Center for Japanese Studies
2014-2015 Newsletter
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Word from the Director, Ken Ruoff

I am often asked what makes Japanese Studies at Portland State University (PSU) unique. In some ways, we are not unique, and in fact model ourselves after older programs in Japanese Studies at institutions such as Columbia University and Harvard University. But there are also some ways that our program is distinct. First, there is no other university in the United States with a profile similar to PSU (e.g., many of our students are the first in their families to attend college) that has such a strong program in Japanese Studies. Higher education already can be transformative, but add to the equation study abroad in a country like Japan, and one has a truly life transforming formula. Second, we have a particularly strong and popular Japanese language program, so much so that we are a rare university in the continental United States where Japanese has the second most number of majors (after Spanish) among languages taught! Third, interest among PSU students in Japanese Studies, already unusually high, remains steady and is even growing. Finally, in a way that distinguished guests such as Carol Gluck find admirable and unparalleled, the Center for Japanese Studies (CJS) profoundly links Japanese Studies at PSU with individuals and organizations in the broader Portland community who share an interest in Japan in a manner that produces wonderful synergy. For those who value more specific examples, see “How PSU fosters connections with and understanding of Japan” on p. 2.

With this edition of the Newsletter, we focus on the Japanese Studies faculty at PSU, including their perspectives on how the CJS serves as a dynamic forum for understanding Japan that complements the many topical and language classes offered at PSU, and also how it reaches out to the community in ways that exemplify PSU’s motto “Let Knowledge Serve the City.”

Dr. Suwako Watanabe, World Languages and Literatures

Dr. Watanabe’s research interests include discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, and language assessment. She is a certified trainer and tester of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview. She is interested in cultural differences manifested in communication, both written and spoken, and incorporates findings into language teaching. She is keenly interested in working with real language data such as recorded conversation and video clips. Her recent publication, “Climactic effect markers in spoken and written narrative: Japanese conditionals and to” TEXT & TALK (2012), is a result of such endeavor, and she uses the findings when teaching students how to tell a story in Japanese. The analytical approach used in discourse analysis is also applied to her recent chapter, “Lessons from OPI: Context- and Discourse-based Instruction,” New Horizons in Japanese Language Education (2014).

She finds that CJS lectures offer social and historical background about Japanese society that enhance students’ understanding. In academic year 2014-15, she will teach third and fourth year Japanese, a graduate seminar on Japanese sociolinguistics/discourse analysis, and a Japanese sociolinguistics course.

Dr. Hiro Ito, Economics

Dr. Hiro Ito is an international macroeconomist. His foci are financial liberalization, financial development, macroeconomic interlinkages between countries, and East Asian Economics including the Japanese economy. Currently, he is working on research that compares the process of internationalization of the Japanese Yen with that of the Chinese Yuan. His current research also focuses on what kind of policy mix would help countries, especially those with middle-income levels in Asia, stabilize their macroeconomic performance.

The “Oregon Success Stories in Doing Business in Japan” lecture series is helpful for students taking Dr. Ito’s course on East Asian Economic Development. This course focuses on the experiences of Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean economic development in the post-WWII era. In fall 2014, Dr. Ito will teach East Asian Economic Development EC448/548.
Dr. Jon Holt, World Languages and Literatures

Dr. Jon Holt’s focus is modern Japanese poetry, with a specialty in Taisho-era poetry, including tan’ka, haiku and shi (free verse). He also is exploring new avenues of research in manga (comic books) and video games. His dissertation was written on Miyazawa Kenji, arguably the most important Japanese poet of the 20th century. He has published research on Kenji, particularly how his Buddhist views intersected with his art. He is currently translating the tan’ka of contemporary poet, Hayashi Amari, and he recently presented a paper on the “auditory hallucination” poetry of Miyazawa Kenji.

Professor Holt believes the CJS greatly expands the view of Japan for PSU students: “Presentations by respected researchers help students understand different approaches to the study of Japanese literature, culture, and language. It gives our faculty the opportunity to meet other national and international colleagues and directly talk with them about their work and the state of the field, which in turn enriches the classes we offer. The overall message CJS events send to the students is this: PSU is a vibrant center for learning Japanese language and culture, with opportunities to connect to a larger national and international conversation about Japan.”


How PSU fosters connections with and understanding of Japan

1. During the 2013-14 academic year, the CJS sponsored eleven events that attracted nearly 2000 attendees. A similarly impressive lineup of events is planned for 2014-15.
2. More than twenty PSU students will be studying in Japan during the 2014-15 academic year at universities ranging from Waseda to Sophia to Kansai Gaidai. This is the largest number of exchange students we are sending to Japan in recent memory.
3. PSU continues to host more exchange students from Japan than any other institution of higher education in Oregon, more than 100 annually (the third largest group of exchange students at PSU by country). This includes a small but elite group pursuing Master’s degrees in Japanese literature, linguistics, and pedagogy.
4. During the 2013-14 academic year, there were 167 students majoring in the Japanese language, and 61 students pursuing a minor. Remarkably, Japanese is second only to Spanish in terms of numbers of majors in PSU’s Department of World Languages and Literatures. Of course, many hundreds more students took courses about the history, literature, economics, and business practices of Japan, among other subjects.
5. Students who pursue Japanese Studies at PSU go on to a variety of careers, and, as seen from the examples this past year of Ania Kotenova (a full, five-year scholarship from the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Columbia University in order to complete the Ph.D.) and Josh Hunt (one of fifteen individuals admitted into Columbia University’s School of Journalism), they also gain admission to elite graduate programs.
6. PSU typically has from six to seven graduates annually who go to Japan as part of the prestigious Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Historically, many individuals who go to Japan on this program remain interested in and involved in Japan with their careers going forward.
7. All of the senior faculty in Japanese Studies have international reputations in their fields and are regularly asked to share their expertise at leading universities not only in the United States but also worldwide. Junior and mid-level faculty are quickly establishing themselves as leaders in their disciplines.

Dr. Laurence Kominz, World Languages and Literatures

Dr. Laurence Kominz earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University, working under Donald Keene. He teaches courses on pre-modern literature, and specializes in traditional drama. He has published books and articles on kabuki, kyōgen, bunraku, and nōh. Books include Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays; The Stars who Created Kabuki: Their Lives, Loves and Legacy; and Avatars of Vengeance: Japanese Drama and the Soga Literary Tradition.

Professor Kominz’s work in drama encompasses theater history, literary analysis, translation, and performance. He studies Japanese performance with masters of kyōgen acting & dance, gidayū singing, and butoh dancing, and teaches students to perform kyōgen, kabuki, and various forms of dance, and directs student productions for the public every year.

The CJS has sponsored workshops in traditional and contemporary performance, and student performance productions since 2003 as part of our summer Japan in Motion Festivals and more recently as Drama! Dance! Drums! recitals at the end of Spring Term. And the CJS has organized presentations by professional performers from Japan almost every year since 2001, in arts as diverse as rakugo, nōh drama, Tsugaru shamisen, and butoh. These world-class events are an inspiration to our students, and provide valuable exposure to Japan’s performing arts for the whole Portland community.

In 2014-15 Dr. Kominz will teach Third Year Japanese Reading and Writing JPN 304/305, Intro to Pre-Modern Literature (in English translation) JPN 341/342, Readings in Classical Literature (in Japanese) JPN 420, Introduction to Traditional Drama JPN 422, and Youth and the Family in Japanese and American Film and Literature INTL 323U.
Dr. Emiko Konomi, SBA- MIM Program

Dr. Emiko Konomi received her Ph.D. in linguistics from Cornell University. She joined PSU as an assistant professor of Japanese in the Department of World Languages and Literatures in Fall 2010. In WLL, she taught and directed all Japanese course levels.

Known for her passionate style and dedication to quality teaching, in 2011 she was awarded the John Eliot Allen Outstanding Teacher Award. Her research focuses on Japanese language pedagogy and linguistics. Her recent publications include Japanese Hiragana and Katakana Flash Cards Kit and Japanese Kanji Flash Cards Kit Series I. The Kanji Cards Kits, Series II and III are forthcoming. In 2013, Dr. Konomi won a PDX open grant and created a pre-advanced level Japanese textbook. She is currently co-authoring a new Japanese textbook with Dr. Wetzel, and has begun working on another textbook for self-study.

She values CJS programs because the diverse topics covered promote a well-balanced understanding of Japan, stimulate intellectual curiosity, and help students make better contributions in class.

Dr. Konomi is transferring to the Masters in International Management program in the School of Business Administration in September 2014. She anticipates creating a strong partnership between the MIM program and CJS.

In 2014-15 Dr. Konomi will teach Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Japanese MIM 505.

Dr. Ken Ruoff, History and CJS Director

Dr. Ken Ruoff’s area of expertise is the modern history of Japan and East Asia. His research focuses on the role played by national heritage sites in shaping popular memories of the past throughout East Asia. His essay “Japanese Tourism to Mukden, Nanjing, and Qufu, 1938-1943” was published in Japan Review 27 (2014). He has seen CJS programs benefit students, faculty, and community members in every imaginable way, from broadening their interests and understanding of Japan to developing relationships with Japanese specialists from throughout the world to learning how local business experts have succeeded in doing business in Japan or, in the case of Japanese, in doing business here in Oregon. Many PSU students are now pursuing advanced degrees under scholars of Japan to whom they were first introduced when these professors came to speak at PSU.

During the 2014-15 academic year, Dr. Ruoff will offer the following courses. Winter 2015: Japan in World History 495/595 and Modern History of Korea 323; Spring 2015: Modern East Asia 322U and Topics in Modern History of Japan 421/521.

Dr. Patricia Wetzel, World Languages and Literatures

Dr. Patricia J. Wetzel’s primary research focus in Japanese is keigo (often called ‘honorifics’ or ‘polite language’). Her book, Keigo in Modern Japan, examines the historical development of modern keigo as Japanese was standardized at the end of the 19th century through to its current status as an index of identity. Most recently, she is looking at the narrative function of keigo in Japanese advertising. She also has a longstanding interest in Japanese language pedagogy. Her other publications include various articles that have appeared in Japanese Studies, Language in Society, Language Variation and Change, Multilingua, and elsewhere. She served as language and linguistics editor then coordinating editor of the Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese. She has also served on the editorial board of the Journal of Asian Studies. She was president of the Association of Teachers of Japanese from 2003-2004.

She encourages students to attend CJS events. Content from the lectures often comes back to the language classes for discussion, where cultural norms and expectations are always relevant. In the 2014-15 academic year, Professor Wetzel will coordinate First- and Second-year Japanese, and teach Beginning and Intermediate Grammar JPN 314/315.

Dr. Masami Nishishiba, Public Administration

Dr. Masami Nishishiba holds a Ph.D. in public administration, an MS in communication studies, and a BA in English linguistics. She is one of the top professional Japanese-English conference interpreters in the region, and has interpreted for President Jimmy Carter, Bill Gates (Microsoft), and many others. Dr. Nishishiba directs the Japanese Local Government Managers training program sponsored by the Tokyo Foundation of Japan, and was co-principal investigator for a U.S. Department of Education project developing online interpretation and translation training for Japanese and Arabic. Her most recent publication is a textbook titled Research methods and statistics for public and nonprofit administrators: A practical guide, Sage Publications (2013).

Dr. Nishishiba’s areas of expertise include cultural competence building, local government capacity development, civic engagement, and research methods. She teaches graduate courses in research methods, diversity in the workplace, intercultural communication, and civic capacity in the Hatfield School of Government. She also teaches a Japanese Interpretation Workshop in the Department of World Languages and Literatures. Her students frequently attend CJS programs to gain cultural and social knowledge about Japan. She is on sabbatical for the 2014-15 academic year.

Dr. Wynn Kiyama, Music

Dr. Wynn Kiyama is an assistant professor of musicology and ethnomusicology and the music history coordinator at PSU. He received a Ph.D. in musicology from New York University and has taught at Rutgers University, Westminster Choir College, Columbia University, and held an artist residency at Colby College. His interests include Asian American music, taiko, chindon, buyo, pungmul, Chinese lion dance, and experimental music. In 2013, the CJS invited Professor Shawn Bender to present a lecture on the early history of taiko groups in Japan. This fascinating lecture benefited Dr. Kiyama’s taiko students as well as the larger taiko community in Portland.

Dr. Kiyama will offer the following courses in 2014-15.

Fall 2014: Chamber Music; Taiko Ensemble; Music History: Medieval/Renaissance; Music Research Methods; Winter 2015: Chamber Music; Taiko Ensemble; World Music: Asia; Music History: Baroque/Classical; Music History: The Romantic Period; Spring 2015: Chamber Music; Taiko Ensemble; Music History: 20th Century.
Calendar Spotlight

8 October, Kineya Kunitoshi performs Nagauta Shamisen.
Cosponsored by PSU School of Music and the Japan Foundation.

Did you know all of the programming sponsored by the Center for Japanese Studies is supported solely by private donations? You can help support CJS programs, using the form below. It is also easy to donate to the CJS online at http://www.pdx.edu/cjs/give-to-cjs

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