

University of Hong Kong's Department of Japanese Studies: Promoting Academic & Policy-Related Research



Author Victor Teo

By Victor Teo

Towards Excellence in Teaching, Research & Public Policy Analysis

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China was established on July 1, 1997, but the region's ties with Japan, East Asia and the world long predated Hong Kong's return to China. Historically, Hong Kong has established significant linkages with regional countries as a trading and logistical hub. Since 1842, Hong Kong's status as a British colony meant that the territory enjoyed unprecedented connections and intimate links with the West, enabling it to play a leading role in the modernization of China through the absorption of ideas from the West and increasingly from Japan after the Meiji Restoration. Throughout the Cold War, Hong Kong once again was the only significant Chinese-majority territory with links to the Western world and the non-Communist bloc. Hong Kong's unique position enabled it to play a critical role as a gateway for the world to get a glimpse into Communist China and a window for the Chinese to connect globally and acquire foreign technology expertise and know-how. Today more than ever, the HKSAR continues to shine as one of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities and a global financial hub as well as being the bastion of China's "One Country, Two Systems" developmental model.

Equipping New Generation of Specialists for Japan & Asia-Related Studies

Since the end of World War II, Japan has emerged as one of Hong Kong's most significant trading partners. According to the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong, Japan is currently Hong Kong's third-largest trading partner after mainland China and the United States, and Hong Kong is Japan's eighth-largest trading partner. Bilateral trade in 2010 totaled 3.83 trillion yen, with Japan's exports accounting for 3.70 trillion yen and imports from Hong Kong accounting for 133 billion yen. Statistics from Hong Kong's Census and Statistics Department indicated that the overall total of Japan's direct investment in Hong Kong reached US\$21.6 billion as of the end of 2009 — making Japan the fourth-largest investor in Hong Kong after China, the Netherlands and the US. In turn, Hong Kong is the 12th-largest recipient of Japan's outward FDI worth US\$1.6 billion.

Yet, despite the intimate relationship between Hong Kong and Japan that even predates the founding of the University of Hong Kong a century ago, it was not until the mid-1980s that the

university set up its first comprehensive program to study on a more systematic basis one of the territory's most important trading partners and long-time friend. During the 1960s, there was only one Japan specialist in the University of Hong Kong, Dr. Akio Watanabe, who subsequently moved to assume a professorship in international relations at the University of Tokyo. In 1985, the Department of Japanese Studies was founded within the university and the first acting head was Dr. Chiu Ling Yeung, the then dean of arts. Subsequently headed by Takemichi Hara, the department operated independently until it was subsumed under the School of Modern Languages and Cultures in July 2006 when various area studies programs were brought together in order to form a new Area Studies and Language School. In 2013, the Department of Japanese Studies will celebrate its 28th anniversary, and stands proudly as the premier Japanese Studies Department in Hong Kong. We now boast an alumni strength of 1,300 students who have majored in Japanese Studies. During the 2011-2012 academic year, there were approximately 660 students enrolled in one or more courses offered by our department.

The department was restructured provisionally in 2012 and currently teaching is organized into two streams: there is a Japan studies track and a Japanese language program, with students being able to select courses and move between the two streams to best prepare them for their future careers. The department now comprises four professorial staff and about 14 Japanese language instructors, of whom about half are full-time staff. The former concentrate on training students who are more interested in subjects such as politics, society, business and the culture of Japan, whilst the latter cater more to students with a professional interest in acquiring strong competence in the Japanese language. The overall aim of the department is to equip Hong Kong and Chinese students with a knowledge and competence in the Japanese language and also in content courses involving Japan, and also to provide overseas students with an opportunity to examine East Asia and Japan-China issues from a comparative perspective.

As part of the university, the department and the school today also strive to engage in innovative, high-impact and leading-edge research within and across disciplines and to serve as a focal point of intellectual and academic endeavors in Hong Kong, China and Asia. We therefore take great pride in our department's gradual shift from a solely language-based focus geared towards the training of Hong Kong students in the acquisition of the Japanese language alone to a more rounded content and language focused department geared towards research in the humanities, social sciences and

policy studies. Most of the disciplinary content courses offered by the department are informed by the faculty's respective research expertise and interests, and every effort is made to ensure that students are equipped with the latest knowledge in each field.

Fostering Interdisciplinary Approaches & Cutting-Edge Research

There are five general sub-fields in which the department has been quite active over the past five to six years. Our department has been at the forefront of efforts to lead in pedagogical improvements related to Japanese language training and teaching. We are also proud to say that our department has trained numerous students who became or are becoming professional Japanese language instructors. To that end, the team of language instructors, ably led by Dr. Miho Yorozu, the director of the Japanese Studies Department, is working hard to revamp the syllabus to enable our students to succeed in achieving the language skills required for their chosen career — be it for Hong Kong governmental service or in various industries with an intimate linkage to Japan, such as finance, entertainment, apparel, travel and food and beverages. The language training, however, needs to be complemented with an equally important understanding of Japan, the Japanese people and their culture.

To that end, one of our faculty members, Associate Professor Dixon Wong, an Oxford-trained anthropologist, is at the forefront of teaching and research in integrating the study of popular culture, notably Japanese popular culture and its influence in Hong Kong and China. With extremely wide-ranging expertise, Dr. Wong has been instrumental in the promotion of all things Japan in Hong Kong ranging from the development of Japanese businesses and enterprises in Hong Kong and China to social policy issues like the interfacing of Japanese and Chinese culture in the workplace environment to the examination of social policy and cultural traits in Japan and their applicability to China. Our department has also been instrumental in training students to meet the new challenges in the Hong Kong economy. In our age of globalization where countries are struggling to go beyond the traditional manufacturing and service industries to grow their economies, the development of creative industries whereby knowledge and creativity are utilized to further a country's economic growth, cultural prestige and political soft power, is becoming more critical than ever. Dr. Wong has most recently moved to set up a "Global Creative Industries" major — the first of its kind at the university and indeed in Hong Kong. To that end, he has established a network whereby our school and department are being linked to various reputable institutions throughout East Asia to further the academic and policy studies associated with this industry.

Dr. Yoshiko Nakano, who has just stepped down as the associate dean (Outreach) of the Arts Faculty and is currently an associate professor in our department, has also been at the forefront of efforts to encourage Hong Kong students to work in and for Japanese enterprises, and also to involve the Japanese community in the

teaching and training of students. Trained at Georgetown University, Dr. Nakano's research has examined the globalization of "Made in Japan" products such as the ubiquitous rice cooker, and she has also published writings on media issues, in particular examining how the return of Hong Kong has been covered by the international media. As a member of the Board of Directors of the Hong Kong Japanese Club, she actively searched for ways in which the university might cooperate with the territory's 22,000-strong Japanese community, and subsequently initiated a number of experiential — and experimental — learning programs. These included cultural workshops, summer internships, and a project-based course in Japanese business. The project-based course for advanced students was entitled "Project in Japanese Business" — with the students taking on practical, hands-on work in Japanese or Japanese-related enterprises and organizations. In the past decade, the partners have included Mitsui & Company, Japan Airlines, the Japan National Tourism Organization, and an entertainment business consultancy.

Our department is also renowned for its research on labor and health issues. Dr. Izumi Nakayama, who earned her PhD from Harvard University in history and East Asian languages, heads this area of research. Dr. Nakayama leads the research and teaching in interdisciplinary research in the broad field of history of science, technology and medicine. With interests in the issues of gender, labor, and health, her research extends empirically beyond Japan to include East and South-East Asia and she supervises doctoral candidates both within and outside the department. Most recently, she has convened an international workshop sponsored by the Social Science Research Council of the United States, the National University of Singapore and the Hong Kong Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at our university. This conference, called "Inter-Asian Connections", was attended by scholars from all over the world to reconceptualize Asia as a dynamic and interconnected historical, geographical and cultural formation stretching from the Middle East through Eurasia and South Asia to East Asia. Her most recent publications include "Posturing for Modernity: Mishima Michiyoshi and School Hygiene in Meiji Japan" in *East Asian Science, Technology and Society* (September 2012) and "Cycles of Meanings: 'Equality', 'Protection' and the Debates on Menstruation Leave in Modern Japan" in the forthcoming *Gender in Japan: Power and Public Policy* (ed. Vera Mackie, Routledge, June 2013).

Sino-Japanese Relations & International Political-Economy Issues

The department has also been striving to develop its research strengths in the study of international relations and international political economy. As an international relations specialist and lawyer by training, I lead the efforts in this area, having joined the department in 2007 as a research assistant professor with special reference to Sino-Japanese relations. To this end, I have convened several international workshops that have involved more than 100 specialists, including both academics and policy practitioners,

PHOTO: University of Hong Kong



Participants at the Asian financial crisis conference at the University of Hong Kong

coming to Hong Kong to give public talks and participate in discussions on Sino-Japanese relations. The workshops are designed to keep discussions frank, amicable and forward-looking and invariably the participants return to their home countries and add their input into policy processes through further dialogue, research and teaching.

As one of China's best universities, the University of Hong Kong also has a unique advantage in that it enjoys a degree of latitude and freedom under the "One Country, Two Systems" formula that enables it to conduct objective research into this significant set of bilateral relations. The first workshop was held four years ago to commemorate the signing of the fourth political instrument in Japan-China relations between Chinese President Hu Jintao and Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda. This resulted in a research volume with contributions by scholars from China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US entitled *Reconceptualising the Divide: Identity, Memory and Nationalism in Sino-Japanese Relations* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

Subsequently, three other workshops were organized thematically around the interactions of China and Japan in the post-Cold War era with third parties and how their interactions might influence or affect Sino-Japanese relations and *vice versa*. As on previous occasions, the workshops produced much substantial discussion and enhanced the understanding of the participants involved of the policies instituted by the respective countries. Consequently, our department has produced a series of research volumes stemming from these discussions — one titled *Southeast Asia between China and Japan* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) and two more to be published in 2013, namely, *The United States between China and Japan* and *The Koreas between China and Japan*. Our department has also been represented at conferences in both China itself and internationally to give presentations on selected topics in Sino-Japanese relations.

As regards research on international political economy, our

department has also made great contributions. Besides the important research that is being done on "Global Creative Industries" and Japanese business in Greater China, our department has also collaborated with other institutions to participate in the academic research and political thinking on the economic situation surrounding Greater China and East Asia. One of the principal projects we undertook in 2010 was entitled "Tackling the Financial Crisis: Perspectives from East and Southeast Asia". This project was undertaken as a collaborative effort with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, a national-level think-tank convened by

the Singapore government to organize an international research workshop whereby over 30 prominent practitioners and scholars were invited to give their thoughts on the political, economic and social developments in the country. From China, we invited scholars from Peking University's Department of Economics, the National University of Singapore and Seoul National University. From Japan, we had professors Kosuke Mizuno from Kyoto University and Shinichi Ueyama from Keio University, as well as Satoshi Inomota from JETRO and Naoyuki Haraoka from the Japan Economic Foundation (JEF). We are looking forward to the publication in 2013 of two volumes of research on the impact of the Asian financial crisis on Asian countries.

The department is now looking forward to conducting even more exciting policy-related research in the coming years. We are planning to convene a "Knowledge Exchange" workshop in spring 2013 on the impact of China's underground economy and its implications for health and human security in East Asia. One possible linkage we are interested in is how these issues impact on China's relations with its neighbors, and in this case Japan. The *gyoza* scare of 2008 in which 10 people suffered food poisoning and 2,800 people complained of feeling sick after eating Chinese frozen food only serves to underscore how important and understudied this topic is. Our understanding is that this workshop is the first of its kind in Hong Kong and very possibly in East Asia. We hope that the outcome of this workshop will further consolidate the reputation of our school and department. We look forward to further consolidating our research links with leading policy and academic institutions within China as well as with our esteemed counterparts in Japan, such as the JEF, in the future.

JS

Victor Teo is a faculty member of the Department of Japanese Studies at the University of Hong Kong. He was called to the Bar of England and Wales in 2004 and received his PhD in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2007.