Two Marquis Events
Coming in May

Kabuki Comedy Performance

Yukio Mishima’s
The Sardine Seller’s Net of Love
(Iwashiuri Koi no Hikiami)

Sunday May 2nd, 6:30 PM
The Scottish Rite Center
709 SW 15th Ave, Portland
$12/$8 PSU Box Office/Ticketmaster

Presented by the Center for Japanese Studies
& Willamette University Theatre Department

***********************

Beate Sirota Gordon
Author of The Only Woman in the Room

Presents a Lecture

“How an American Woman Won Equal Rights for the Women of Japan”

When a team of young Americans began writing a new constitution for Japan in early 1946, Beate Sirota was enlisted to help. Assigned to the subcommittee dedicated to writing the section of the constitution devoted to civil rights, she insisted upon the insertion into the constitution of a clause guaranteeing equality between men and women. The Constitution of Japan remains unrevised to this day.

Tuesday May 18th, 6:00 PM
PSU Smith Center Ballroom (355)

Understanding PSU’s Renowned Japanese Language Program: An Interview with Dr. Patricia Wetzel

Technology has brought Japanese news and entertainment into every interested student’s laptop, and has made the teaching of Japanese broader and more complex, says Dr. Wetzel. The Japanese language program now has the second largest enrollment (after Spanish) in Foreign Languages and Literature, with no fewer than 120 majors in the language, a dozen master’s degree candidates, and many eager applicants to the graduate program. And although Professor Wetzel is too modest to say so, the success of the program has brought accolades from American and Japanese experts such as the late Eleanor Jorden of Cornell and Donald Keene of Columbia.

Dr. Wetzel, who is in her 25th year at PSU, noted in a recent interview that before the internet “I used to get the old Japanese language newspapers from the library when they were three months old and bring them into the classroom. Now we can send students to the internet to find out what’s going on in Japan, what is popular, what is selling, what the weather is. We have students searching for things on youtube and elsewhere, so students are a lot more savvy about what is available out there.” (Story continued on page 4)

CJS Advisory Board Chair
Bruce Brenn Receives Order of the Rising Sun

In the fall of 2009, the Government of Japan awarded Mr. Bruce Brenn, who has been chair of the Center for Japanese Studies Advisory Board for a decade, the Order of the Rising Sun for his work in promoting education about and business relations with Japan. Shown here are Bruce and Cindy Brenn at the official reception at Consul General Okabe Toshimichi’s residence the afternoon Mr. Brenn was presented the award. In January 2010, Mr. Brenn presented a lecture to an overflow audience about his experiences of establishing Nike Japan (see page 2).
With candor and humor, veteran international banker Bruce Brenn, who charted the establishment and early success of Nike Japan, detailed the challenges the new company faced in the 1980’s and the solutions he applied in the face of a widespread perception that the Japanese markets were virtually impenetrable to foreigners. At the time, he recalled, the well-entrenched existing makers had a natural advantage in the marketplace. There were old ties and relationships with wholesalers and retailers. These companies had easy commercial access to sporting events and long-standing working relations with established coaches and athletes. “On the other hand, being a foreigner also had its advantages,” he said. Nike’s first advantage, said Brenn, was that Japanese athletic shoe products were “technically inferior” to Nike’s.

Furthermore as a former athlete himself, Brenn knew where the weaknesses were. Also, he felt that Japanese coaching techniques were not world class. Japanese trainers typically depended less on modern training principles and good equipment than on gritty perseverance. Among Nike’s strengths were products that offered foot protection, stability and cushioning, attributes the local products lacked. Nike also had close involvement with many world-class foreign athletes and coaches who could be brought to Japan to help in the training of coaches and athletes. “The trick to making Nike Japan successful was going to be one of how to best take advantage of these capabilities.”

Brenn had yet another advantage as a foreigner: he was familiar with life in Japan and had fluency in the language. “As a kid growing up in Japan right after the war and later doing post-graduate work in Tokyo in the early 60’s,” said Brenn, “it was readily apparent to me that adult men were used to ‘scuffing’ to work in ill-fitting leather shoes, and working in slippers all day. And of course no one wore shoes in anyone’s house. So shoes, in general, were not a major factor in Japanese awareness.” But before any of this could be put into practice, said Brenn, he explained to his old friend, Nike founder Phil Knight, that in order to have true control of a joint company in Japan, it was necessary to have at least 51 percent equity in the company. It was also important to have a Nike person as president (who would be seen internally and externally as boss), and finally to have a Nike person as the head of the accounting department. The need for control of the accounting department, Brenn noted dryly, was that “all financial controls flow from fast, accurate sales and cost accounting information. What can I say?” he shrugged, “I was a banker.”

With a management team in place Nike Japan began to show itself to the public on weekends at public parks, handing out fliers at booths where Nike products were on display, and where Nike staffers could talk about the importance of cushioning and stability in athletic shoes. It also gave Nike technicians the opportunity to take foot measurements, which showed that Japanese feet were not the same as western feet. A special development team was formed for the Japanese products. The next step was to bring coaches and athletes from abroad to hold clinics: “Who better to hold such clinics,” said Brenn, “than Tom Tellez, the coach of Carl Lewis, the world sprint record holder and the world’s leading long jumper?” This Nike incursion into the Japanese market was not taken lightly by Japanese makers of athletic goods. The head of one company (Asics) “went so far as to issue a statement quoted in Japan’s leading economic newspaper, that he would prevent Nike from sponsoring track meets and bringing athletes to compete in Japan.” Brenn complained of this interference through diplomatic and personal channels and the threat was averted.

Soon Nike was called on to bring more athletes and coaches to Japan and of one such event in Osaka, Brenn said, “I don’t think Japan had hosted such a wonderful field of athletes since the 1964 Olympics. It helped put Nike’s name on Japan’s athletic radar as well as on the feet of Japanese youth.” Nike’s sales in Japan boomed. Brenn was transferred to the home office in Beaverton in 1985, which ended his direct involvement with Nike Japan. Shortly afterward, Nike Japan was sold to Nissho Iwai, and Brenn returned to international banking in Asia, based in Japan. In the early 1990’s, though, Brenn was consulted by Nike executives for a strategy to buy back the company. “I was very pleased that Nike had decided to take it back.” Nike did so and operates this successful subsidiary today.
Success Stories in Doing Business with Japan: The Vanport Story

Adolf Hertrich’s firm, Vanport, was exporting logs to Japan long before he broke the invisible barrier and became the first major American supplier of highly specialized lumber to Japanese builders. As he told his audience at PSU, “The Japanese log buyers came over here in 1967 looking for logs, and we took the logs down to the Columbia River and the bulk carrier ships loaded them and took them away to Japan.”

“Everything was running very nicely,” Hertrick recalled. The U.S. housing market was booming and Vanport was supplying lumber to the domestic market from its sawmill in Boring and unprocessed, raw logs to Japan. "Unfortunately," said Hertrich, “In the middle 1970’s, you could no longer export round, unprocessed logs to Japan. Lumber had to be manufactured in this country.” It was a critical time for Vanport because “We needed the Japanese market. We got a high price for our export logs and without that edge we wouldn’t be successful. We had to do something because doing nothing was not an option.”

The mainstays of American housing construction, the two-by-four and the two-by-six, for example, were being promoted heavily in Japan but to little avail, he discovered. “Less than one percent of the Japanese housing market was done by two-by-four and we saw there was a lot of risk in an investment in a new (conventional) sawmill.”

At the same time Hertrich decided that it should not be difficult to cut lumber to Japanese specifications. “As lumber prices at Japanese sawmills were very much higher than we were getting for our domestic lumber, I wondered why American companies had not zeroed in on the Japanese market,” said Hertrich.

One obstacle was that the Japanese post-and-beam construction required “a multitude of sizes and grades, so much more than our standard construction,” which is satisfied with two-by-four and four by six inch lumber. In Japan there are variations by regions. Roof rafters are one size in Tokyo, another in the Nagoya area, another in Osaka, for example. “There are also high quality standards,” he stressed. “In the U.S. you frame a house and cover it with sheetrock. In Japan some of the wood will still be exposed when the priest comes to bless the house and neighbors come to look around. They will not tolerate flaws or dirty footprints on lumber, it has to be clean,” he said. He saw no true obstacle to trying to satisfy the market.

Consequently he went to Japan to visit some of his customers and found them “very supportive, they showed me around to see how Japanese framers operate, and we decided we would try it.” Hertrich was able to get two experienced Japanese framers “to show us how to grade by Japanese rules.” He modified the saw mill and “We started to try our hand at producing Japanese lumber. And probably after a year we could finally say now our lumber looks almost like it was cut in a Japanese sawmill.”

The crowning achievement came when Vanport applied to the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for ministry certification of Vanport lumber, an official seal of approval. The ministry agreed and sent two inspectors to Vanport (at Vanport’s expense, Hertrich pointed out with a grin). The inspectors spent two weeks exhaustingly checking the equipment and processes, even the maintenance and housekeeping of the sawmill. “We were approved,” said Hertrich. “It was the first time this certification was given to a foreign firm. We made headlines in the newspapers and in the business press -- so much news that we have never had to spend money on advertising.”

Through the years Mr. and Mrs. Hertrich have hosted no fewer than 26 young Japanese, usually the children of customers, who each usually stayed two years to master English. The Hertrichs have been frequent visitors to Japan, often to attend the weddings of the children of his older customers who have become virtual members of the now widespread Vanport organization. The Hertrichs have been generous contributors to the Center for Japanese Studies and have established a scholarship for the study of Japanese at PSU.

Larry Kominz: kominzl@pdx.edu
Patricia Wetzal: wetzelp@pdx.edu
Suwako Watanabe: suwako@pdx.edu

With Best Wishes,
Ken Ruoff (ruoffk@pdx.edu)
Director
Professor of History
Booming Japanese Language Program Adds New Faculty Member

With enrollment increasing in the Japanese language program, PSU, even in these difficult economic times, made a strategic new hire to meet the demand for instruction in one of PSU’s flagship programs. Jon Holt will officially join the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at PSU in September 2010 as an assistant professor of Japanese literature. His research interests include literary reception history, modern tanka poetry, and the role of manga (illustrated novellas) in contemporary Japanese culture. At the University of Washington, where he will receive his Ph.D. this June, he has taught Japanese literature courses. In his dissertation, titled "The Fractured Voice: the Works of Miyazawa Kenji," he examines the ways in which Miyazawa deploys voice in his poetry and children’s stories to create religious and philosophical forms of self-critique.

Interview of Dr. Patricia Wetzel, Continued

While what they see is not always of value as a teaching tool, she says “I think all this availability of materials and technology have moved us to a more holistic kind of teaching than we used to do. We can focus on what it means to behave in a particular way in Japan. Language is, after all, a performance. You are learning how to be someone in a foreign language.”

The downside to the uses of technology is that “there is so much (information) that you (as a teacher) feel overwhelmed,” she said. “Students nowadays arrive with varied backgrounds and knowledge in and of Japanese. Now you have to gauge who knows what and fill gaps at the same time.”

“Some people come to us with an overestimated sense of what they can do because they can understand Anime (animated Japanese films), but they haven’t really thought about who they are in that other culture.” She explains that in learning Japanese the problem is not merely putting the correct endings on verbs. It is understanding who you are and how you relate to the situation and the other persons in the situation before speaking.

Professor Wetzel has turned up the switch on ambitions for the language program. She is working on developing a course in translation and interpretation, she is seeking more space for the learning lab, and she is voicing the idea that too much time is spent taking tests “when we could use our classrooms for teaching Japanese.”

Understanding the Japanese American Experience

Dr. Eiichiro Azuma
Lectures at PSU

Propaganda, Cold War Politics, and Race

Professor Eiichiro Azuma of the University of Pennsylvania recently presented an early reading of his provocative work in progress on the use of propaganda in Japan during the Occupation era (1945-52).

He sees the postwar period up to 1950 and the establishment of the National Police Reserve as a precursor of the Self Defense Forces replete with well-calculated propaganda. This took place in the context of the Cold War and U.S. need for support of Japan largely through the symbolism of Nisei soldiers of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team that fought in Europe and was perhaps the most decorated single unit in the U.S. Army. Portrayed as “Paragons of patriotic America,” said Prof. Azuma, images, books and films of the soldiers were shown to Japanese audiences as new models. The highlighting of the men of the 442nd demonstrated the new and democratic military that Japan should aspire to develop in contrast to Japan’s discredited wartime imperial military.

One reason there has been little work done in this aspect of the postwar era by historians and others, suggests Prof. Azuma, is that rigid lines of academic disciplines and territory exist and that some issues which are truly transnational, such as this one, are typically investigated by specialists in only one of the countries.

Professor Hillary Jenks continues the series on the Japanese American experience with a lecture on Los Angeles’s Japantown, 22 April (7:00), Native American Center.

Center for Japanese Studies
www.pdx.edu/cjs
311 East Hall P.O. BOX 751 Portland, OR 97207
Phone: 503-725-8577 E-mail: cjs@pdx.edu