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What is Modern Japan Studies?

Towards a constructive critique of epistemic violence



Universiteit Leiden



What is Modern Japan Studies? Towards a constructive critique of epistemic violence

Oratie uitgesproken door

Prof.dr. Chris Goto-Jones

bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van op het gebied van
het Moderne Japan
aan de Universiteit Leiden
op 15 juni 2007



Universiteit Leiden

*Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus (vice-Rector Magnificus),
zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders.*

Honoured guests, colleagues, students ... friends ...
皆様、来ることをありがとうございました。

I can honestly say that it feels rather strange to be standing here. This is at least partly because an oratie is in itself a strange and unusual creature, complete with its own traditional fashions (as you can see), and partly because I have to confess a measure of discomfort about the particular chair in which I now (very happily) find myself. Ironically (or perhaps through the long wisdom of Leiden tradition), the cause of my discomfort is simultaneously the *raison d'être* of the genre of the oratie itself. That is, this occasion forces me to provide a representation of myself as a scholar; it forces me, therefore, to engage with the question of identity - not only of my own identity (which is already difficult enough) but also that of the field for which this chair bears responsibility.

As most of you are probably aware, this is the field of *Modern Japan Studies*.

However, when people ask me what I do, I hardly ever say 'Modern Japan Studies.'

For a long time I used to say, *I do philosophy*.

Oh, people would say, *what kind of philosophy?*

I suppose you could call it comparative philosophy. I'm working on questions of violence and penitence at the moment.

Really? Who are you working on?

The Kyoto School.

Silence.

Who?

They were probably the founders of philosophy in Modern Japan

(never modern Japanese philosophy).

Oh! They would say, as though they have made a breakthrough.
You do Japan!

Silence.

Do Japan? I would ask. *I study a group of philosophers who were active in Japan in the early twentieth century. They were rather important, actually, and had some fascinating ideas about nothingness as the locus of all existence.*

Oh - modern Japan! They say. *Can you say something in Japanese? Oh go on!*

This kind of exchange pains me for a number of reasons, and I'd like to spend some time today explaining why. I'd also like to reach a conclusion to this oratie that makes me happy to say: *I do Modern Japan Studies*.

For me, Modern Japan Studies is a profoundly and intricately discomfoting field. Indeed, as I hope to show today, it is precisely its discomfoting nature that makes it so fascinating (for me) and, I would argue, so *potentially important* in today's academe.

Before I go on, I am sure that some of you noted the phrase 'potentially important' in that last sentence. I believe this is 'potential' because (for various intellectual, historical, political and institutional reasons) Modern Japan Studies does not always even *aim* to make a substantive theoretical contribution to our universe of knowledge, and this is because (for understandable reasons) its primary concern is often Japan itself, as a kind of hermetically sealed entity or 'enclave of knowledge.'

Let me paraphrase myself: I believe that Modern Japan Studies is often in denial about (or is institutionally denied) its

discomforting nature - that is: it both knows and doesn't know the discomfort that it can cause - and that it needs to confront this denial and even to relish the discomfort, the dissonance that it can cause in the *Humanities and Social Sciences* at large.² Conversely, the mainstream disciplines and institutions of the *Humanities and Social Sciences* need to overcome their denial that Japan exists in the modern world at all.

Lest I be misunderstood before I start, there are a number of things that I am not saying. And one of these things is this: I am not claiming that current work in the field of Japan Studies lacks value; rather I am suggesting that the field can potentially do (and actually *should* do) more (and other) than it does - and I hope to suggest some ways for it to do this.³

Hence, the title of my oration today: *What is Modern Japan Studies? Towards a constructive critique of epistemic violence*.

I should say at the outset that I consider Modern Japan Studies to be located within the broader field of Modern Area Studies. For reasons that I hope will become clear, this identification (as opposed to an identification with Asian Studies or even Oriental Studies) has some important implications. At the most mundane level today, it means that I will spend quite some time talking about Area Studies in general, and this is something for which I make no apologies, since I believe that Area Studies is (or should be) defined by an approach to knowledge rather than by geographical boundaries.

There are many and various sites of debate about the meaning and value of Modern Japan Studies, and I would like to explore two of them, try to explain how my own work fits into them and highlight the kinds of challenges that they present. The

first is the state of the field since the end of World War II (which is a largely US-centric story), and the second is the state of the field before that time (which is a largely Euro-centric story). I will end with some thoughts on what all this might mean for Modern Japan Studies in Leiden.

The Theoretical Impoverishment of Area Studies

The contours of the postwar debate are relatively simple to sketch: Modern Area Studies were created by the US government in the closing years of WWII with the specific mandate to provide useful knowledge about actual and potential enemies of the state (ie. Japan, then the USSR and China, and more recently various countries in the Middle East). The underlying rationale here is that these 'non-Western' areas are so essentially different from the 'capitalist West' that they need to be looked at separately. According to this argument, the strategic alliance between Area Studies and the US government is illustrated by the shifting patterns of funding into particular areas depending upon the identity of the 'enemy apparent' at any given time.⁴

The foundational text in this narrative is often cited as Ruth Benedict's classic work on Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which was commissioned by the US War Office in 1944 with the specific instruction to provide information that would help the USA to win the war in the Pacific.⁵ For many, particularly for the critics, this book represents the first icon of Modern Japan Studies.⁶

According to critics of the Area Studies edifice in the USA, this political birth led to the entrenchment of an academic context for Area Studies that emphasised the 'use-value' of scholarship produced in its various sub-fields, including Japan Studies. The

result (and the genesis) was a *privileging of language training* in key university programmes, with the goal of training operatives, officials and even scholars to translate the ‘exotic’ languages of these ‘non-Western’ areas. Hence, Modern Japan Studies was born to be a type of ‘applied area studies.’⁷

Whilst training Japanese-literate politicians, military personnel and businessmen is a laudable and wholly sensible function for Modern Japan Studies programmes, this is not an academic function, rather it is a vocational one. One of the key problems for Area Studies in the postwar, then, was that of how to present itself as a genuine academic field: what could it contribute to our knowledge about the universe and our existence in it?

For the critics, the answer to this question is simple and functional: data - scholars of Area Studies are responsible for providing data that would be otherwise inaccessible for reasons of linguistic difference/distance, which other scholars in the ‘properly disciplinary’ Humanities and Social Sciences could then interpret and analyse using the theoretical and methodological tools indigenous to the Western academic tradition. There is a subterranean epistemic violence at work here.⁸

In other words, Area Studies should seek to advance knowledge by providing data for the existing disciplines and authorities via translation.⁹ This means that Area Studies needs no theoretical content - it is other than the ‘disciplines’ and somewhat subordinate to them - it trains servitors, not innovators.

For the most outspoken critics of this alleged structure, the institutions of Area Studies (and especially Japan Studies) act as ‘watchdogs or guard dogs’ over this view.¹⁰ They argue that

the major journals, the biggest professional organisations, and the most established university institutes in the field privilege translation over theory and effectively shut out the voices of opposition and innovation.¹¹ In this view, the organisations of Area Studies in the postwar act to perpetuate their own subservience to strategic governmental agendas and to cripple their truly academic potentials, *and crucially this is why that structure is maintained.*

This humiliating narrative raises an obvious question: why would scholars of Area Studies permit this to happen? The sheer ridiculousness of passivity in the face of this kind of professional disgrace and irresponsibility might appear to act as an alibi. But for many, this trend is actually an echo of the way colonial Orientalists (insecure about the knowledge-value of their work) were ‘intoxicated by [their] proximity to colonial power and legitimized by [their] functional use-value’ to the imperialist governments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² They sold out.

Sketching some Preliminary Parameters for Modern Japan Studies

Of course, one of the potential problems with this critique of the history of Modern Area Studies as a largely atheoretical translation service is the fact that it supposes that they found their genesis in the particular context of the 1940s. And yet here we stand in Leiden, seat of the oldest chair of Japan Studies outside of Asia, which was established in 1855, simultaneously with the chair in Sinology, building on a long tradition of research into Asian languages and cultures.¹³

That being the case, how are we to understand the significance of these postwar debates and critiques?

I think that the best way to proceed is to turn these postwar critics on their heads and to say that what distinguishes Modern Area Studies from whatever came before is not the *emphasis on translation* or the *absence of theory* but rather the *critique of this emphasis and absence* and the increasing *concern for the incorporation of theory* and for the construction of Modern Area Studies as a *site of critique* rather than as a pool of data. *This is Modern Area Studies as an approach to knowledge.* I, for one, would be happy to subscribe to this inversion and to its vision of a trajectory for the field of Modern Japan Studies as a domain of epistemic discomfort, or perhaps even *dis-Orientation*.¹⁴

There are also two cheaper ways to differentiate these postwar ‘modern’ studies. The first is about disciplinarity, and especially about the social & political sciences. I say that this is a cheaper method not because I wish to diminish the significance of disciplinarity (rather the opposite, in fact), but because the form of the argument is so self-evident that it hardly needs stating: anxiety about their marginalisation from the disciplines of the social and political sciences distinguishes Modern Area Studies from whatever came before primarily because the social and political sciences themselves were only formalised as disciplines in the late nineteenth century. Hence, concern for the relationship between ‘area’ and ‘discipline’ is one of the distinguishing features of Modern Japan Studies - and this relationship should be discomfiting and disorienting for both discipline and area.

The second additional method is equally obvious: in so far as the problematic concept of ‘the modern’ refers to something more than merely a temporal space roughly equivalent to ‘the present’ (ie. if we accept, as we must, that modernity is an ideological and

economic category as much as a temporal or historical one), then Modern Area Studies could only exist once there was a modernity to study in areas outside of the ‘West’, and once there were modern tools within the West to study it. Hence, for many we are immediately talking about the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (although the start of the ‘modern’ in Japan is hotly contested today, and this challenge to the Euro-centricity of modernity is one of the most exciting discomforts that Modern Japan Studies should explore).¹⁵ Rather more sensitively (but certainly not very controversially), then, we are also be talking about ‘Western’ imperialism – the expansion of capitalism. As we will see shortly, the *postcolonial anxiety* of Modern Area Studies might well be one of the factors that should distinguish it from the *colonial complacency* (or even complicity) of whatever came before.¹⁶

Of course, the implied accusation of these ‘parameters of concern’ for Modern Area Studies is that Area Studies before the 1940s (whatever institutional form they may have taken) were holistic in their approach to knowledge, that they were primarily concerned with the past rather than the present, with the pre-modern rather than the modern, and that they were already (largely) non-theoretical sites of inquiry (*and that they were unself-conscious about this*).¹⁷

Europe and the Mystical Appeal of Oriental Studies

Of course, once we accept (as I think we must) that there are important continuities between nineteenth century Oriental Studies and Modern Area Studies (such as the alleged emphasis on translation and the absence of theory), it becomes imperative for us to understand the nature of these legacies and influences.

We might argue that Oriental Studies reached a zenith with the publication of Max Müller's epic series of 'scientific' translations, *Sacred Books of the East* (OUP, 1879-1910).¹⁸ For many commentators, this acclaimed and valuable series of literal translations amply demonstrates the resistance of Oriental Studies to theoretical innovations in the wider scholarly community, and hence already illustrates its tendency towards marginalisation and enclivity.

In particular, for some critics, this series highlights the extent to which Oriental Studies might be termed a 'domain of applied translation',¹⁹ in which the scholar interposes himself between the original text and the 'Western' audience and serves as a bridge for them to cross directly into the mystical truths of the Orient. The underlying assumption here concerns the 'self-evident obviousness and pre-given "realness" of the text'²⁰ - that is, the text should be able to speak for itself, without the application of theoretical apparatus to interpret (or transform) it for a specific audience. The translator need not be specialist in, say, Buddhist philosophy in order to make this translation, rather he/she had to have a technical knowledge of Pali or Sanskrit. Conversely, we might argue that the ability to make this technical translation actually *constituted expertise* in Buddhist philosophy *at that time*. This would/should clearly be a problem today.

For some, this orientation to the text finds its origins in the dominance of philological techniques in Oriental Studies.²¹ They argue that Oriental Studies finds its roots in the Christian philological tradition of the sixteenth century, when scholars were interested in unearthing the primitive and transparent language of God (or at least of Adam) that existed before Noah's sons built the ill-fated Tower of Babel to reach the gates of

Heaven, when God punished mankind by fracturing the unity of word and thing and splintering language into many 'confounded tongues', dooming mankind to perpetual misunderstanding and misunderstandings (on the basis that without correct language there could be no correct knowledge).²²

In other words, the tradition began with a search for origins - ancient languages - in the belief that original forms were the equivalent of truth. And, importantly, that the original language would be perfectly transparent: the word and the thing would be identical.

It is conceivable, then, that there was then a simple slippage from the quest to find ancient Semitic languages to a quest to explore ancient, non-European languages, especially 'exotic', pictographic texts like Egyptian, Chinese, and then Japanese.

The evidence for this slippage is relatively clear: the seventeenth century English architect John Webb famously argued that the Chinese script was the most ancient on earth, reaching back for over 5,000 years. He concluded that Chinese was the language of God, and that this implied that the Chinese had avoided God's wrath and thus survived the great flood.²³ If you could read Chinese, you could read the mind of God.²⁴

Then the European (re)discovery of Sanskrit in the eighteenth century completely exploded the quest for an originary Semitic language, since Sanskrit predated any of them, but it further entrenched the idea that the *Sacred Texts of the East* contained exotic, esoteric, mystical and even primordial truths that might precede (which was equivalent to exceed) those contained in Western texts - they simply needed translating as accurately as possible.

The idea of the exotic East leads us to one vital and powerful critique that we have not yet considered: it came from Edward Said, whose name is now a byword for postcolonial studies (despite his own resistance to that term).²⁵ The importance and power of Said's 1978 book, *Orientalism*, which effectively transformed the term *Orientalist* into a pejorative, cannot be denied and can hardly be overstated.²⁶ This is not to say that his book has no critics, nor that those critics have necessarily been unconvincing;²⁷ it is merely to state the fact that this work has changed the contours of the debate about Area Studies (and Oriental Studies in particular), and that the postcolonial anxiety of Modern (or critical) Area Studies found an icon in this book.

It is something of an irony, then, that whilst Said's work has been extremely influential across the various disciplines that make up the Humanities, institutional Area Studies appears to have largely ignored it.²⁸ This is at least partly because (or perhaps this is why) a new field of 'Postcolonial Studies' arose to embrace the political sensitivities and theoretical demands of Said's approach through the 1980s and beyond, leaving Area Studies floundering in its wake.²⁹

For many critical thinkers in Modern Japan Studies, Said represents a tremendous missed opportunity for the field to appropriate a drive to explain the relationships of power that inherently reside in the project of studying an area that is somehow 'Other' (and that was, in many cases, subordinated as a colonial or pseudo-colonial subject). Indeed, it is relatively easy (given the political and rhetorical force of a number of positions that we have already discussed) to construct an argument that suggests the various institutional stake-holders (the 'guard dogs') of Area Studies in the postwar period would resist any re-plotting of the field that challenged or critiqued

their status as discrete 'enclaves of knowledge'³⁰ or as transparent translators and servitors for the disciplines (and for the government). In this argument, the institutions of Area Studies seek to defend their status as 'representatives' of (or voices for) the areas they study, as though the people of those areas were not able to speak for themselves. Here, a professor becomes a self-proclaimed (and university appointed) ambassador for the area in question - the colonial violence at work here is clear.³¹

For those few of you who are unfamiliar with Said's thesis, it is worth spending a moment to outline some of its most salient and influential features.

Said argues that *Orientalism* describes a cluster of false assumptions about the nature of a cultural world that is defined almost entirely in terms of the negation of the so-called 'West.' That is, he argues that much of our (that is 'we' as 'Westerners') knowledge about the Orient is actually knowledge of our own fantasies of difference, and that because Europe has dominated the Orient for so long, the reality has never had enough power to challenge these fantasies. That is, the 'Western' media and academe have actually created the Orient as a site of fantastical self-indulgence, which doesn't really exist. Its characteristics tend to be portrayed as pre-modern (or even anti-modern): spiritual, feminine, ancient and profound, sometimes barbaric and primordial - always 'exotic' and often 'bizarre.' Crucially, Said argues that Oriental Studies as an academic field does not *examine or investigate* the differences between the 'West' and the 'East', but that it actually *creates* those differences - *The Sacred Texts of the East*, if you like, both make the East and make it sacred. Importantly, of course, this process of creation is simultaneously an act of

complicity to colonial power and an act of violence against the ostensible ‘colonies’ or Others -this is the epistemic violence of imperialism.

In the case of Modern Japan (which Said does not discuss), it is easy to find examples of this kind of Orientalism in the media. Some of you will remember that in 2002 Japan and Korea co-hosted the World Cup (which was the first time that it had been held in the ‘Orient’). At the time, I was slightly horrified to see the way in which the venerable BBC presented its coverage of the biggest sporting event the world had ever known: the opening credits showed a montage of sumo wrestlers, geisha, martial artists (some of whom appeared to be Chinese), and then a blur of futuristic cityscapes with neon-signs, electronic gadgets and a flashing shinkansen. Japan (and Korea, which was not differentiated) apparently existed in a bizarre temporal space between an exotic and romanticised past and an exotic and romanticised vision of the future. Orientalism meets techno-Orientalism, and both deny modern Japan its concrete everydayness (and its football).³²

One of the salient features of Said’s thesis for us today is the way in which his dynamic both creates and eradicates difference. Hence, on the one hand, Oriental Studies generates a fantastical Other - the East, or the Orient itself - which is different from the ‘West’, but, on the other hand, it asserts the integrity of a cultural unity called *the Orient*. In other words, this discourse eradicates our perception of differences *within* the so-called Orient (and also, not incidentally, within the ‘West’).³³

Unfortunately, as the BBC disappointingly demonstrated, this type of generalization about ‘Asia’ remains a challenge for us today. As professor of Modern Japan Studies, I am frequently

asked to give my professional opinion on a range of contemporary issues in ... Korea, in China, in Indonesia, and once or twice in Kenya. I was once asked to supervise a PhD thesis on religious guerrilla movements in Sri Lanka (I declined). However, the problem also extends to issues within Japan, because ‘doing Japan’ still appears to have generic force. Ask me about the *Japanese* stock market, WWII in *Asia*, *Japan’s* ODA policy, about *Japanese* anime/manga, about *Japanese* syntax and grammatical structures ... ask me anything with ‘Japan’ in the question; *Japanese* is a hegemonic genetive.

But it is simply not possible *both* for ‘Japan’ to be a *real place* and for one person to be *professionally knowledgeable* about all these different fields, *even if they can read the magical language of Japanese*. Hence, one of the key challenges for Modern Japan Studies is to shake this vestige of imperialist, nineteenth century generalism. And this raises some interesting, discomfoting and disorienting questions about the relationship between Modern Japan Studies and the so-called ‘disciplines.’

The Discomfoting Journey from Discipline to Area Studies

So, how do the issues in these debates relate to my own field of inquiry, which I might call political philosophy in Modern Japan or, sometimes, the intellectual history of Modern Japan (never Japanese political philosophy or Japanese intellectual history).

For some, the anti-theoretical bias in Area Studies slips rather easily into a de-privileging of various types of scholarly inquiry. Most especially, Harry Harootunian has argued that the intellectual history of Modern Japan (and of other areas) presents the ‘watchdogs’ of ‘applied area studies’ with some serious dilemmas. Presumably this is because in the case of the

history of ideas the subject matter is always already explicitly theoretical in nature. Not only that, but, to the extent that we are talking about a period that is meaningfully ‘modern’, the intellectual history of ‘non-Western’ areas (and especially Japan) presents a constellation of narratives that challenge and critique precisely those ideologies that seek to de-theorise Area Studies.

What does this mean? It means primarily that the intellectual history of the modern world (that is of those parts of the world that have been overcome by capitalism) contains a series of abortive, silenced and defeated ideological and philosophical systems - structures that were steamrollered by capitalist modernity itself. Hence, almost by definition, the study of modern intellectual history should be a discomforting exploration into ideas that challenge the primacy of the intellectual structures of the contemporary ‘West’, including those neo-colonial structures that define Area Studies as a domain in which theory is unnecessary or simply absent.

Of course, Harootunian is not entirely correct to argue that intellectual history is not already a vibrant part of Modern Japan Studies. However, the growth of this sub-field owes a great deal to Harootunian himself as well as to some of his colleagues that were once assembled in the University of Chicago.³⁴ Since the 1970s, they have industriously and deliberately forged a place for the intellectual history of Modern Japan in the field,³⁵ and I should take this opportunity to express my debt to them; in the absence of their work I would not be where I am today. Indeed, one of my most enduring memories of my undergraduate days at Cambridge University was when the inspirational historian of Modern Japan, Stephen Large, wrote on the bottom of one of my essays: *Gee Chris, even those guys in Chicago would think that this was crazy!*³⁶

As some of you will already be aware, my own work has been largely concerned with the so-called Kyoto School of Philosophy, which grew up around the person of Nishida Kitarô in several generations between about 1911 and 1991. My first book, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity*, was revised from the PhD thesis that I wrote in Oxford under the supervision of Arthur Stockwin, who is here today (in those dramatic red and black Oxford colours) and for whose incredible patience and seriousness of mind I am eternally grateful.

That book sustains two theses. The first is a project in the intellectual history of Modern Japan, in which I attempt to demonstrate that whilst his philosophy held anti-imperialist potentials in the 1930s and 1940s, Nishida himself was effectively complicit in Japanese ultranationalism because he failed to affect an effective strategy of dissent against the state and its ideology. He may have been protesting, but nobody really noticed ... and even fewer people actually understood anything he wrote (because his language was manifestly ‘confounded’ and not transparent at all!). There is a lesson here (no matter how distant it may seem) for contemporary critics of Area Studies, who need to ensure that their critiques of colonial violence and irresponsible complicity are accessible and comprehensible to as many people as possible.

The second thesis was that we (as political philosophers rather than as historians of Japan) should reconsider the philosophy of Nishida and the Kyoto School as a potential source of sophisticated insight into the perennial problems of political philosophy itself: ie. questions of the role and nature of the nation and the state, questions of the correct (or even most ethical) relationship between the individual, political choice

and political action, and also questions of international relations, cosmopolitanism, and globalisation.

I am rather conscious of the way that the second thesis is dependent on the first (at least politically and perhaps ethically), to the extent that the conventional interpretation of Nishida at that time was that he had been a fascist. Hence, any responsible rehabilitation of his philosophy had to first extricate his ideas from the social and political impact of the historical person himself. In order to do this, of course, I needed to be trained in a range of methods: I had to be able to read Nishida in his famously tortuous and ugly Japanese original, and then, because his texts did not simply 'speak for themselves', I had to contextualise his ideas in their appropriate traditions (Mahayana Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, German Idealism, Marxism etc.), and then I had to interrogate his texts in a properly theoretical (even philosophical) manner. I would certainly not claim to have done these things perfectly (or even particularly well), but I am convinced that these challenges underpin an appropriate methodology.

My agenda there was explicit (and somewhat over-excited by youth, I realise in hindsight): I wanted to make my colleagues in the Department of Politics & International Relations (which was the department in which I did my graduate training in Oxford) realise that Japan was not only a case study to which we should apply 'our' models of political theory, but that it was also a source of theory (in this case of philosophy) that we might then be able to use to better understand our own political issues and problems in the present. In other words, I wanted to open a space for Japan within the incredibly Euro-centric discipline of political philosophy - I wanted knowledge of Japan to be of universal relevance, not just of relevance for

studying Japan. I wanted to discomfort the discipline (and dis-Orient the Area).

Rather conveniently, in a number of symposiums and publications of the early 1940s, members of the Kyoto School made some of these arguments for me:³⁷ they were radically self-conscious of the ethnocentricity of Western academe (even if they were not always so conscious of their own cultural chauvinism).

At that time, I would have identified myself as a political theorist, not as a scholar of Area Studies. However, when the book was published I noticed something rather odd happening: with the exception of a number of open-minded and progressive political theorists,³⁸ the discipline of politics appeared to balk at the mention of the word 'Japan' in the title - the idea of non-European political theory seemed to be an anathema - Japan was supposed to be an empirical case study in political science, not a source of theory ... not a location of epistemic discomfort or *critique*. In the field of Area Studies, however, that book found some modestly fertile ground amongst the kind of critical scholars of Modern Japan that we have just been discussing - scholars who were themselves working tirelessly precisely to transform Area Studies into a location of *critique* and *theory*, as a generator of *dissonance* rather than merely of data. It was then that I realised that there was a type of Modern Japan Studies with which I could identify, about which I could be excited, and which I might already be doing.

One other such scholar, Rikki Kersten, was the reason that I first found a home within Japan Studies in Leiden, after a number of years teaching in politics and history departments

in the UK. Ironically, Rikki's absence today is also the reason that I am standing here as her successor to the chair of Modern Japan Studies in Leiden. Rikki was one of the external examiners of my PhD thesis, and I cannot say how deeply grateful I am for her faith in my abilities and in my view of Modern Japan Studies. Those of you who have met her will know that she has very small feet and a great variety of shoes; I will never try to fit into them.

Modern Japan Studies in Leiden

At the most fundamental level, of course, these issues are really about training, which means that they are about students. What kinds of students do I want to train? Do I want to train students who can read the tortured prose of Nishida Kitarô? Yes and no. Yes, I want them to be able to read the texts, but no, I don't want them to think that being able to read them is the same as understanding them in a scholarly manner. Do I want to train students in philosophical method? Yes and no. Yes, I want students to understand how to interrogate a text in a rigorous and sophisticated manner, but no, I don't want students to think that a critical reading of a text must necessarily subscribe to the traditions of European philosophical method. I want students to be critical and to allow their subject matter to transform them. I want them to be open to the idea that difference can be real, but that not all perceived (or fantasized) differences are reflected in reality.

This means that students need to be in an institutional environment that fosters synergy between the conventional disciplines and the areas, but it also means that the critical quality of Modern Area Studies (and of Japan Studies in particular) to discomfort the disciplines and dis-Orient the Orient through theoretical innovation and critique should be

cultivated. This, I think, means recognising Area Studies as an approach to knowledge rather than as a workhorse of or a data-store for the 'Western disciplines.'

I am tremendously grateful to the former Rector Magnificus, Douwe Breimer, as well as to the current Vice-Rector, Ton van Haaften, for their unfailing support for this kind of vision in the form of the new Modern East Asia Research Centre (MEARC), which I am fortunate enough to direct together with Axel Schneider.

I am also grateful to the staff (and especially the support staff) and students of the Department of Japanese Studies, whose industry and dedication to the department and the field is truly inspiring. We have already been through a great deal of change in the two years since I first arrived in Leiden, and I remained awed by their spirit and energy. They deserve more than I can give them, but I will give them all that I can.

And finally, in this context, we would do well to remember that for two hundred years scholars in early modern Japan would have categorised all of the work done in the whole of the University of Leiden (except for that done in our wonderful East Asian Studies building, the Arsenaal) as *rangaku* - Western learning or Dutch learning - and they would have expected a couple of 'eccentric' scholars to represent it all in its exotic entirety, from medicine through literature and philosophy to astronomy. Everyone else in the Japanese academe would have been involved in what *we now* call East Asian Studies, but which they would simply have called ... knowledge.

At that time, Japan had the excuse of *sakoku* - the official policy of isolation from the rest of the planet, which was formulated

at the start of the seventeenth century. *Sakoku* had profound effects on the geography and politics of knowledge in Japan, drawing the horizons of scholarship within the islands of the nation. During that long period, only the outward looking Dutch were permitted to sustain official contact with Japan, hence the name for non-Japanese Studies, *rangaku* (Dutch Studies). Given the fact that Leiden University has the oldest and most sustained contact with Japan of any university outside of Asia, and given that we live in the global age of the twenty-first century, *sakoku* is certainly not an excuse for intellectual parochialism that we can use today.

Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

- 1 Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p.47.
- 2 This kind of language of 'dissonance' is often associated with a Foucauldian critique (the distanciation effect of otherness). Yet Michael Dutton maintains that Foucault's legacy is importantly disconnected from the question of the relationship between knowledges within and without Area Studies. Michael Dutton, 'Lead Us Not into Translation: Notes toward a Theoretical Foundation for Asian Studies', *Neplanta: Views from South*, 3:3 (2002), p.521.
- 3 A number of commentators have been speaking about the so-called 'crisis of Area Studies' for many years now. The inaugural volume of *The International Journal of Asian Studies*, 1:1 (2004) began with a series of articles concerning "The Asian Studies 'Crisis'", (Chris Burgess, pp.121-136; Juliet Clark, pp.95-110). In allied disciplines, such as comparative literature, this kind of crisis consciousness is also in evidence from seminal works such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. Spivak's earlier work is much broader, of course, pointing to the enduring problems of negotiating the status of knowledge between Western and non-Western contexts (*In Other Worlds*, London: Routledge, 1987/2006). It is in this context of crisis, death and resurrection of the 'Area' that we should understand recent books, such as Harry Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi's *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, London: Duke University Press, 2002. As Andrew Gordon points out in his substantial review of that book, much of this sense of crisis is not new to the field (especially in the USA), 'Rethinking Area Studies, Once More', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 30:2 (2004), pp.417-429. What would be new, however, would be a resolution of the crisis, so that the field can finally move on ... Here in the tradition-rich corridors and theatres of Leiden, we are in the midst of reconsidering the institutional shape and dimensions of Area Studies; hence, it seems that this might be a suitable and even hopeful occasion to interrogate the crisis once again.
- 4 Leading examples of this kind of critique are Naoki Sakai and Harry Harootunian, who published a fascinating dialogue: 'Japan Studies and Cultural Studies', *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 7:2 (1999), pp.593-647.
- 5 Ruth Benedict's classic book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Mariner Books, 1946/1989), was later declassified and published in 1946.
- 6 Sometimes reference is also made to (the 'founding father of Japan Studies') Edwin O. Reischauer's 1942 'Memorandum on Policy towards Japan', in which (as professor at Harvard) he was already suggesting that the US should use Emperor Hirohito as a puppet head-of-state after the war in order to better control a Japanese population who were, apparently, fanatically devoted to the emperor-cult. Reischauer, of course, would go on to become US Ambassador to Japan (1961-6) and would found the famous (and powerful) Japan Institute at Harvard University (1973), which would later be renamed the Reischauer Institute in his honour (1985). For Naoki Sakai, this memorandum marked the start of an alliance between the US government and what he perceives as the conservative bastions of education in the USA, specifically Harvard ('"You Asians": On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 99:4 (Fall 2000), p.803).
- 7 Term from Michael Dutton, 'Lead Us Not into Translation: Notes toward a Theoretical Foundation for Asian Studies', *Neplanta: Views from South*, 3:3 (2002), p.525
- 8 An allied problem concerns the identity and politics of so-called 'field work' for scholars engaged in Area Studies. I share the concern of many scholars of Area Studies who have been puzzled by the way that 'their Area' (in my case Japan) is so often presented as a 'field' where one goes to do 'fieldwork', even if one's purpose is entirely textual or archival rather than ethnographic. Colleagues go to France or the USA to 'do research', but I must go to Japan to do 'fieldwork'. The implications, of course, are that non-Western areas require a special order of observational practices (and even interventions on behalf of the indigenous populations in order to help them to 'speak for themselves') that would be irrelevant (or perhaps 'redundant') within Europe or the USA. In some cases, this leads to the bizarre practice of treating all texts in these

languages (even modern scholarly treatises) as primary resources that need a degree of ethnographic interpretation. Here we see the clear legacy of colonial knowledge structures.

- 9 This is a fairly precise analogy for the function that should be served by the Harvard-trained officials and agents for the US government.
- 10 See for example, Harry Harootunian and Naoki Sakai, 'Japan Studies and Cultural Studies', *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 7:2 (1999), pp.593-647.
- 11 Harootunian and Sakai mention major journals in the field (such as the *Journal of Japanese Studies* and *Monumenta Nipponica*), the biggest professional organisation in the field, the *Association of Asian Studies*, and the most established university institutes (esp. Harvard and Washington). I have often heard the counter argument that neither Harootunian nor Sakai have been 'silenced' by these institutions; indeed, their voices of criticism are loud and powerful. However, I note that the volume of their own voices is thanks largely to their own industrious efforts to create alternative forums for expression within their fields, including the cultivation of new journals and publishers, such as Duke University Press.
- 12 Michael Dutton, 'Lead Us Not into Translation', p.522.
- 13 The first professor of the Chinese and Japanese Languages in Leiden was filled by J.J. Hoffmann. Hoffmann was tempted away from his previous position as Translator of Japanese for the Government General of the Netherlands-Indies. He was offered the position after a petition from the Minister of Internal Affairs (noting how rare and valuable to the Netherlands knowledge of Japanese was) to the Curators of Leiden University in 1854; the minister himself had already received a petition from the Society for the Promotion of the Christian Religion amongst the Chinese for the establishment of a chair in the Chinese Language. Given the political nature of these beginnings and Hoffman's principal identity as a translator, it should be of no great surprise to learn that Japanology and Sinology in Leiden (and elsewhere, following Leiden's lead) developed along the lines of applied translation and philology. My thanks to Wim Boot for providing me with a copy of his speech, 'JJ Hoffmann - The First Japanologist', which was

delivered on 21ST March 2005 in Leiden on the occasion of the 150TH anniversary of Hoffmann's appointment.

Of course, it is not the case that the American intellectual discourse is ignorant of the existence of Europe. We cannot simply assume a level of national conceit that declares the non-existence of a field of scholarship until Harvard establishes an institute for it. Hence, we must assume that the argument rests on more than merely the existence of institutions to study Japan or Asia or some other Area. In particular, we should take special note of that troublesome qualifier: Modern. Might we be able to argue that *Modern* Area Studies, including (and perhaps especially) *Modern* Japan Studies began in the 1940s in America? Perhaps Modern Japan Studies is something different from the Japanology of Hoffmann?

- 14 I am grateful to Ethan Mark for noting the aptness of this phrase.
- 15 Of course, debates about the start of modernity in Asia (and in Europe) abound.
- 16 Following the earlier logic of labelling 'whatever came before' as Japanology, we might simplify and suggest that Japanology is characterised by colonial complacency and that Modern Japan Studies should be characterised by postcolonial anxiety. Hereafter, however, I will tend towards the more general label: Oriental Studies, following Said.
- 17 Of course, this last factor (the absence of theory) means that we should also be interested in the elements of continuity and tradition that link the European tradition of (what we might call) *Oriental Studies* (which we might associate with the establishment of such venerable institutions as the School of Oriental and African Studies (then the School of Oriental Studies) in London in 1916, with Modern Area Studies, in its more theoretically charged (or at least theoretically self-conscious) form.
- 18 The success and longevity of this series is underlined by the fact that most of it has now been digitized and is available online at the Internet Sacred Texts Archive: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm> (14.06.07).
- 19 Although these technical texts were somewhat in defiance of the innovations that were taking place in the rapidly advancing and professionalizing field of translation studies at that time.

- 20 Michael Dutton, 'Lead Us Not into Translation', p.505.
- 21 Michael Dutton ('Lead Us Not into Translation') is a persuasive advocate of this view, and I am grateful to his account here.
- 22 The recent Alejandro Gonzalez film, *Babel* (2006), which is an interesting contemplation on the problems of 'confounded tongues' in so far as it is comprised of a series of interrelated stories involving characters who do not share common languages, provided me with a nice illustration of these problems. It was the first film that I saw in the cinema in the Netherlands, and hence my first experience of the Netherlands' progressive language policy (showing movies in their original languages with subtitles rather than dubbing them). I was rather at a loss because *Babel* contains sections in Arabic and Spanish (with Dutch subtitles that I could not yet read). One of the story-threads is set in Japan, so I was looking forward to being able to understand at least that part of the narrative. Unfortunately, the Japanese characters in the film are deaf and thus speak in sign-language! Hence, I sat for 143 minutes listening to two spoken languages and watching one system of sign-language that I could not understand, whilst trying to read subtitles in a language that made only the vaguest sense to me. I can certainly testify to the problems of the confounding of tongues.
- 23 Rachel Ramsey, 'China and the Ideal of Order in John Webb's An Historical Essay', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62:3 (2001), pp.483-503. Discoveries at Kaifan (Hunan, China) suggested that there was an unbroken line of Jews in China tracing back to before the time of Christ, although the Kaifan bible eventually turned out to be identical to the Amsterdam bible ...
- 24 Did this mean that all literate Chinese people knew the mind of God, or only Europeans who learnt Chinese?
- 25 Lest it appear that critical thinking in this field is entirely the preserve of the American academe in the postwar, I note the strong influence of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida on Said.
- 26 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1978.
- 27 There are many and various critics of Said. Robert Irwin, for instance, concedes the importance and impact of Orientalism but refusing to agree with the apparent conclusion that all Europeans before 1978 who had anything to say about the so-called Orient was effectively racist, ethnocentric or imperialist. In his own book, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* (Overlook Books, 2006), Irwin argues that many Europeans have been committed advocates of Arab, Islamic and other 'non-European' political causes. Others, such as George P. Landow and Bernard Lewis have criticised Said's scholarship and argued that his ideas are more catchy than accurate, appealing to the political sensitivities of the contemporary period. In particular, they note that Said has almost nothing to say about China, Japan or Asia itself, preferring to focus on the Middle East as the site of the Orient.
- 28 I note, for instance, that some of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Europe still maintain faculties of Oriental Studies, including Cambridge, Oxford and SOAS in the UK. At the time of writing, Leiden sustains the so-called CNWS (School of Non-Western Studies), the unfortunate title of which suggests little consciousness of the politics of Orientalism or post-colonialism.
- 29 Perhaps the next landmark text in this field, which helped to solidify postcolonial studies was *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989/2002, by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.
- 30 Term from Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*, p.47.
- 31 This kind of position contains a constellation of problems about the importance and role of empathy in Area Studies. Sakai and Harootunian are damning about the ways in which some scholars 'want to fantasize about themselves as representatives of the native population, somewhat heroically articulating and defending the interests of the natives who, just like infants or junior partners, are incapable of either expressing or defending their own interests' (Sakai in Harootunian and Sakai, 'Japan Studies', p.634). At one level, this position is collusive with the self-identity of scholars in Area Studies as translators. However, on another level, this argument also acts in collusion with nativist discourses of knowledge (such as the infamous *Nihonjinron*, or essays on Japanese uniqueness), which emphasize the crucial importance of *being native* in order to properly understand the area or its culture: ie. authentic knowledge of an area can only be produced by natives

of that area. Hence, professors become those who have most successfully *become of the area* that interests them.

- 32 One of the most curious snippets of insight into modern Japanese society was the shocked observation by one of the BBC sports commentators that Japanese fans tended to stay behind after matches in order to tidy up the stadium.
- 33 Whilst Said himself was explicitly concerned with an Oriental world that he perceived as bounded by the Middle East, the general pattern of his analysis has been widely applied to other areas, including Asia, East Asia and Japan. Naoki Sakai takes this discourse to its logical conclusion and argues that both the West and Asia (the idea of the Orient being already so defunct that he ignores it entirely) are 'mythical constructs' - in particular, he asks pointedly: who are these people who would call themselves Asians (we may assume that there was never a people that would recognise themselves as Orientals)? Or, 'more fundamentally, where is Asia? What is it?' (Sakai, 'You Asians', p.790). Whilst the accusative form, 'you Asians', appears to mean something in Europe and the USA, the reflective form, 'we Asians', appears to mean nothing (or very little) anywhere, except perhaps as a political tactic (the legacy of the political problems of enlivening the idea of 'we Asians' in the form of the so-called 'East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere' still casts a deep shadow over attempts to revive the idea today). Of course, this problem ties back to the question of modernity: in the modern world of nation states, doesn't it make much more sense to talk about Modern Japan Studies than Asian Studies - Japan is a modern state, just like The Netherlands or the USA. Asia is not the EU. Japan is not China, it's not even Korea (not matter what the BBC thinks), and it is certainly not India or Egypt. If we do otherwise, are we denying Japan's modernity and, if we are, we need to ask some serious questions about why we might feel the need to do that.
- 34 The list of scholars here is long and distinguished, but I would like to take this opportunity to single out Kevin Doak, whose book, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), made a deep impression on me and helped me to see a new way of

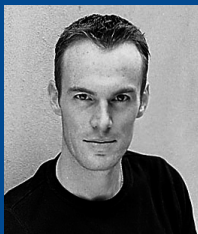
approaching my subject matter. Subsequently, Kevin has been a great colleague and a good friend.

- 35 Including by creating new publications as alternative forums to those that they considered to be too conservative. Many of these new publications have appeared from the progressive Duke University Press.
- 36 I should take a moment here to offer my deepest thanks to Stephen for his unstinting support and for providing me with my very first sparks of interest in the history of Modern Japan; in some ways, everything that came after that is his fault!
- 37 I discussed some of these issues in 'On the Location of Japanese Philosophy: If the past is a different country, are different countries in the past?' *Daiwa Foundation Prize Lecture*, Daiwa Foundation, London, October 2003. Revised and expanded as 'If the Past is a Different Country, are Different Countries in the Past? On the Place of the Non-European in the History of Philosophy', *Philosophy*, 80:311 (2005), pp.29-51
- 38 My thanks to Andy Hurrell, Michael Freeden, Sudipta Kaviraj and Claire Moon in particular.

In deze reeks verschijnen teksten van oraties en afscheidscolleges.

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