our students.

Cluster members have published papers in international peer-reviewed journals including Migration Studies (Bell), Crosscurrents: East Asian History and Culture Review (Bell), Professional Geographer (Chen); Environment and Planning B (Chen); International Journal of Human Resource Management (Conrad); Japanese Studies (Conrad); Social Science Japan Journal (Conrad). The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus (Matanle); International Business Review (Wei).
By bringing together experts from Northern Universities, Global Policy North will deliver cutting-edge research and analysis on pressing global collective action problems. 

Hugo was also invited by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat in Seoul to tickle about how they might foster future collaboration between China, Japan and South Korea. He gave public talks at University College Cork and Durham University.

Dr Gossia Jaksimow was invited to the prestigious Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, where she presented a paper entitled ‘NGOs, citizenship and space in China: from urban exclusion to urban transformation’. She was also invited to the European Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES) Collaborative Research Network on EU-China Relations Workshop where she presented a paper entitled ‘Desecuritising China? Chinese narratives on the BRI in the context of 16+1’. Shortly after the workshop, she presented a paper in UACES conference entitled ‘China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the European Fragmentation’.

The securitisation/soft power dynamics in China’s engagement in Central-Eastern Europe was also invited to present a paper at a conference entitled ‘China’s Belt and Road: Anxiety or Opportunity?’ at the University of Oxford, ‘Governing Security Risks along the Belt and Road’ at an International Security Risks along the Belt and Road Conference and another on ‘China and the Changing Global Order’ at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP 23 negotiations.

Katherine presented two keynote addresses on ‘How is China Changing the Global Order?’ at a conference in London. She was also invited to the conference ‘The end of the region? The Future of Central Lancashire and the National Union response at Japan Society, London; to talk on Japan’s labour market policy and union response at the 16th+1’. Shortly after the workshop, she was invited to present a paper at a conference entitled ‘China and the Changing Global Order’. During the summer of 2017, Dr Kim received a Korea Foundation Field Research Fellowship which allowed him to travel to Yonsei University and take up a Visiting Scholar position in the Institute for North Korean Studies.

Key Highlights:

- Professor Hugo Dobbson began 2017 by publishing an article entitled ‘1st Japan Really Back? The 'ABA Doctrine' and Global Governance’ in the Journal of Contemporary Asia, currently ranked 7th out of 69 Area Studies journals. Over the course of twelve months, the article has received over 4,000 visits and is now the fourth most read article in the 47-year history of the journal and was cited in the Financial Times.

- Later in the year, he edited a collection of essays published in Celebrity Studies that resulted from a White Rose-AHDR fund project on informal politics in East Asia. He also co-authored the introduction entitled ‘Non-western celebrity Politics and Diplomacy’. At the end of 2017, he published an essay in Kamizono, the official journal of Meiji Shrine Intercultural Research Institute in Japan on the political role of former Japanese prime ministers and co-authored an article on the same subject accepted for publication in Journal of Contemporary Asia in 2018.

- He also took teams of student policy analysts to the G7 Summit in Taormina and the G20 summit in Hamburg as part of the Global Leadership Initiative (GLI). While at the summits, he was interviewed by the world’s media, including Japan’s Asahi Shimbun and Turkey’s TRT World.

- Hugo has joined Global Policy North, a new network of academics based in the north of the UK working on global governance and connected issues. It aims to create a network for Northern academics and practitioners to extend the scope and scale of their research agendas through coordination and collaboration.

- Dr Seung-young Kim was invited to speak at a number of highly regarded outlets. The Conversation and China Citizenship Approach to Migrant Worker’s Rights, an essay in Kamizono, the official journal of the UK working on global governance and contemporary international relations as well as international history in East Asia since the late 19th century. We investigate the causes and processes of international cooperation and competition with reference to the structure of the international system, agencies, norms, and cultures that have generated changes and continuities in the region and globally.
Improving Japanese Studies Teaching in Japanese Companies – Foreign Graduate Employment Research making an impact

While work opportunities for foreign graduate employees in Japanese companies were in the past often limited to overseas subsidiaries and associated with limited career potential, since around the year 2010, Japanese companies have been actively and systematically hiring foreign graduates into their Japanese headquarters as full career-track employees.

My recent research into this trend (together with Associate Professor Hendrik Mayer-Ohl from the National University of Singapore), has shown that many companies appear to have implicit or explicit foreign recruitment targets of 10–20% of a year’s employe intake. As many of these companies hire several hundred new graduates each year, this new hiring trend poses both challenges and opportunities for Japanese studies and language graduates around the world. Informed by my research, I organized on 6–7 November 2017 a conference in London to address what this trend means for Japanese studies teaching and research. The conference brought together international representatives of Japanese studies and language departments. Japanese company executives, employment agents, as well as Japanese studies students and graduates. We discussed how the employment of foreign graduates in Japanese companies has changed since the 2000s, what kind of skills Japanese companies are looking for when employing foreign graduates, how Japanese studies departments should prepare their graduates for employment in Japanese companies and how this should inform their teaching activities and curricula.

There was widespread agreement among the participants that Japanese studies departments should and can do more to address employability in their teaching curricula - not just in response to the recent hiring trend in Japan. At SEAS, which is currently undergoing a curriculum review, we will develop employability-related skills more systematically throughout our curriculum. For example, in their final year all Japanese studies students will write CVs and have mock job interviews in the Japanese language. Moreover, they will learn how to conduct research, how to collaborate within a team and how to disseminate information in non-academic formats such as policy briefs.

Another issue which we addressed both in our research and at the London conference was what kind of changes Japanese companies should be making to their human resource management practices to accommodate the hiring of foreign graduates. Over the coming year, I will draw up a ‘best practice’ brochure in Japanese, which will help Japanese companies to inform their teaching activities and curricula. In sum, I am thus hopeful that my recent research will have a positive impact both on the teaching practice in Japanese studies and on the employment situation of young foreign graduates in Japanese companies.

She also argued that growing competition between major powers, combined with domestic challenges, made it difficult for China to fulfill the role of primus inter pares. China’s centrality on the world stage was a major theme at the 19th Party Congress held in Beijing (18–24 October). Yet, in practice, the Chinese approach towards governing the world appears to be more ambivalent. China is now strengthening its status within global institutions, while simultaneously sponsoring alternative governing arrangements. It is playing a stronger role in global economic governance in particular, yet still supporting a traditional division of responsibility between developed and developing nations. It is an active participant in international rulemaking - reaffirming traditional principles of sovereign independence and non-interference in domestic affairs - while revising its stance on conflict intervention and counter-terrorism. An important question arises: what is the scope of China’s leadership ambition in global governance? Is it to govern the world on more equal terms? Or simply to change the rules of international conduct to align with its national rejuvenation project?

In sum, I am thus hopeful that my recent research will have a positive impact both on the teaching practice in Japanese studies and on the employment situation of young foreign graduates in Japanese companies.

By Professor Katherine Morton, Professor of China’s International Relations

On 16 November 2017 Professor Katherine Morton presented a distinguished lecture at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore on the question of who governs the world? Her opening address suggested that it was premature to conclude that a leadership vacuum is likely to emerge in response to mounting global challenges. Despite US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union, growing interdependencies continue to drive collective action. In reality, in the contemporary era, no individual state, no matter how powerful, has the political capacity to govern the world single-handedly.
The enduring legacy of Japan’s colonial cinema

Divine Work: Japanese Colonial Cinema and Its Legacy, written by Dr Kate Taylor-Jones and released in 2017 by Bloomsbury Press, is a reconsideration and re-examination of one aspect of the Japanese Imperial Empire, namely the cinema of this period and how its influence has been seen across the East Asian spectrum. Divine Work or Seigyo was the term used by orators and writers of the period to describe the Japanese Imperial project and it is from this term that this monograph took its title. The role that cinema, as the most popular art form of the last 100 years, plays inside wider society cannot be underestimated. Cinema both entertains and informs; it can be both the site of repression and expression; as well as offering debates on high art versus mass popular culture. East Asian cinema has become a powerful force on the international stage with Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, China and Taiwan all presenting film, directors and stars that travel globally. However, turning to the beginnings of the cinema of this region, cinema and colonialism arrived in many East Asian nations in the same decade. As the Japanese Empire expanded they both exported their own cinema products to their colonies but at the same time indigenous film industries attempted to begin. Early cinema in Asia may have all too often been conceived and presented inside the problematic moment of Imperial occupation but as this book explores, that does not mean we should ignore it. This book is just one example of East Asian cinema events and scholarship that take place here in the School of East Asian Studies. This year alone students have had the opportunity to attend the 2017 London Korean Film Festival, the London East Asian Film Festival and the Japan Foundation touring Film Programme. Students have had a chance to speak to filmmakers from across the region and study East Asian cinema at all levels of both Undergraduate and Postgraduate study. More exciting film events are planning in 2018 so please keep an eye on our website.

Thinking from the Yamanote

By Dr Mark Pendleton, Lecturer in Japanese Studies

Tokyo’s iconic train line, the Yamanote, marked the 130th anniversary of its initial opening and 90th anniversary of its completion as a loop in 2015. That year I organised, with Dr Jamie Coates, a double panel at the Association for Asian Studies conference in Chicago, which brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from anthropology, media studies, architecture, film studies, art and history to think about how Tokyo’s residents have understood their relationship to the city through their interactions with the Yamanote.

This might at first seem like an odd theme for a conference panel, but the Yamanote has an interesting past and present. Originally conceived as a private cargo line, it eventually linked up with other train lines to form a circle, connecting the historically separate shibamachi of the eastern half of the city, traditionally home to merchants and the lower classes, and the yamanote of the west, where altais had lived, and transformed into a major passenger and commuter line. The Yamanote’s circle continues to provide a key structuring device in the city today, connecting the transport hubs of Shinjuku, Shibuya, Tokyo, Ueno and more, as well as demarcating the downtown of the city from the outskirts and suburbs. Perhaps understandably then, people have used the Yamanote as a means to make sense of their lives in the city and in the process, transformed its function and the function of the areas that surround it.

That Chicago discussion has led to an exciting special issue of the journal Japan Forum, due out in May 2018 entitled ‘Thinking from the Yamanote: Space, Place and Mobility in Tokyo’s Past and Present’. Dr Coates and I divided the issue into two parts, with the first group thinking about various sites and locations around the Yamanote line. While the authors of these articles necessarily concerned themselves with specific locations, they demonstrated the ways in which differing human interactions and mobilities have helped produce these specific spaces. Sites discussed include Ikebukuro, a northwestern station often considered a kind of borderland and associated with migrants and misfits, and by extension ‘danger’ – it’s now home to a vibrant Chinese population. The Yamanote is a raised aboveground line, which leaves large amounts of space under its tracks, which have been used for different social interactions and cultural innovation, including informal homeless camps, tiny bars and food establishments and a range of other purposes. The structure of the loop also excludes certain people from easy participation in urban life, such as the ‘buraku’ communities, who live in geographically difficult to access locations beyond it, but often have to move through these more central spaces, for example on their way to work.

The other grouping started with the loop itself, thinking about how the circular organisation of the line helped frame both people’s lives in the city and how that has been represented culturally. These include arthouse and blockbuster films like Café Lumière (2005) and 26 Years Diary (2007), the use of proximity-based social networking apps and games, and activist and activist interventions into the everyday space of the train carriage. Together the two sets asked important questions for Japanese Studies and other disciplines, including around how people live in Tokyo today: how processes of mobility around the city help to shape and reshape urban landscapes; and to what extent studies of Japan need to be explored in relation to Japan’s regional and international context.

The participants in the special issue are Mark Pendleton, Jamie Coates, Joseph Hankins, Suzanne Mooney, Keiko Nishimura and Jennifer Coates. The introductory article, by Pendleton and Coates, is available freely for everyone to read via the Japan Forum website, thanks to the University of Sheffield’s open access policy.
Engaging the Other: Exploring the History of ‘Oriental’ Acts in the British Circus

By Nicola Unwin, BA Chinese Studies and History

The first element of this joint project is a Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience scoping study conducted by final year Bachelor of Arts in Chinese Studies and History student Nicola Unwin, and supervised by Dr Mark Pendleton and Dr Marjorie Dryburgh. Here is what Nicola has been finding as she explores the NFCA collections.

My research sets out to analyse East Asian culture as a trend in British society, and how that itself is encapsulated within the circus ring.

There are many that view the circus merely as a spectacle; on the contrary, it is a reflection of society. During the twentieth century, the circus was one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment. The circus welcomed all guests with no class bias, and the circus was just as warmly received across wide segments of British society. Due to this, the circus is a perfect platform from which to build an analysis of popular culture and trends in any decade. For example, during the late twentieth century, as we entered the comic book phase of popular culture, Spiderman became a popular feature of many circus rings.

The Western obsession with all things Asian, particularly Chinese artefacts, dates back as far as the Renaissance period. From there, interest only amplified. The early twentieth century saw a resurgence of chinoiserie, reflected in clothing, hairstyles, and even furniture which featured classic Chinese motifs. Of course the circus, home of all things mystical and different, could not resist the allure of the ‘Orient’. Many artists ‘from the orient’ performed acts associated in the popular imagination with traditional Chinese culture, such as hanging from the hair, hand balancing, and acrobatics.

This fascination with Asia can also be found in acts such as Chung Ling Soo, a Chinese performer celebrated for being the world’s greatest magician. However, he was not actually Chinese. In fact, Will Robinson, an American man, recognising the popularity and allure of Chinese acts, took on the role of Chung Ling Soo. Robinson was not alone in taking on a persona either to enhance the perceived authenticity of their acts or to take commercial advantage of the interest in Asia. In fact, ‘China’s greatest foot juggler Chung Wong’ was a persona of a man named Billy Moxon.

As time went by, as with many fads, the mysticism surrounding Asia began to fade, however, the popularity of Asian acts continued. In fact, many acts such as Lilly Yokoi began to be heralded more for their skill and talent, rather than their ethnicity. Born in New York in 1929 to acrobat parents who had migrated from Japan, Lilly Yokoi performed acrobatics on a bicycle. Unlike many ‘Oriental’ circus acts discovered during my research, Yokoi’s ethnicity is never focussed upon, and she was never exhibited as an oriental act. Yokoi did not bend to stereotypes and chose to wear a more typical circus show costume, rather than clichéd oriental robes.

During the course of my research I have been forming links between the overarching historical narrative of the twentieth century, and the presence of oriental acts in the circus. Through discovering these links, you can develop a wider picture of attitudes towards East Asia throughout the century. As my research continues I will look at specific historical events in Asia and analyse how certain events can affect the reception of Chinese acts within the British circus. For example, would the empathy felt towards Chinese citizens during the aftermath of the 1937 Nanjing massacre extend to the circus, causing the ratio of Chinese acts to rise, and that of Japanese drop? And eventually, venturing closer to our modern day world, questioning if it was Cold War tensions, or a rise in awareness of issues around race and ethnicity, that precipitated a break in the fascination with the ‘Orient’ in the circus.
Automated Graves: The News Business of Death in Japan

By Anna Vainio, PhD student, School of East Asian Studies

Each year our department runs a seminar series, inviting a number of interesting speakers to discuss their latest research and share it with staff, students and visitors alike. This year’s keynote lecture was delivered by Prof. Anne Allison from Duke University, one of the leading voices in the field of Anthropology on Japan. Her talk from across the region. And, gathered a sizeable audience.

Business of death in Japan, leading voices in the field. Duke University, one of the latest research and share speakers to discuss their runs a seminar series, inviting each year our department.

School of East Asian Studies

By Anna Vainio, PhD student, School of East Asian Studies

Events

Automated Graves: The News Business of Death in Japan

As Japan has for a long time suffered from a feminized birth-rate combined with a rapidly aging population, increasingly many people today are departing from the physical world without leaving a family behind. Traditionally, death has been the business of family, with most people dying at home amongst their extended family, buried in the family grave in the countryside, with annual rituals being carried out by the family. With the decline of the family, death has become a lonely business, a haunting prospect on how “not to die”, says Allison, prompting people to manage their own death and life beyond the grave in advance.

This, according to Allison, has led to the development of a booming and ever-growing “end of market”, referring to the popularisation and marketisation of death and dying. She presents us with a number of examples ranging from ‘grave buddies’ (haka-tomo) to sutra chanting robots, but mostly focusing on the concept of automated graves that promote a “designer style of death”. To alleviate anxiety around death and dying alone, the number of automated graves in Japan is rising sharply, with over a hundred of them today in Tokyo alone.

But what is an automated grave site? The ashes of the deceased are stored in the facility and delivered to a one-size-fits-all viewing booth via an automated system for visitors who come and pay their respects and carry out necessary annual rituals. If no family is around, the rites can be carried out by the staff as well for an additional fee.

Allison’s description gave a colourful and detailed account of a facility that combines grace and refinement, with maximum efficiency and convenience for the modern user (both the dead and the living).

During the Q&A Allison was asked whether these changes in how people are ending their days in Japan today can be seen as the death of Japanese culture itself. She provided a poignant response. While precariousness of the society is increasing and creeping into many aspects of life, literally from cradle to grave. In contrast, these shifts in tradition can also be seen as signs of the vitality of Japanese culture itself. They represent a sense of hope and persistence to keep cultural forms, traditions and heritage alive. In Japan drastic demographic changes and decline of the family is coupled with a highly developed and responsive consumer society. Whether it is cat cafes, “virtual wives”, or automated graves, they speak of a society that is developing services and products to alleviate a range of life’s discomforts and uncertainties, and helping people self-manage their lives in a number of ways in the absence of public or private safety nets. While many such services may on the surface seem depressing, they are still providing a sense of comfort, hope, and continuity for those trying to lead their lives, and to die, in an ever more precarious society.

BAJS Conference 2018. Crisis? What Crisis? Continuity and Change in Japan

Since the collapse of the Bubble Economy, Japan has often been described as being in demographic, economic or and/or social crisis. In recent years, however, significant legal and constitutional changes have been proposed, implemented and resisted: signs of sustained economic growth have appeared for the first time in several decades and a re-assertive global image of what it means to be Japanese is being promoted, particularly in the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics of 2020. As in other moments in Japanese history, tensions between desires for transformative social change and continuity have reappeared, framed by regular moments of crisis, sometimes real, sometimes perceived.

Debates over how political, social, economic, and cultural change occurs in Japan, both in the past and present, have often swung between these narratives of crisis, continuity and change. These frameworks have also shaped much of the study of Japan in the UK and elsewhere across a wide range of disciplinary approaches.

In the sesquicentennial of the Meiji Restoration and the fiftieth anniversary of the protests of 1968, we, along with the British Association for Japanese Studies, invite scholars to reflect on these narratives of change, continuity and crisis and their usefulness in the 21st century.

Keynote speakers confirmed

Confirmed keynote speakers for the conference are: Professor Mōri Yoshitaka (Tokyo University of Arts) and Professor Gennifer Weisenfeld (Duke University). We are delighted to have two leading scholars in Japanese Studies joining us who are both in different ways interested in exploring cultural and social responses to crisis.

Find out more about the conference at www.sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/bajsconference2018
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Ma J, Hong W (2017) Residential environment and subjective well-being in Beijing: A fine-grained spatial scale analysis using a bivariate response bimodal multilevel model. Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science


Ma, J., Dong, G., Chen, Y. et al. (1 more author) (2017) Does satisfactory neighbourhood environment lead to a satisfying life? An investigation of the association between neighbourhood environment and life satisfaction in Beijing. Cities


Book Reviews


Wananabe H (2017 online) Labour Market Dualism and Diversification in Japan, British Journal of Industrial Relations


Dobson HJ (2017) Is Japan Really Back? The “Abe Doctrine” and Global Governance, Contemporary China


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