Welcome Message

Welcome to the new weekly CJS e-newsletter! In response to the unprecedented measures being taken in response to COVID19, CJS has taken the initiative to bring all the latest in Japanese research online, starting with this weekly e-newsletter. In this issue, we will providing a brief rundown of how Japan is responding to the COVID19 virus, including an on-the-ground report from UEA Lecturer in History Professor Nadine Willems who is currently in Tokyo. You can also find a message from CJS Director Professor Simon Kaner on the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures website. You can find more from our SISJAC colleagues on their e-bulletin.

As we develop our online strategy, future issues will include book recommendations from our researchers, as well as Japanese film and manga suggestions to bring Japan to you at home. We are also exploring beginning a new CJS podcast to bring our CJS seminars to your living rooms – stay tuned for more updates!

Holding off on lockdown

The Japanese government has been reluctant to impose the unprecedented lockdown measures observed across the world against COVID19. With its population of over 10 million and its infamously cramped spaces, the capital Tokyo would seem like the perfect city for the highly contagious coronavirus to rapidly spread through. However, according to official testing numbers, the total number of infections in Japan stands just over 2,500, paling in comparison with the 90,000 cases reported in Italy. Whether this is due to severe undertesting or the nation’s reputation for cleanliness and culturally inherent social distancing, Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike seems reluctant to impose a complete lockdown seen in capitals around the world. Many Tokyoites have been seen enjoying the seasonal cherry blossoms, although there has been a noted shift away from picnicking beneath the trees in groups to strolling by without stopping.
As it turned out, I landed at Tokyo Haneda airport just before Japan’s imposition of travel restrictions on people coming from overseas. One day later, and I would have been asked to self-isolate for 14 days. It had been difficult enough to secure a seat on an airplane since for several days demand far outstripped supply. Many flights had been cancelled while some airlines charged astronomical prices. But I was lucky in the end, although interrogated in earnest by the cabin staff before boarding about my whereabouts in the previous couple of weeks.

It was a relaxing flight, in spite of the odd atmosphere, a few of my fellow travellers having donned a full plastic moon suit, a mask, goggles and gloves to make the trip. It seemed a bit exaggerated on the occasion, but they must have felt safe inside their vinyl envelope. I felt relatively safe too. After all, I had never experienced Heathrow Airport so quiet and its security procedures so smooth. If I was in danger of catching a virus, it would not be due to overcrowding.

Twelve hours later, Haneda Airport appeared livelier, if only just. The coronavirus has kept away millions of Chinese and other tourists who usually throng to Japan in the spring to enjoy hanami, or cherry blossoms viewing. Indeed, this year hanami is a toned-down affair. Along the Meguro River, young people stroll and take selfies, but they do not need to fight their way through jam-packed bridges. There are no queues to buy pink fizz and sakurazake, and anyway Meguro Ward has issued an injunction curtailing the number of stalls allowed to do business along the cherry-tree lined roads. As I look around, I notice that it has also planted signs urging people to respect the “coughing etiquette”. They contrast awkwardly with the cheerful banners announcing the 2020 Tokyo Olympics that hang at regular intervals in the city streets. As we know now, the 2020 Olympics are rescheduled for the summer of 2021.

Restraint - jishuku - is thus the motto of the season. In the past few days, the number of coronavirus infections has increased markedly, especially in Tokyo. As I write, Prime Minister Abe has not declared a state of emergency yet and Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko has no legal power to impose a lock down. She can only rely on the obedience and understanding of the public to slow down contagion. In any case, it is not clear that she would want to take such a drastic measure as the paralysis of Japan’s capital, given the huge economic fall-out that would follow.

As things stand, the population appears to be cooperating. In the past couple of days, a few shops and venues have closed in my neighbourhood. The little fish restaurant in which I often have lunch is open but reports that no customers show up in the evenings. At the weekend, railways in Tokyo suffered a 70 to 80% fall in passenger numbers. Small eateries have started offering take-away business in the hope to bag some revenues in spite of declining footfall. Hand sanitizers are available almost everywhere. And although face masks are in short supply, they remain conspicuous in the city.
As far as I can tell, though, Tokyo keeps on rolling. The megalopolis is operating in a low gear, but by no means in panic mode. By the time I left the UK, I could not escape the impression that human life on earth was about to end – that the spread of the coronavirus was no less than apocalyptic. The country was on a war footing and fear insinuated itself into every corner of daily life. The message I hear in Japan differs starkly. Here caution takes priority over alarm. The main recommendation focuses on avoiding the “three mitsu”, or three “proximities” – a play on words since in Japanese it reads “mitsu no mitsu” (3つの密):
mippei kūkan (poorly ventilated spaces); misshū bashō (packed venues); and missetsu bamen (close conversations). And so like almost everyone else in this city, I comply with official advice, making the most of the time and quiet forced on me, and all the while hoping that things will not suddenly accelerate into a much worse outcome.

Written by Nadine Willems, Lecturer of Japanese History at UEA. All photos taken by the author.

CJS Research Seminars – Autumn Semester report

While several of our schedule seminars have been postponed, we were able to have three fascinating speakers from a range of disciplines come and give insightful talks on our behalf.

In Conversation with Anthony Thwaite

On the 23 January, following our MA Information Session, the first CJS Research Seminar of 2020 saw esteemed poet Anthony Thwaite join us to give readings of some of his best works to a full house. These were accompanied by Japanese translations provided by SISJAC's Ryoko Matsuba and Junzo Uchiyama, who gave powerful, evocative renditions of the classics. Anthony reminisced on his time in Japan at the University of Tokyo as the nation was rebuilding following the aftermath of the Second World War whilst in conversation with CJS Director Simon Kaner, who also got the opportunity to discuss their shared passion of archaeology. The evening was rounded off with a book signing of Anthony's new poetry compilation and platters of delicious sushi.

A bilingual English-Japanese edition of Anthony Thwaite's collection of poems can be purchased from amazon.co.jp. Copies can be bought and delivered to the UK.
Gender and National Image: Representations of figure skating in Japanese anime

On the 4 February, we were delighted to have Dr Michael Tsang visit from Newcastle University to give a talk on how, over the years, Japanese figure skating anime has reflected its real-world counterpart and the broader socio-political shifts of the time.

Such observations included the intimate relationship between multinational characters of Yuri on Ice being a means of conveying the desire of Japanese officials to cooperate internationally, as well as various references to ‘bromance’ as a reflection of the changing attitudes in Japan today on homosexuality. Dr Tsang also cited the fiery protagonist of Ginban Kaleidoscope as a symbol of female strength and independence, a casting off of ‘Yamato Nadeshiko’, the traditional Japanese concept of the kind, submissive female archetype.

A key aspect highlighted was the element of ‘non-victory’ whereby the protagonists failed to come out on top despite displaying superb skill. Dr Tsang associates this with a Japanese desire to appear as a non-threatening nation full of technical and artistic potential on a global stage and champion its ambition to constantly improve, although Dr Tsang acknowledged that if the protagonist wins outright then the anime is unlikely to get a sequel. The talk was then followed by an engaging Q&A where UEA Japanese Studies students fully took the opportunity to tangle with the notions put forward by Dr Tsang.

Extending Virtual Kyoto with Professor Keiji Yano

On 5 March, we were visited by Professor Keiji Yano of Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, who gave a talk on his long-running project 'Virtual Kyoto'.

Virtual Kyoto is a virtual time-space created on a computer for the purpose of investigating the past, present and future of the historical city of Kyoto, using the cutting-edge technologies in GIS and VR. (Yano et al., 2008). Professor Yano explained how Virtual Kyoto has evolved into various ways since 2002,
adapting new technologies as well as new materials on Kyoto. This was demonstrated through stunning visuals of the street-by-street reconstructions of central Kyoto, the incredible amount of information and source material that had been used to put together such a detailed reconstruction that spanned several eras. This included not just key landmarks such as Nijo Castle and the Imperial Palace, but also the 50,000 traditional kyo-machiya houses that dot the city with meticulous accuracy as well as many industrial era Western-style buildings.

The talk also covered the various spin-off projects that had derived from Virtual Kyoto, including: an Augmented Reality smartphone app that provides a window into Virtual Kyoto as you walk the streets of Kyoto yourself; an open high-resolution database of historic maps; and high quality scans of modern buildings throughout the city.

**News from Japan**

**National**

For a running number of reported COVID19 infections, victims and recoveries in Japan, see the Asahi Shimbun homepage: [https://www.asahi.com/](https://www.asahi.com/)

An up-to-date document from the Japanese ministry of health displaying the spread of the virus can be found here: [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/10900000/000618504.pdf](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/10900000/000618504.pdf)

For information on government measures to financially support households:

[Japan to give ¥300,000 to struggling households as COVID-19 cases rise](https://www.asahi.com/)

For Japanese speakers, here’s an article laying out vocabulary coming out of the crisis:


For updates on Japanese universities nationwide:

[https://twitter.com/JapanIntercult/status/1245265575556689921](https://twitter.com/JapanIntercult/status/1245265575556689921)
Tokyo

For details of life on the ground:
https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/03/30/national/japan-social-distancing/

For more information on the postponing of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics:
https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20200330/p2a/00m/0sp/018000c

Useful Links

Embassy of Japan: http://www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp/
Japan Foundation: http://www.jpf.org.uk/
JSPS: http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/
British Association for Japanese Studies: http://www.bajs.org.uk/
Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation: http://www.dajf.org.uk/
Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation: http://www.gbsf.org.uk/
Japan Society: http://www.japansociety.org.uk/
EU-Japan Centre: http://www.eu-japan.eu/
Canon Foundation: www.canonfoundation.org
Applications for JET Programme: http://www.jetprogramme.org/
Japanese Language Proficiency Exam: http://www.jlpt.jp/e/index.html
UEA Japan Society: ueajapansociety@gmail.com
Taiko Centre East: http://www.taikocentre.org.uk/
Career Forums: http://www.careerforum.net/event/?lang=E

Contact Us

If you have any contributions for the next issue of the e-newsletter, please send them to us by Wednesday to make the next issue.

The CJS office is located in the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts (the mezzanine floor), although the office is temporarily closed as per university guidelines. You can email us (cjs@uea.ac.uk).

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