

Research, Teaching and Cultural Diplomacy: the current profile of Australian Studies in Japan

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This discussion provides an overview of the current state of teaching and research about Australia within the Japanese higher education sector, based on a recent Review commissioned by the Australia-Japan Foundation (Darian-Smith 2010). It begins with an account of the development of Australian Studies as a field of inquiry within both Australia and Japan, and examines the role of Australian Studies as a contributor to public or cultural diplomacy between the two countries. The paper will then outline some of the Review's key findings.

Australian Studies in Australia and in Japan

Australian Studies began to develop in Japanese tertiary institutions during the 1960s, fuelled by the rapid expansion of the Australia-Japan economic relationship (Sekine 1994: 1). In the 1970s, there was official recognition of the importance of strengthening mutual understanding between the two countries through education and cultural exchange (Sekine 1994: 3). In this context, the Australian Government established the Tokyo office of the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF) in 1976, with a main objective being to promote Australian Studies in Japanese universities and high schools. The AJF has continued to support the expansion of Australian Studies in Japan in the intervening decades, including support for teaching and research initiatives, providing resource kits for schools, and, at one stage, producing a popular e-bulletin on Australian Studies activities for Japanese academics.

Japanese scholarly interest in Australia during the 1970s coincided with increasing recognition within Australia itself about the importance of an educational focus on Australian literature, history and culture—in contrast to an existing curriculum that positioned Australia within British and imperial culture and emphasized Australia's links with Europe. This emerging sense of a modern and global Australian nation was influenced by such factors as postwar migration to Australia from countries other than Britain (including Indo-China by the mid 1970s), shifts in the economy away from traditional British markets towards those of the United States and the growing economies of Asia, and greater strategic and cultural interaction between Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Australian nationalism of the 1970s was to manifest itself in a new wave of cultural production. This resulted in the development of a distinctly Australian theatre (for instance, with the first works by playwright David Williamson), and in the renaissance of the Australian film industry with the production of Australian film 'classics' such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Gallipoli* (1981). Australian visual art flourished and there was a growing publishing industry that supported new works of Australian fiction and history. By the Australian Bicentennial of 1988, held to commemorate the first European settlement at Botany Bay and proclaimed 'a celebration of the nation', there was a heightened sense and a critical appraisal of Australia's past and contemporary social and political issues.

Interest in questions about Australian identity, culture and history were to have an important impact on the curriculum in Australian schools and universities in the 1970s and 1980s. At the university level, for instance, there was a growth in courses offered in Australian literature and history. Calls to 'Australianise' the curriculum were not restricted to the humanities and social sciences, but encompassed the areas of applied science, economics and even vocational training. The idea was not simply to have more Australian content, but to ensure that social, political, economic and technological were discussed from an Australian perspective that took into account Australia's international allegiances and its place in the Asia-Pacific region.

These developments within Australia also led to increasing interest in Australian Studies abroad, including in Japan. This gained momentum in the 1980s with the report of the Committee to Review Australian Studies in Tertiary Education (CRASTE 1987) and subsequent reports, exploring the role of Australian Studies as a mode of cultural diplomacy and a medium through which government could foster bilateral relations (Ryan 2004; Bennett 2004; Carter 2004). In addition, during the 1970s and 1980s there was an increase in the number of student exchanges from Australia to other countries, particularly at high school level. Many of these were fostered by internationally-oriented community organizations such as Rotary International, which was a popular movement in regional Australia. Japan was to be one of the larger recipient nations (and certainly the largest Asian destination) welcoming Australian exchange students into its secondary and tertiary institutions.

Coupled with this emphasis on outgoing Australian student exchange was the shift in language teaching policy at high schools, as the conventional concentration on European languages such as French and German was widened to incorporate Asian languages, including Japanese. A 2010 study by Anne de Krester and Robyn Spence Brown explains that:

From the 1970s until the early 2000s, the teaching of Japanese in Australia expanded rapidly, and it is now the most widely taught language in Australia, in both schools and universities—a unique situation within the western world. The impetus for this expansion derived partly

from the economic and strategic importance of the Australia-Japan relationship, which prompted government investments in promoting the teaching of Japanese. However, it was supported by many other factors, including the development of a core group of committed teachers, good resources and opportunities for students to travel to Japan (de Krester and Spence 2010: 4).

However, while Japanese remains the most highly studied foreign language at Australian schools and universities, with more than 10% of all students studying Japanese in the school curriculum, further changes to national language policies and teacher training has led to some decline (around 16%) over the past decade. This is now the subject of discussion in Australia, including on the role of Asian language teaching as a means of actively supporting Australia's 'Asian literacy'.

In retrospect, from the 1970s several factors combined to strengthen Australia's cultural relationship with Japan, including educational exchange and promotion and, especially among a Australian younger generation, an increasing Australian interest in Japanese popular culture. Literature has also been important in expanding Australians' understanding of Japan and Asia more broadly (Broinowski 1992; Haskell 2010) and vice-versa, as translations of canonical and contemporary Australian writing continue to alert Japanese readers to the complexities of Australian society (see, for instance, Darian-Smith and Arimitsu 2008).

In the late twentieth century, Japan was among the first countries in the world, and certainly the first in Asia, to promote dedicated academic interest in Australia through the establishment of centres, academic posts and teaching programs. For instance, the Centre for Australian Studies (CAS) at Otemon Gakuin University was established in 1967 as the first teaching and research centre in Japan devoted to the study of Australia. In 2007 the CAS opened the Australia Library, with materials donated from the Australia-Japan Foundation Collection, formerly housed at the Australian Embassy, Tokyo. Another influential initiative has been the Visiting Professor of Australian Studies at the University of Tokyo, a position for rotating Australian scholars that was established in the 1980s and most recently located at the University of Tokyo's Centre for Pacific and American Studies (CPAS). These are just two examples of the commitments to Australian Studies within the Japanese tertiary sector, and many other important programs have also been founded.

The 1980s, in particular, saw an increase in the number of Japanese universities interested in Australian Studies. Responding to this growth of interest the Australian Studies Association of Japan (ASAJ) was established in 1989, with its own journal, annual conferences and seminars. The ASAJ currently has over 200 members drawn from throughout Japan with a diversity of scholarly expertise. While Japanese academic interest and teaching about Australia was initially dominated by economists and social scientists, alongside some specialists in Australian literature, Australian Studies has expanded to the study of history and culture, including a particular interest in the areas

of multiculturalism, immigration and Aboriginal studies.

In addition, since the 1980s there has been growth in the number of Japanese university students who have visited Australia as part of their academic training, often participating in shorter programs with an emphasis on English language acquisition (Asialink Index 2008: 70). The number of Japanese students enrolling in postgraduate programs in the humanities and social sciences at Australian universities, including at PhD level, has also grown over the past three decade (IBIS-World 2009). Indeed, there is a strong correlation between Japanese academic interest in Australian Studies and the opportunities available for Japanese students and scholars to spend time in Australia studying and conducting research and developing familiarity with Australian society.

Australian Studies Matter and Cultural Diplomacy

Economists have long understood the importance of bridging cultural distance to maximise trade relationships, and in this framework educational exchange is key for the fostering of international co-operation. Educational programs in Australian Studies in Japan have, since the 1970s, been crucial to the development of the strategic Australia-Japan partnership. Education as a *product* has also played a significant role in the success of the economic relationship between Australia and Japan, with education functioning as one of Australia's most important exports through the international student market. 'Education,' as the 2009 Asialink Index argues, 'is often seen as a softer form of engagement [with other countries], less quantifiable than trade in goods, for instance, and more nuanced than many other forms of encounter' (Asialink 2009: 37). Research has found new 'statistical evidence' that 'a correlation exists at the country level between education . . . [and] investment and trade statistics in the years to come' (Asialink 2009: 37). While education has often been understood anecdotally and intuitively as important to future economic and trade relationships, new data confirms the pivotal importance of educational activities in nurturing the necessary conditions—including the understanding between nations at a people-to-people level—for such future economic growth.

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) 2008 report on Australia-Japan bilateral economic relations, despite efforts to bridge cultural distance between the two countries, recently 'there are some crucial areas in which, *relative to the relationships both Australia and Japan have with other major commercial partners*, bilateral cultural distance seems to be increasing markedly' (italics in original; DFAT 2008: 38). Further, as DFAT suggests, 'cultural distance must be overcome for the trade relationship between the two countries to survive' (DFAT 2008: 4). Such a statement is perhaps overly dramatic, but does highlight the significance of education and other forms of cultural diplomacy—for instance, exchanges in the visual and performing arts—in contemporary international relations. A recent example of the significance of artis-

tic exchange can be seen in the extraordinarily successful tour of works by the Aboriginal artist Emily Kngwarreye to the National Museum of Art, Osaka and the National Arts Centre, Tokyo, during 2008.

The 'education relationship' between Australia and Japan, as described above, therefore has a 'critical' role to play in ensuring the long-term viability of Australia-Japan economic relationships (DFAT 2008: 39). Australian Studies programs at tertiary level contributed to the establishment of the cultural conditions that allowed the Australia-Japan economic relationship to thrive during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 2010s, the Australia-Japan relationship has matured but Australian Studies and the promotion of Australian culture, research and innovation continues to directly and indirectly support future economic and political cooperation.

The Current Situation of Australian Studies in Japan

In 2009–10 the Australia-Japan Foundation commissioned me, in association with the International Australian Studies Association, to review the current situation relating to the teaching and research about Australia in Japan, with the aim of understanding the current state of the field. The Review adopted a broad consultative approach, and engaged widely with individuals, academic organisations and scholarly academies and associations in Japan and Australia. It drew extensively on input from the Executive and members of the Australian Studies Association of Japan (ASAJ), an important partner in the Review process. An online bilingual survey of ASAJ members gathered data on the teaching and research interests of Japanese Australian Studies scholars, and their views of future developments.

i) Teaching Australian Studies in Japan

The Review found that Australian Studies in Japan is taught in two modes: first, as part of dedicated Australian Studies programs and subjects, and second, through a broad range of comparative, regional and thematic subjects. In 2007 the ASAJ had found that subjects about Australia are taught in at least 80 Japanese tertiary institutions, mostly in the areas of inter-cultural studies, politics, history, economics and international relations. This is probably a conservative estimate, but it is certainly clear that Australian material is conveyed to thousands of students at undergraduate and graduate levels within the Japanese tertiary sector.

The survey with ASAJ members as part of the recent Review found that 60% of respondents had taught Australian Studies in some form within the last five years. 28% of respondents taught subjects that focused primarily on Australia. One third noted that they taught Australian Studies as part of comparative subjects; 22% as part of regional-focused courses (Darian-Smith 2010: 19).

The Review found that the teaching of Australian Studies outside of dedicated Australian

Studies subjects is likely to increase in the future. Many Australian Studies teachers are experienced in other English-language area studies and regional studies: 12% have taught British Studies; 12% have taught American Studies; 24% Oceania Studies; 13% Pacific Studies (Darian-Smith 2010: 22). Over 70% of survey respondents believed that Australian Studies in the Japanese tertiary system should broaden the geographical and thematic focus of its content, with just 10% believing that Australian Studies should generally continue to exist as a discrete area of study. For instance, 50% of respondents claimed that Australian Studies should have a future place in Japanese university education alongside global studies and 36% saw that Australian Studies should be one strand of regional studies programs.

Australian Studies teachers as a group in Japan are thus very open to repositioning their teaching within a broader framework. As a parallel, there have been calls for Australian Studies programs in Australian universities to be repositioned within regional and global studies (Patience and Jacques 2004; Tada 2004; Curthoys 2000). This conscious repositioning—both in Japan and Australia—would encourage university teachers from a broad range of disciplines to adopt Australian case studies, and would promote the benefits of a more regional focus to existing Australian Studies research in Japan. It would also satisfy various institutional priorities in terms of funding and curriculum. While the Review found that there were many dedicated and enthusiastic Australian Studies teachers, ASAJ members were of the view that Australian Studies could generally be better supported within their institution. Indeed, 61% of survey respondents claimed that Australian Studies received significantly less support than other English language area-studies, such as Canadian Studies, American Studies and British Studies (Darian-Smith 2010: 19).

ii) Research in Australian Studies

The Review found that 82% ASAJ survey respondents were active researchers in Australian Studies. The Japanese academics reported that they studied Australia in a wide range of discipline areas including media studies, literature, art, politics, economic policy, international relations, geography and environment, and agriculture and bioscience. Despite this breadth, the themes of multiculturalism, migration and Indigenous peoples were prominent across all fields of study. This reflects the location of ASAJ members across a diverse range of university departments and faculties within Japanese universities. One-third are concentrated in the organisational units of either Business and Economics or Law and Politics. Two-thirds are largely dispersed across the humanities and social sciences, including media studies and social work, although a small number of ASAJ members are located in the natural sciences (Darian-Smith 2010: 16).

Crucially, the survey of ASAJ members demonstrated that interest in Australian Studies is closely aligned with academic travel to Australia. Sixty per cent of survey respondents had studied in Australia at some time, including as undergraduates, while 95% of respondents had visited Australia to conduct research or participate in academic conferences. 29% said they travelled to Australia

lia once a year, while almost half travelled to Australia at least once a year. A further 24% travelled to Australia every two years (Darian-Smith 2010: 16). These findings demonstrate the long-term benefits of international exchange programs for both students and academics. It is clear, then, that the continued vitality of the field depends upon facilitating connections between Australia and Japan on both individual and institutional levels. The survey also indicates that a good number of ASAJ members have worked collaboratively with Australian scholars in some form, with half reporting that they had done so. 47% of respondents have university-based links with Australian universities or study centres.

The Review also sought input from Australian researchers about ways to support greater collaborative research and teaching with their Japanese colleagues. In one example, the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) which in the past has worked with the Japan Academy to support research linkages, emphasised the importance of scholarly exchange in developing Australian Studies as an area of research. ‘Scholarly exchange’, the AAH submission argued, ‘is a particularly effective and enduring means of creating links between national research and teaching communities, and for fostering interest in Australia and its peculiarities as objects of study’ (AAH cited in Darian-Smith 2010: 24).

Finally, the survey of ASAJ members also included a section on graduate students, and a small number of Japanese students who are studying Australian topics for masters or PhD research were interviewed for the Review. For these graduate students, their interest was usually first piqued during travel to Australia—whether as part of a university or school exchange program, or holiday. This is not surprising, as many senior Australian Studies scholars developed their interest in this way, with the leaders of the field benefitting from Australian government investment in international education from the 1970s. Indeed it appeared that travelling to Australia either to study or as a tourist was highly significant in the development of an interest in Australia by current graduate students.

Conclusion

This reminder of the importance of educational exchange and travel returns to an earlier point about positioning Australian Studies in Japan, both in terms of its teaching and research, in a boarder context of maintaining important and mutually sustained links between the two nations. The Australian government is aware of the importance of its cultural diplomacy activities, and in 2007 issued a report from its Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade called *Australia’s Public Diplomacy: Building our image*. As the report made clear, ‘good public diplomacy complements conventional diplomacy’ (2007: 11) and ‘the reason public diplomacy is now afforded a high priority in foreign relations is the growing realization that it is an indispensa-

ble tool in the toolbox of international politics: that effective public diplomacy can and does place a country at an advantage in advancing its national interests' (2007: 18). Very recently there has been increased discussion in Australia about the role of education and research collaborations in fostering international partnerships, as well as much discussion about the ways that Australia's public broadcasting can foster increased knowledge about Australia internationally (O'Keeffe and Oliver 2010).

It is now an important moment for Australian Studies at the tertiary level in Japan. Since the 1970s the field has benefitted from the interests of many academics and students across Japan, and with the support of the Australia-Japan Foundation (AJF), and has grown steadily and intellectually matured; indeed, Japanese scholars are making important contributions to the analysis of Australia's cultural, economic and political life. However, many pioneering scholars in Australian Studies are now nearing retirement, and Australian Studies is operating in an increasingly competitive educational environment both in Japan and Australia. Careful planning is essential to ensure the continuation of Australian Studies as a robust area of teaching and research within the Japanese tertiary system. In this time of transition and generational change it is particularly important to attract post-graduate students and early career researchers to the area to ensure its replenishment. The Review provides some key findings and suggestions that can assist in this process. For it is essential from both Australian and Japanese perspectives to take a long-term approach to nurture enduring interests in Australian Studies so as to build upon the strengths of the important bilateral relationship—a relationship that is sustained not only at government level and through both conventional and cultural diplomacy, but through people-to-people relations, where it matters most of all.

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