

Introduction: On the Birth of "Japan in the World, the World in Japan: A Methodological Approach"

The idea of a forum for discussions about teaching our specialty in Japan came to us during an idle conversation over coffee three years ago. In our little ad-hoc circle of young (at least as far as classroom experience is concerned) Japanese studies specialists teaching in English and/ or Japanese at Japanese universities, we were slowly discovering shared issues and common challenges, such as the fact that classes were too big or too small and we could do nothing to control the numbers, or that (what we thought were) absolutely essential materials could be read either in English, or in Japanese, but never in both. As more Japanese universities treaded the path from global, to super global, to top global (?), there was also an increase in teaching opportunities for those like us, who could move more or less freely between languages and cultures. We were promptly tasked with teaching "something, anything" about Japan, preferably in English, of course, and without much thought given to curriculum integration, at least in the beginning. Also, quite often a course title, extremely broad and ambiguous, was "inherited" from one instructor to the next— a nomenclative inertia that prompted a fair amount of perplexity among those of us taking pride in our specialisation.

Our students too were a confused and confusing lot: they came from all the possible backgrounds and corners of the world, and had English/ Japanese abilities that ranged from upper beginner to native speaker; they would specialise in anything from robotics to Danish literature, from dentistry to international law, and from civil engineering to Japanese mythology, and attend our class— the same class— either to improve their English, or their Japanese; either to make friends with (other) foreign students, or to learn the basics of a culture they were encountering for the first time, or even, in some cases, to gain advanced insight into Japanese literature for the master's thesis they were writing on representations of Kannon in early *setsuwa*. Some of our students expected quiet lectures where they could "row their boats" undisturbed, others wanted to challenge everything, but learn only what fit their "bubble"; coming from different learning and teaching cultures, we all had different expectations, and had to do our best to fulfill the really tall order we had been given. To this end, peer consultation sessions over Skype (how much discussion time do American students expect in the classroom? what readings do you recommend for teaching Orientalism?) swapping lesson ideas (make them read Pierre Loti's "A Ball in Edo" with Akutagawa's "The Ball"; why don't you start with pair work, and then integrate the shy students in bigger groups in twos?) and teaching materials translated overnight (I'll give you Tōson's "Momotarō" in English if you give me anything by Orikuchi Shinobu!) have been of the essence.

We soon realised that our quest for new methodological solutions to Japanese studies education was quite global, and that indeed, more heads think better than just a few. Thus, we started looking for like-minded people, possibly faced with similar challenges but already in possession of an answer or two they might be willing to share. We escaped our over-specialised ivory tower, connecting over and across disciplines, and eagerly embraced the need to meet those different from us, so that we can learn from them and become better at teaching others. And so, what was in the beginning a conversation among a handful of friends became a workshop (at Okayama University, June, 2015), and then a full-fledged symposium (at Otemae

University, December 2016). We plan to keep up the enthusiasm, and organise more similar events in the future, sparking heated discussions and exchanging great teaching ideas as we go.

This volume brings together a selection of the papers presented at the Otemae University Symposium mentioned above. We hope all those who take the time to peruse it will find something useful in it.

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