

Preface to the second volume of *New Voices*

This issue of *New Voices* is a monument to the strength, diversity, and maturity of undergraduate Japanese Studies in Australia. The complexity and profundity of the topics tackled by the authors of the essays published here testify to a degree of sophistication that is commendable for any scholar but especially so for undergraduates. The quality of the research and methods used are outstanding, and the level of stylistic refinement and execution is inspiring. Nothing should detract from the individual achievements of the authors featured here. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that their work is the product of a nation-wide curriculum on Japan that, in terms of its enrollment and teaching numbers, range of instruction, and strength in language training is unparalleled in the English-speaking world. In fact, Australia has the world's largest per-capita population of Japanese language learners and in terms of sheer numbers, it is only third behind China and Korea. In a country with a population smaller than California, there are over 1,500 primary and secondary schools teaching Japanese language and 56 universities or colleges that maintain comprehensive Japanese Studies programs. Together, these institutions employ almost 3,000 instructors and scholars who teach and conduct research on Japanese language, literature, linguistics, history, culture, society, and politics. Therefore, while the authors of the essays published here are deserving of commendation in their own right, certain praise is also due the army of teachers, the steady stream of generous funding, and the wealth of library resources that has made their studies possible and Japanese Studies in Australia so strong.

The 'new voices' heard in this issue belong to recent honours graduates who met certain core criteria. First, they all successfully completed an honours program at an Australian university in the past four years and earned top marks on their research theses. Their academic supervisors nominated their work for publication and each engaged in the sometimes heart-rending task of drastically shortening their manuscripts to fit the new format. Finally, each of the essays was blindly reviewed by at least two academics who generously offered input and approved them for publication. This process ensured the highest standards but, inadvertently, excluded the work of some potential candidates. To be sure, there are more than a few recent outstanding Australian honours graduates whose theses became the core of doctoral projects, a challenging endeavor that, no doubt, prevented them from contributing to this collection. Others had their original theses published in academic journals, a great achievement that excluded them from this issue. More still secured jobs upon graduation that made them either too busy or too distant from the field to revisit their honours theses at this time. I mention this here merely to make the point that these eleven essays by no means account for the total body of outstanding honours theses completed over the past several years. Nevertheless,

I do believe that they are a strong and loyal representation of the remarkable level of quality, diversity, and intellectual achievement typical of recent honours-level research in Australia.

There seems to be discrete and identifiable zeitgeist that motivates the interests of each generation of students who choose to study Japan. During the 1950s and 60s, across North America, Europe, and here in Australia, many were enamored by an exoticised and idealised vision of that country as the home of Zen, *haiku* poetry, Cold War pacifism, and other obsessions of the youth progressive movement of that volatile period. My own generation, those of us who ‘discovered’ Japan in the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, were largely attracted to the country’s extraordinary economic rise. Today, almost without exception, students take to Japan by way of their ubiquitous, voluminous, and all-engrossing consumption of *manga*, *anime*, and other forms of Japanese popular culture. And the result is astounding: Academic interest in Japan, at least in Australia, has never been higher. Moreover, perhaps because students grow up immersed in Japanese popular culture, there seems to be a sense of urgency and obsessiveness in their desire to know the country. Despite these initial impulses, it is striking that recent advanced undergraduate research remains largely conservative. Only one essay in this collection, for example, deals with popular culture. The rest treat more conventional themes and deploy orthodox disciplinary methods. And I find the same general trend among my own advanced undergraduates. But this rift between personal fascination and academic curiosity is hardly new. My own mentors, students of the sixties, went to Japan to meditate. They came home as historians. The would-be bankers of the 1980s moved to Tokyo to get rich. Many came home to take up jobs, usually with significantly less pay, teaching on the Japanese economic miracle (and eventually, its discontents). There is and probably always will be a gulf dividing people’s initial fascinations with Japan and their long-term relationships with that country. The current explosion of Japanese pop-culture is a boon for our industry. Not only has it opened up new vistas for approaching and appreciating the country, it has swelled the numbers of would-be Japan specialists; it is the furnace propelling an exciting field that continues to grow and prosper.

Some words of thanks are in order to the people and institutions that made this publication possible. First, to the members of the editorial advisory board: their role in carefully reviewing each of the submissions and generously taking the time to provide critical feedback was elemental in the refinement of the essays. Susan Wake took on the Herculean task of meticulously editing each of the manuscripts and coordinating the entire publication process. Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank Wakao Koike and the Japan Foundation for supporting and perpetuating the *New Voices* project. The students whose work is featured here, their teachers, and many thousands more, have

benefited profoundly over the years by the financial and logistical support of the Japan Foundation. On behalf of us all, I happily and energetically convey my thanks.

Matthew Stavros, Ph.D.
The University of Sydney
Editor, *New Voices*, vol. 2

On the Journal's Format

All successful submissions to this issue of *New Voices* are published online and are universally accessible at: <http://www.jpf.org.au/newvoices>. Several of the essays, however, were chosen by the editor and advisory board to also be published in a physical journal format, which was distributed to universities and libraries across Australia and to the Japan Foundation's 19 overseas branch offices. The selection of these essays was based not only on quality but on an attempt to provide readers with representative examples of honours scholarship in several disciplines at a variety of Australian universities.