

Assessing 'the Chinese Threat' to Japanese as a Language of Study in Australian Schools (with Particular Reference to the State of Victoria)

by

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Introduction

For proponents of the spread of the Japanese language, Australia represents a major success story. To illustrate: Australia ranks third in the world in terms of the number of people learning Japanese (behind only South Korea and China), with about 370,000 learners (Japan Foundation 2007). The overwhelming majority of Australian learners are children who study Japanese as a so-called 'LOTE' (Language Other Than English) in one of the nation's schools. Despite this seemingly positive state of affairs, fears have been expressed in recent years that the future of Japanese LOTE may be in serious jeopardy due to the growing interest in Chinese. This paper seeks to gauge, to the extent possible, whether such fears may be justified. For clarification: the language referred to simply as 'Chinese' throughout this paper is known alternatively as 'Mandarin Chinese', 'MSC', 'Modern Standard Chinese' and 'Putonghua'.

The bulk of this study is dedicated to a discussion of various factors with the arguable potential to influence the appeal, in relative terms, of Japanese and Chinese as target languages in Australian school education. In this regard, the standpoints of language-in-education policy-makers, school decision-makers and learners are all considered. However, since policies and conditions vary among Australian states and territories (and could not all be addressed in a study of this limited scale), the primary focus is placed on the state of Victoria, which has an especially strong track record of Japanese language education at the school level. This study has been informed by a number of individuals with first-hand experience in teaching and

administering LOTE programmes in Victoria. In the interests of 'confidentiality' (see Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1992; Grinyer 2002), no information which might reveal the identity of informants has been included.

In attempting to assess the degree of threat posed to Japanese by Chinese, I shall begin by explaining how and why Japanese has succeeded in establishing itself as one of the most widely studied LOTES in the Victorian school curriculum.

History of Japanese Study in Australia

Despite Australia's location in the heart of the Asia-Pacific region, few of its citizens had learned Asian languages like Japanese until relatively recently. Although the country's first tertiary-level Japanese programme was initiated in 1917 by Sydney University, interest in Japanese remained at a generally low level at least until the 1960s. Japanese received a significant boost in the middle of that decade, with the initiation of Japanese degree programmes at six Australian universities. As Marriott, Neustupny & Spence-Brown (1994: 1) have explained, the introduction of Japanese at tertiary level had an important knock-on effect in school-level Japanese teaching and also led to the systematic introduction of Japanese as an examination subject. However, it was only in the 1980s—around the time when Japan rose to the status of global economic superpower—that the Japanese language began to enjoy widespread appeal within school language education. In fact, Australia experienced a veritable explosion of interest in Japanese learning, likened by some (e.g. Lo Bianco 2000; Furukawa, Jonak & Negishi 2002) to a 'tsunami'. In national policy terms, Japanese was first identified as a language of special importance to Australia in the 1987 National Policy on Languages (NPL), the country's first comprehensive national language policy. In the NPL (Lo Bianco 1987), Japanese was specified as one of nine 'priority languages' (along with Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Indonesian/Malay, Italian and Spanish).

The upturn in interest in Japanese occurred within the context of a more general shift in Australia's economic and political orientation towards the countries of Asia. In the late 1980s, a new term, 'Asia literacy', was coined by the Asian Studies Council (1988) in its 'National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia'. In contemporary Australian discourse, Asia literacy has become almost a ubiquitous concept, the importance of which is emphasised frequently by politicians, academics and business leaders (see, for instance, Fitzgerald 1997; Henderson 2003, 2008; March 1995; Rudd 1995a, 1995b). Although, as March (1995) has explained, Asia literacy is subject to various interpretations, it would seem obvious to regard the study of Asian languages as one of its most salient elements.

The study of Japanese received a major boost in 1995, with the launch of a national-level language-in-education policy initiative known as 'NALSAS' (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools). NALSAS was designed as a joint operation involving Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments with an annual budget of approximately \$30 million; a demonstration of the high priority attached to the study of Asian languages. The NALSAS initiative itself was based on a report entitled 'Asian Languages and Australia's

Economic Future', which had been compiled by the Committee for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) under the Chairmanship of Kevin Rudd, a Chinese speaker, described by Deborah Henderson (2007) as 'the most influential public servant in the Queensland government at this time, and a key advocate of engagement with Asia and the teaching of Asian languages'. The report's authors described Asian language development as 'a matter of national importance, requiring urgent and high-level attention at a national level' (Cited in Rudd 1994: i). NALSAS made the overt link between the study of Asian languages and the future development of the national economy, identifying four 'priority' Asian languages to be earmarked for special support—besides Japanese, these were Chinese, Korean and Indonesian.

Although the NALSAS strategy was discontinued by the Liberal/National coalition government under the leadership of John Howard in 2002, in a shift of language-in-education priorities, Japanese has continued to be one of the most widely studied languages in Victorian primary and secondary schools. With the election of a Labor government under the leadership of the above-mentioned Kevin Rudd in late 2007, foreign language-in-education policy has been refocused upon the issue of 'Asia literacy'. In this connection, the Australian education minister, Julia Gillard, announced in 2008 a new 'National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program' (NALSSP), which David Hill (2009) has described as essentially 'a revived (though much less well-funded) version' of NALSAS. Again, Japanese has been designated as a language of special priority. In mid-2009, under the rubric of 'becoming Asia literate', the government began making available grants in order to assist schools in promoting the teaching and learning of Asian languages and/or the studies of Asia related to one or more of the four NALSSP target countries—China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea.

Japanese Study in Victoria State

Within Victoria's school system, Japanese has been regarded, at least since the early 1990s, as a priority language. This importance of Japanese was emphasised in the state's 'LOTE Strategy Plan', issued in 1993, which specified it as one of eight 'key languages' to be taught in mainstream schools in the state; the others being German, Chinese, French, Indonesian, Italian, Modern Greek and Vietnamese (Ministerial Advisory Council 1993: 4). The position of Japanese LOTE was enhanced further by the introduction of the aforementioned NALSAS strategy, not least because of the substantial funding it guaranteed. According to an account from one highly experienced teacher interviewed for this study, around 90% of Japanese LOTE teachers were non-Japanese native-speaking/non-Japanese background Australians at the time of the NALSAS launch. Since the supply of teachers was insufficient to fulfil demand, the Victorian education department began welcoming Japanese native-speakers, who were encouraged to pursue university studies in primary school teaching methodology (with subject specialization in LOTE). The Victorian education department also initiated its own ATJ (Assistants to Teachers of Japanese) programme, in which Japanese native-speaker assistants were recruited directly from Japan to support teachers of Japanese LOTE in the state's schools.

In this, the first decade of the twentieth century, Japanese is still one of the most widely-studied languages in the schools of Victoria, both at primary and secondary school level; and not

only in state schools, but also in the independent and Catholic school sectors. The apparent strength of Japanese LOTE is amply illustrated in following few statistics from the Victoria department of education's 2007 'LOTE Report' (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009). In the state sector alone, Japanese was being studied in 2007 by 18,862 students at 199 primary schools and by 46,193 at 87 secondary colleges. Japanese LOTE was offered by more than 20% of all primary schools in Victoria and 28% of secondary schools, making it the third most commonly studied LOTE at both the primary and secondary school levels.

Assessing 'the Chinese Threat'

While, on the basis of the above, the position of Japanese LOTE in the Victorian school system might appear entirely secure, fears have been expressed in recent years that the study of Japanese may begin to decline significantly, as more and more schools abandon the language in favour of Chinese. Against this background, I shall attempt to assess the seriousness of any such 'Chinese threat'. In this connection, I shall discuss a range of factors with the arguable potential to enhance the appeal of Chinese as a target language in Australian school language education. Although, of course, the Chinese language itself may hold an intrinsic attraction for certain individuals, the factors discussed below pertain to the political and educational contexts in which target languages (i.e. LOTEs) are chosen in Australia.

China's Rise to 'World Power' Status

In very basic terms, national foreign language-in-education policies represent the perceptions of governments as regards the language learning needs of their people. Thus, perceptions of the relative importance of different countries in the international community, whether in economic or political terms, may be one factor governing the choice of foreign languages for study in any nation's education system. Over the past quarter of a century, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has transformed itself from a largely impoverished 'developing country' into the world's third largest economy (Cha 2009). Indeed, with an average annual GDP growth rate above 10%, China has been able to boast the fastest growing economy of any major nation. As G. John Ikenberry (2008) explains, the Chinese economy has quadrupled in size since the late 1970s. It has become one of the world's major manufacturing centres, consuming roughly a third of the global supply of iron, steel, and coal. By the end of 2006, China had accumulated more than \$1 trillion in foreign reserves. Meanwhile, its military spending has increased at an annual inflation-adjusted rate of over 18% a year. Over the same period, China has transformed itself from a relatively isolationist state into a political power with a global sphere of influence (see Keller & Rawski 2007; Zheng 2005). Against this background, Josh Kurlantzick (2007) suggests that China 'may become the first nation since the fall of the Soviet Union that could seriously challenge the United States for control of the international system' (Kurlantzick 2007: 5).

The Deepening Australia-China Politico-Economic Relationship

With specific regard to Australia, the rise of China has had particularly profound implications for the national economy. Ien Ang (2008: 18) sees Australia's 'long-lasting economic boom' as 'inextricably linked to China's insatiable demand for natural resources such as coal and iron ore'. Australia has also become a key supplier of agricultural products to China as well as a major market for Chinese manufactured products (see Mai et al. 2005). In 2007, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) announced that China had become the country's chief two-way trading partner, surpassing Japan. Significantly, this was the first time in 36 years that Japan had not topped the list of Australia's international trade partners. The Australia-China relationship has been developing in other areas, such as tourism. While other sources of international tourists have dwindled amid the global recession, the number of Chinese visitors has been increasing. At the same time, thousands of Australians also visit China each year.

At the political level, Australia has fostered increasingly close ties with China, especially since the election of Kevin Rudd as prime minister (Raman 2008). Rudd's personal advocacy of engagement with China was already evident in a paper he contributed to a scholarly publication more than a decade before assuming Australia's top executive office (Rudd 1996) and came to the fore again during the 2007 Australian election campaign. As prime minister, Rudd has devoted considerable attention to Australia's relations with China. In the early days of his tenure, he made an official visit to Beijing (while conspicuously failing to visit Japan) and has forged a personal relationship with top Chinese politicians, addressing President Hu Jintao in Chinese at a 2007 conference of regional leaders. The Rudd government has sought greater bilateral cooperation with China across a range of areas like 'clean coal technology', and has also taken steps to reopen free trade talks. At the London G20 summit in March 2009, Rudd personally called for China to be given a greater role in the International Monetary Fund (Malkin 2009).

The Rudd government's eagerness to embrace China has drawn criticism from within Australia. While there is perhaps a certain predictability in opprobrium from political opponents like Malcolm Turnbull, the leader of Australia's Liberal party, who has accused Rudd of acting as a 'roving ambassador for the People's Republic of China', numerous media commentators and academics have also questioned the wisdom of his government's China policy. In this context, Tom Conley & Michael Heazle (2008) have counselled against neglecting Australia's other more long-standing bilateral relationships. As they explain:

As a nation, Australia is increasingly at risk of being seen as opportunistic, a society always willing to jump on to the next big thing, even at the expense of our long established partnerships if necessary. (Conley & Heazle 2008)

In this regard, Conley, Heazle and others worry that Rudd's eagerness to embrace China may be occurring at the expense of Japan, and are thus fearful of the effects of such a policy on Japan-Australia relations. Rudd's decision not to visit Japan on his world tour of early 2008 was regarded by some as indicative of a shift in priorities. In this regard, Hugh White of the Australian National University (ANU) has also warned that Japanese politicians 'see Australia moving China's way' (cited in Hall 2008).

The Global Appeal of Chinese

Just as Britain's and subsequently America's 'great power' status led to the emergence of English as the *de facto* international *lingua franca* (see, among others, Crystal 1997; Phillipson 1992), the rise of China has generated interest in the Chinese language across the globe. Numerous countries have reported a significant upturn in the study of Chinese, albeit from a very low base. This has certainly been the case in the United States (Stewart 2007), where the language has also attracted the attention of some very influential individuals, like Senator Joseph Lieberman, who in 2005 introduced a bill requesting \$1.3 billion in funding for Chinese language classes in public schools (Forero 2006). According to a report from China's 'People's Daily' newspaper, more than 30 million people worldwide were learning Chinese as a foreign language in 2005, with more than 2,500 universities in 100 countries offering Chinese language programmes (People's Daily 2005). Meanwhile, the number of foreign students studying in China increased from 8,000 in the mid-1980s to 110,800 in 2005. Moreover, as of 2006, more than 500,000 examinees had sat the Chinese Language Proficiency Test (HSK) since its introduction in 1990 (Gong 2006).

Advocacy for Chinese in Australia

Amid the worldwide spike in interest in Chinese, advocacy for the language has been especially strong in Australia. One of the most powerful and compelling advertisements for Chinese has surely been the election of Kevin Rudd as prime minister in 2007, making Australia the only 'Western' country with a Chinese-speaking head of government. In fact, some, like the Director of the Faculty of Asian Studies at Australian National University, have even credited Rudd with increasing enrolments in Chinese language courses (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2009; The Australian 2009). Chinese has accumulated a number of other high-profile supporters like Amanda Vanstone, a former immigration minister, who has recommended that Chinese study be made compulsory.

Numerous Australian academics are also strong proponents of Chinese. As one example, Jane Orton of the University of Melbourne issued a comprehensive report in 2008 on the state of Chinese language education in Australia, calling for the nurturing of 'a solid pool of Australians in all sectors who deeply understand China and can speak Chinese well' (Orton 2008: 6). Advocacy has also come from the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), a joint activity of Asialink at the University of Melbourne and the Curriculum Corporation. In late 2008, the AEF hosted a 'national forum' on the future of Chinese language education in Australian Schools, which drew a broad range of participants from various fields, including government, academia, the Australian business community, schools and the Australian Parents Council. Meanwhile, the Chinese study issue has drawn the attention of the mass-media, as evidenced by a number of newspaper articles, editorials and radio programmes emphasizing the instrumental value to Australians of the Chinese language (e.g. Munro 2008; Patty 2007).

Chinese Immigration into Australia

One development that has tangibly boosted the profile and status of Chinese across Australia is the dramatic increase in the number of native Chinese-speakers living in the country. In

the 2006 national census, 669,890 Australian residents identified themselves as having either complete or partial Chinese ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Although the Chinese community in Australia stretches back to the mid-19th Century (and has particularly strong roots in Victoria; see Cronyn 1983), a large percentage of this community has always been Cantonese-speaking. In fact, Cantonese has traditionally been the most widely spoken language among Australians of Chinese background (Jupp 2001). However, since the abandonment of the so-called 'White Australia' immigration policy in the 1970s (see Windschuttle 2004), the (Mandarin) Chinese-speaking population has grown steadily. Since the start of the new millennium, the rate of increase has been dramatic, not least in Victoria. Figures from 2006 show that less than 10% of Victoria's China-born population had arrived in Australia before 1986 (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008). According to the 2006 census, Victoria was home to some 56,559 China-born persons; an increase of 53.8% from 2001. By contrast, the census recorded only 5,780 Japanese nationals as residents of the state (Victorian Multicultural Commission. (2007b).

Chinese has established a firm footing for itself as one of Victoria's (and indeed Australia's) foremost 'community languages'. In fact, Chinese is now one of the most rapidly growing community languages in Australia. According to Michael Clyne and Sandra Kipp (2002), Chinese underwent a 68.5% increase between 1991 and 1996, plus a further 51.3% increase between 1996 and 2001 (Clyne & Kipp 2002: 30). Writing in 2008, Clyne predicted that if the present trends continue, Chinese will 'leapfrog into first place' among community languages by 2011 (Clyne 2008: 2). The impact of Japanese native-speakers on Australia's language demography has been comparatively small. In Victoria, Japanese does not even rank among the top ten community languages. Although the day-to-day use of Chinese has undeniably become more widespread within Australian society, it is debatable to what extent this development actually acts as an incentive for Australians of non-Chinese backgrounds to study the language. This issue will be discussed below.

Chinese Students in Victorian Schools

Of all the overseas students to arrive in Australian schools in recent years, those from the People's Republic of China have arguably made the most impact. According to Yao (2004), China has been the largest source of international students in Australia since 2001. A more recent report, from June 2009, put the number of Chinese students in Australia at over 130,000 (Gillmore & Millar 2009). The impact of these students has been pronounced in Victoria, especially in the independent school sector, where several of the state's most prestigious schools have embarked on recruitment drives in China; in some cases entering into 'sister school' relationships with counterparts in that country. It is perhaps logical to assume that any school seeking to establish ties in China might consider it advantageous to offer Chinese on its curriculum as a demonstration of its commitment.

For young Chinese seeking to study abroad, the prospect of an English-medium education is one obvious drawback. In Victoria, the educational credential awarded to those who successfully complete their high-school level studies, the Victorian Certificate of Education ('VCE'), is an especially attractive qualification. In fact, the VCE offers overseas students the possibility

of pursuing tertiary-level studies, not only in Australia but also in other English-speaking countries. The VCE is recognised by some of the world's most prestigious universities—including Oxford, Cambridge and a number of American 'Ivy league' colleges—in applications for undergraduate admissions (although, ultimately, entry is still subject to criteria set by individual universities). For Victorian schools, the benefits associated with students from China are tangible. Aside from the financial rewards associated with fee-paying students, the individuals who arrive from China often do so with a record of high academic achievement. Such students enhance the VCE results of the schools they attend, thereby generating a potentially valuable knock-on effect in terms of advertising and marketing. It is worth mentioning, however, that the organization responsible for administering the VCE, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), has begun authorizing the establishment of 'offshore' programmes, which enable foreign students to pursue VCE studies in their home countries. As of 2009, the VCE was being offered by only six schools in the People's Republic of China, though a wider expansion of participant schools could precipitate a significant decline in the number of Chinese students attending Victorian schools.

As it stands, however, China still represents, by some margin, the single biggest source of overseas students in the Australian schools sector, according to figures from Australian Education International (AEI), a government agency. In 2008, 13,638 Chinese students were enrolled at Australian schools; a 22.6% increase on the previous year. In Victoria, Chinese students made up 54% of all international enrolments in the schools sector in 2008 (Business Victoria 2008). The number of Japanese students is comparatively much smaller and has been declining. In 2008, only 1,056 Japanese nationals were enrolled as pupils across the entire Australian schools sector, marking a 17.8% decrease on the 2007 figure (Australian Education International 2009).

China's 'Soft Power' Offensive

For several decades following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the country's Communist government evinced little overt interest in enhancing its image among the populations of 'Western' countries like Australia. Rather, it seemed much more intent on projecting China as a champion of the so-called 'developing world' and a bulwark against Western colonialism (see Bergsten et al. 2006; Kurlantzick, 2007). Over the past decade, this attitude has changed markedly, as China has sought to garner what is often termed 'soft power' all around the world. 'Soft power' has been defined by Joseph Nye, the man who first coined the term as:

the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. (Nye 2004: x)

In this regard, one Chinese scholar, Zhang Tuosheng, identified one of the objectives of China's foreign policy as 'playing an active part in international affairs with emphasis on gaining 'soft strength' and acting as a responsible big country' (cited in Chey 2007). China's global 'soft power offensive' has begun to draw considerable attention, as evidenced by the wide range of works that have addressed the issue (e.g. Chey 2007; Ding 2008; Ding & Saunders 2008; Gill & Huang 2006; Hsiao & Yang 2008; Kurlantzick 2006, 2007; Nye 2005; Starr 2009; Wuthnow 2008; Yoshihara & Holmes 2008). Commentators have noted greater levels of sophistication

and efficacy in China's recent efforts at cultural diplomacy with the establishment of agencies like *Hanban* and the Confucius Institute (see discussion below).

In Australia, to the extent that public opinion can ever be gauged accurately, there are signs that China may have made some headway in enhancing its image among the general public. Opinion polls conducted by the Lowy Institute, a prominent Australian research organization, suggest that many Australians have come to view China as favourably as the United States (Kurlantzick 2007: 4) and certainly do not regard it as a threat to their own country, as may have been the case in decades past. A 2006 Lowy Institute poll revealed that, out of thirteen hypothetical threats to their country's security, Australians ranked 'the development of China as a world power' as the least threatening (Yoshihara & Holmes 2008: 127). For Kurlantzick (2007), this transformation in China's image among the Australian public, 'from pariah as recently as the 1980s to close friend', is an especially remarkable one. Coupled with its undoubted economic and political importance vis-à-vis Australia, the fact that China is regarded by Australians in sympathetic rather than antithetical terms might be expected to enhance somewhat the appeal of the Chinese language, whether among policy-makers, school decision-makers or potential learners.

Hanban and the Confucius Institutes

Changes of perception in various countries regarding China, its culture, and its language have evidently been recognised by the Chinese government. Indeed, as one element of its pursuit of 'soft power', it has begun, over the past decade or so, to promote energetically the study of Chinese around the world. In 1987, it created the Office of Chinese Language Council International (also known as '*Hanban*'), drawing participation from 12 state ministries and commissions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to its own website, *Hanban* is 'committed to making the Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services available to the world, to meeting the demands of overseas Chinese learners to the utmost, to contributing to the formation of a world of cultural diversity and harmony' (*Hanban* website; accessed 19/05/2009). To this end, it conducts a range of activities, including teacher training; certification for teachers of Chinese as a foreign language; and the dispatching of teaching staff to overseas missions. *Hanban* has also established a network of cultural centres known as 'Confucius Institutes', which it funds and operates jointly with universities in various countries around the world. By October 2008, 326 Confucius Institutes had been established in more than eighty countries and regions.

The creation of *Hanban* and the Confucius Institutes represents a significant change in policy on the part of the Chinese government—from a position of little apparent interest in spreading the Chinese language to a strategy of active promotion. *Hanban* has been particularly active in Australia, forging relationships with regional departments of education and establishing Confucius Institutes at four universities, including the University of Melbourne in the state of Victoria. *Hanban* has developed a strong relationship with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). It sponsors a full-time language advisor within that department and conducts a host of other activities aimed at promoting Chinese language education in Victorian schools. In pursuit of its goals, the agency has shown

a willingness to commit considerable financial resources. In 2007, *Hanban* invited fifteen principals from Victorian schools on fully-funded trips to China. In 2009, fifteen *Hanban*-sponsored volunteer teachers were brought to Victoria. In the same year, *Hanban* also established a 'Chinese Teacher Training Centre', in partnership with the Victorian government. Significantly, the centre is the first of only three international centres planned by *Hanban* (the others being in the United States and Europe).

'Pro-Chinese' Trends in Victorian School Language Education

The growing importance of Chinese has been reflected in recent trends in school language education in Victoria. According to one official from the DEECD interviewed in connection with this study, the Department has made a concerted effort to promote the study of Chinese within the government school system, targeting it for priority promotion, especially at schools looking to change LOTEs and at newly-opened schools. In 2008, DEECD established a Chinese teacher assistant programme in cooperation with *Hanban* and the Chinese Education Consul-General in Melbourne. In the same year, seven native-speaker Assistants were recruited from China to work with local LOTE teachers in Victoria's primary and secondary schools. Several other initiatives have been introduced to support the study of Chinese, including the initiation of Chinese bilingual programmes.

Since the late 1980s, the period when Australia's first comprehensive national language policy (NPL) was established, the study of Chinese has increased significantly across the whole country, albeit from a very low base. To illustrate: only 2,300 children were studying the language at Australian primary schools nationwide in 1988, yet by 1991, this had risen around 440% to 12,300 (Smith et al 1993). By 2007, there were 12,980 students of Chinese at mainstream government schools in Victoria alone (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009).

Why Might Japanese be Vulnerable to a 'Chinese Threat'?

In this section, I shall outline some reasons why the study of Japanese LOTE might be considered vulnerable to a threat from Chinese.

The Relative Decline of Japan as a World Power

As mentioned above, the study of Japanese underwent a dramatic increase in Australia in the 1980s after decades of apparent disinterest in the language. To appreciate the appeal of Japanese, it is worth recollecting the strength of Japanese finance, commerce and industry during that period. In the mid-1980s, Japan almost seemed destined to surpass America as the world's foremost economic power, as Charles McMillan (1996) explains:

In 1980, Japan overtook the United States as the leading producer of automobiles. In 1981, the Japanese government launched a ten year programme to build a fifth generation computer system, thereby becoming the world's leading supplier of advanced computer systems. In 1986, Japan replaced the U.S. as the world's leading creditor nation and capital exporter. In these

developments, Japan has mapped out profound changes in the competitive world of the global economy. (McMillan 1996: 4)

Since the bursting of its so-called 'bubble' in the early 1990s, however, Japan has suffered an extended period of relative economic decline (see, among others, Blomström, Gagnes and La Croix 2001; Lincoln 2001; Williams 1994). At the same time, Japan's international political influence has also arguably waned somewhat. Thus, while China's star has been rising steadily, the momentum in Japan's case has largely been in the opposite direction. Indeed, there has been almost a converse relationship between the relative fortunes of China and Japan, in that the economic and political setbacks suffered by the latter have sometimes been to the direct advantage of the former. As well as emerging as a powerful economic rival to Japan (Abe & Lee 2001), China has arguably replaced Japan as the primary political power in the East Asian region. This shift in power has caused particular concern among Japanese politicians, fearful that their country may be downgraded in importance by its chief ally, the United States. Anxiety was heightened in Japan in 1996, when a senior official in the Clinton administration remarked that China was 'America's natural partner in Asia' (Green 1999: 160). A new expression, 'Japan passing', was coined to illustrate that Japan was in danger of becoming less relevant to American interests and hence 'passed over' (see McCormack 1998). Kevin Cooney (2006) believes that Japan has a 'real fear of abandonment'; in particular 'there is a fear by many in Japan that Japan will be abandoned by the United States in favor of China' (Cooney 2006: 103).

Although Japan has been a key regional trading partner and political ally of Australia for most of the post-war period, some observers, like Conley and Heazle (2008), have detected signs of 'Japan passing' in the approach of the Australian government since the election of Kevin Rudd. If any fundamental shift in priorities were ever to occur, it is at least conceivable that the study of Japanese might decline from its current high levels. That said, there is little evidence as yet (as will be argued below) to suggest that Australia has genuinely begun to de-prioritize its relationship with Japan.

The 'One European-One Asian' LOTE Policy

As Kelly & Jones (2003: 13) have observed, schools in Australia tend to offer only one European and/or Asian language on their curricula. This is certainly the case at the majority of schools in Victoria, despite the wide array of LOTEs studied in schools across the state—21 at primary level and 18 at secondary (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009: 3). Given this *de facto* 'one European-one Asian LOTE' policy, individual schools may feel inclined to choose between Japanese and Chinese rather than retain both languages on their curriculum. In purely practical terms, then, the threat to Japanese lies in its similarities with Chinese; namely the fact that it is an Asian language, a non-Roman script language, and a language whose value to the Australian learner is largely perceived through an economic prism. One difference, however, is that Chinese is a leading community language in Australia while Japanese is not. This, as will be argued below, is a highly significant difference.

Signs of Diminishing Support for Japanese Language Education from the Japan Foundation (JF)

At precisely the time when Chinese government agencies have been redoubling their efforts to promote Chinese in Australia, there have been signs of slackening support for Japanese among their counterparts in Japan. The main champion of the Japanese language worldwide is the Japan Foundation (*Kokusai Kōryū Kikin*), described by Utpal Vyas (2008) as ‘a state-level agency which tries to utilise Japan’s soft power’. Although since 2003 the Foundation has operated as independent quasi-governmental agency (*dokuritsu gyōsei hōjin*) (Japan Foundation 2003a), its activities still reflect the priorities of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

Within Australia, the Japan Foundation (JF) has played an active role in supporting Japanese language education since it established its headquarters in Sydney in 1977. In Victoria, the Foundation sponsored for a number of years a full-time Japanese language education advisor, based permanently within the Victoria Department of Education and also conducted a range of gratis training seminars for locally-based teachers of Japanese. However, in 2005, the Foundation withdrew its advisor and also began scaling back some of its other support activities for Victoria-based Japanese LOTE teachers, offering most seminars only at its Sydney headquarters, rather than within Victoria. In the absence of official policy statements from JF, it is unclear exactly why the organization chose to scale down its support activities at this time. It is conceivable that the organization’s policy-makers considered that Japanese had already gained a sufficiently strong foothold in Victorian schools to remain self-sustainable. It is entirely possible, with Japan seeking to increase its political influence in other areas of the globe, that JF policy-makers calculated also that the organization’s resources might be better channelled elsewhere. There has been a notable increase in investment in certain other countries, notably in China, where in April 2006 the Foundation established a ‘Japan Foundation China Center’.

In the view of several Japanese LOTE teachers interviewed in connection with this study, the Japan Foundation’s decision to withdraw its permanent language advisor from the Victorian education department seriously undermined Japanese language education in the state—particularly in light of the increase in *Hanban* and DEECD support for Chinese. It is interesting to note, therefore, a recent change of policy in this regard. After a hiatus of some four years, a new full-time Japanese Language Advisor (this time an Australian rather than a Japanese national) was appointed in mid-2009, perhaps born of a concern to ensure that Japanese should remain one of the primary LOTE languages in the Victorian school system.

Factors Favouring the Retention of Japanese LOTE

In spite of the increased interest in Chinese, there are several reasons for believing that Japanese LOTE will remain strong enough to maintain its position as one of the most-widely studied languages in Victoria’s primary and secondary schools, at least in the short to medium term.

Stakeholders and Support Infrastructure

One factor that suggests that Japanese LOTE will continue to thrive is the strength of the organization that delivers and supports Japanese language education in Victorian schools. Perhaps first and foremost here are the Japanese teachers themselves, who in 2007 numbered 324 in Victorian government schools alone (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009). In Victoria, teachers of LOTE are organized into 'language teachers associations' under an umbrella organization known as MLTAV (the Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria). The organization representing teachers of Japanese, the Japanese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria (JLTAV), is reputed to be one most active and well-organised language teachers' associations in Victoria. According to one JLTAV official interviewed for this study, about 65% of the association's members were Australians of non-Japanese background, while approximately 35% were Japanese native-speakers as of 2008. This represents a significant difference from its Chinese counterpart, CLTAV, whose membership is dominated by native Chinese speakers, a large percentage of whom are teachers at Victoria's Community Languages Schools (also known as 'ethnic schools') rather than government schools.

In addition to the range of activities organized by JLTAV, Victoria-based teachers of Japanese enjoy the benefit of a strong support infrastructure, particularly compared with that which exists for most other LOTEs. In this context, a key institution is the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education (MCJLE), based at Monash University. The Centre, which was established in 1996, offers a range of programmes and activities geared towards teacher education and materials development, as well as a range of grants and scholarships. The MCJLE also manages a well-subscribed e-mail discussion group, *Nihongo Victoria*, which was founded by a former JF-sponsored Japanese language advisor. The support infrastructure for Japanese LOTE has undoubtedly been enhanced further by the appointment of a new permanent DEECD-based language advisor in mid-2009. With the reinstatement of this support, Japanese became one of only five LOTEs for which specific advisors operate within the DEECD (the others being Chinese, Indonesian, Spanish and German).

The Economic and Political Importance of Japan

Although, as explained above, Japan has suffered a certain decline in its geopolitical status and influence since the late 1980s, there are still compelling reasons for Australian policy-makers to regard their relationship with Japan as highly important; thus, there would seem little incentive for them to seek to de-prioritise the learning of Japanese. To illustrate: Japan remains (as of 2009) Australia's largest export market (a position it has occupied for some 40 years) and its second largest trading partner overall. In 2006, merchandise exports to Japan totalled \$32.5 billion Australian dollars; more than the combined value of goods exports to China and the USA (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008: 143). It is thus logical that Australian government and business leaders should continue to regard Japan as a vital export market and a country that offers lucrative opportunities for Australian enterprises. Aside from its economic importance to Australia, Japan is also a long-standing political and military ally. Despite recent disagreements between the two countries over the issue of whaling, the two

countries have long shared the same liberal-democratic values and free-market principles, and there is little as yet to suggest that their bilateral relationship will change fundamentally within the foreseeable future.

The Efficacy of Japanese 'Soft Power'

Although government officials are ultimately responsible for establishing language policy, societal attitudes can play a role in informing decisions as regards which languages are studied in schools. This has certainly been the case in Australia, with its history of parental involvement in various aspects of school decision-making. A positive image of a given country might provide some incentive for study of that country's language while a negative image may detract from its appeal. There is evidence from Australia that societal attitudes towards certain foreign countries *have* influenced the choice of LOTE in given schools. Notable here is the case of Indonesian, study of which suffered a significant decline across Australia in the aftermath of terror attacks against Australian targets in Bali in 2002. According to Yvette Slaughter (2007), many parents expressed vehement opposition at the time to the teaching of Indonesian to their children; in extreme cases lobbying the Victorian education department with the aim of having Indonesian withdrawn from the curriculum (even though the choice of LOTEs is a school decision in Victoria). Interestingly, Slaughter reports also some parents calling for Chinese to be taught in place of Indonesian, on account of its perceived higher value, in relative terms, as a tool for personal economic enrichment.

While, as explained above, the government of China has attempted in recent years to generate 'soft power' around the world through cultural promotion, it should be remembered that Japan has long been a master of the art of cultural diplomacy (see Leheny 2006; Otmazgin 2008). For several decades, the government has successfully promoted Japanese culture around the world through its sponsorship of international events and organizations like the Japan Foundation. In the current age of globalization, however, interest in Japanese culture is largely being generated by non-governmental actors. In particular, the appeal of Japanese 'popular' culture—e.g. fashion, 'J-pop' music, *manga* (comics), *anime* (cartoons), computer games and *karaoke*—has remained strong in many parts of the world, despite the relative decline of the Japanese economy since the 1980s. Ironically, Douglas McGray (2005) believes that Japan's global kudos—what he terms its 'Gross National Cool'—has increased *because of* its economic travails rather than in spite of them. As he explains: 'Perversely, recession may have boosted Japan's national cool, discrediting Japan's rigid social hierarchy and empowering young entrepreneurs' (McGray 2002:51).

To the extent that public opinion can ever be gauged accurately, Japan's image among the Australian public seems generally positive, certainly by comparison with the early post-war period. For instance, in the Lowy Institute opinion poll mentioned earlier in reference to China, 84% of respondents claimed to hold a positive view of Japan (Kurlantzick 2007: 4). Over the past two decades or so, person-to-person contacts among Japanese and Australians have flourished, with high levels of activity in the area of student exchanges. According to one survey from the early 1990s (cited in Marriott 1994a: 94), there were eleven different organizations involved in facilitating extended-stay visits by Australian students to Japan. More

recently, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2009) has reported that approximately 3,000 Australian school students visit Japan each year under 'sister-school exchanges'.

Naturally, it would be unreasonable to equate an interest in Japan and Japanese culture among the populations of other countries with an ability on the part of the Japanese government to influence those populations. However, it is not inconceivable that such an interest might engender a heightened desire to learn the Japanese language. Indeed, one UK-based survey found that a key reason for an increase in Japanese study at British universities was interest in Japanese popular culture. Specifically, the survey report attributed an increase in demand for Japanese studies to the popularity of certain aspects of modern Japanese culture, such as Japanese comic books (*manga*), animations, design and fashion. Significantly, the report suggested this development represented a change from the past when the prime motivation for learning Japanese was 'business' (Hollingworth 2007).

The Vocational Value of Japanese

Although China has overtaken Japan as Australia's largest two-way trading partner, there is still a vocational incentive for Australians to learn Japanese. As I shall argue in the following section, this incentive is arguably stronger than in the case of Chinese.

For at least two decades, Japan has been a popular destination for Australians seeking employment, particularly in the teaching sector. In this regard, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme offers Australian graduates the opportunity to work as teaching assistants in Japanese schools for up to five years (see McConnell 2000). When the Japanese government launched JET in 1987, Australia was one of only four countries invited to participate. As of 2008, 6,514 Australian nationals had participated in the programme (Sources: MOFA 2007; CLAIR 2008). According to Katsumi Kakazu (2001), numerous JET alumni have since gone on to become teachers of Japanese in Australia. For Australians between the ages of 18 and 30, there is the option of taking a year's 'working holiday' in Japan, under a reciprocal scheme launched in 1981 (Marriott 1994b). Within Australia also, employment opportunities exist for Japanese speakers, especially in light of the relatively small number of native Japanese-speaking residents in the country. One major source of employment is the tourism sector, given that Australia is one of the leading overseas destinations for Japanese tourists. In fact, between 1986 and 1997, Japan was Australia's largest source of international tourists (Lim & McAleer 2001: 1261). According to Aso (2006), approximately 700,000 Japanese tourists visit Australia every year.

The 'Uneven Playing Field' vis-à-vis Chinese

As explained above, Australia has experienced a substantial wave of immigration from China. While these immigrants have obviously boosted the role and status of Chinese in Australian society, their presence might also be regarded as a disincentive for the study of that language among Australians of non-Chinese ethnicity. Some have expressed doubt as to whether Australians from non-Chinese-speaking backgrounds can hope to master Chinese to the same

level as those from such a background. Empirical evidence suggests such doubts may be justified. Research conducted within Australia on national tests in three heritage languages (one of which was Chinese) identified a strong relationship between home exposure to the language and performance in the listening and also, albeit to a lesser extent, the reading component of the tests (Elder 1996). In Victoria, VCE results in Chinese LOTE show a clear domination by Chinese background speakers. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the best-performing Chinese LOTE students are those who have enrolled for the VCE through Community Language Schools. These schools are 'for profit' ventures, which operate as *de facto* 'home language' schools for children of different ethnic backgrounds. According to the ESAV (Ethnic Schools of Victoria) website, Chinese was being studied by 11,767 children in 29 schools. Almost invariably, students of these schools achieve the highest VCE scores and can thus continue to attract the most able students. Against this background, it is understandable that Australians of non-Chinese-background should perceive themselves at a comparative disadvantage vis-à-vis the learning of Chinese.

According to the abovementioned Orton report, the teaching and learning of Chinese in Australia is, by senior secondary school, 'overwhelmingly a matter of Chinese teaching Chinese to Chinese' (Orton 2008: 5). At Year 12 nationally, only 3% of students take Chinese, and 94% of those are first language speakers of Chinese. Thus, one of the key recommendations made in the Orton report was for students who speak Chinese at home to be taught and assessed separately from those who learn the language in a classroom. In Victoria, the VCAA has already responded to differing student needs by creating three separate categories of VCE examination for Chinese LOTE ('First Language', 'Second Language' and 'Second Language Advanced'). As yet, there is little evidence of the levelling-out of the 'uneven playing field' that exists for non-Chinese-background students. Given this reality, it would be understandable if non-Chinese background Australians were to perceive themselves as incapable of competing with Chinese native-speakers or those from a Chinese native-speaking background—and not only in the LOTE classroom but also in the job market, e.g. when seeking employment within companies and organizations dealing with China. While this situation pertains to some extent across Australia, it is perhaps particularly prevalent in Victoria, which is home to a large and increasing number of native Chinese-speakers. Again, this represents a significantly different situation from Japanese on account of the much smaller number of Japanese residents.

The 'English Power' of China

Another point to consider when considering the rationale for studying Chinese in Australian schools is the fact that China is home to millions of competent English-speakers. Considerable effort and resources have been invested by the Chinese government to attain high standards of English education. Although the exact number of English speakers is unclear, it was estimated as long ago as 1990 that between 200 and 300 million people were learning and using English in China (Dzau 1990: 1). Writing in 2008, Yukio Tsuda (2008: 50) put the figure at 'more than 500 million'. Significantly, English has been designated as *the* principal foreign language of study in Chinese schools; in contrast to Australia (and perhaps especially Victoria), where individual schools may choose among a wide slate of LOTES, thereby spreading resources. According to Luke Slattery (2009), English is compulsory in Chinese primary schools

from grade three, and from grade one in Beijing and Shanghai. It is evident that many Chinese learn English to a high standard. In 2007, China had the second largest number of students in the world taking the TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language), the world's most widely accepted academic English examination, and test scores have become among the highest in Asia (Educational Testing Service 2008). The use of English in China has become so prevalent that some (like Qiong 2004) have argued that 'China English' should be regarded as a legitimate internationally-accepted variety of English alongside American, British and other so-called 'World Englishes'. Combined with the already substantial pool of bilingual Chinese/English-speakers in Australia, the vast number of competent English-speakers in China would seem to undermine to some degree the economic argument for the mass-study of Chinese among Australian schoolchildren.

Recent Trends in the Study of Japanese and Chinese in Victorian Schools

Unquestionably, Chinese has made considerable headway over the past two decades in terms of establishing itself as a LOTE in Victoria and other Australian states. In Victoria, Chinese was, as of 2007, the sixth most widely-studied language at both the primary and secondary school levels; the number one 'community language'; and the number one language at the Victorian School of Languages (VSL). Chinese is also the LOTE subject with the highest number of VCE enrolments, although, as mentioned above, there are three categories of Chinese examination. In 2008, 2986 students sat VCE examinations in Chinese (VCAA 2008: 4) At the same time, some schools (albeit a very small number thus far) have replaced their Japanese LOTE with Chinese. To appreciate the true strength of Chinese relative to Japanese, it is perhaps useful to consider some recent statistics. The below chart (Table 1) shows the actual number of children studying Japanese and Chinese LOTE at government schools in Victoria.

Table 1: Students of Japanese and Chinese at Government Primary & Secondary Schools in Victoria (2003–2007)

		Japanese	Chinese
2003	Primary	53,619	8,972
	Secondary	21,076	5,591
2004	Primary	56,550	8,270
	Secondary	20,145	3,759
2005	Primary	55,654	8,809
	Secondary	20,392	4,061
2006	Primary	48,347	8,988
	Secondary	20,127	4,121
2007	Primary	46,193	9,163
	Secondary	18,862	3,817

Source: DEECD

It is immediately evident from the above table that Chinese still lags a long way behind Japanese as a target language at both primary and secondary levels. There are still approximately

five times as many children studying Japanese as Chinese. Despite a slight, gradual decline in the number of students studying Japanese at both levels, there has been no explosion in Chinese study akin to the Japanese 'tsunami' of the 1980s. Indeed, over the five-year period featured above, there was actually a decline of more than 30% in the number of secondary students learning Chinese and only a very slight rise at the primary school level.

Conclusion

At the national policy level, it is apparent that Japanese remains very much part of the government's LOTE agenda. Indeed, despite the personal reputation of prime minister Kevin Rudd as an advocate for Chinese, the Rudd government once again designated Japanese as a key language in Australia's most recent foreign language-in-education policy initiative, the 'National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program' (NALSSP). Under the NALSSP, the Australian Government pledged A\$62.4 million over four years to increase opportunities for Australian students to become familiar with the languages and cultures of Australia's 'Asian neighbours', specifically China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. In essence, then, the Program marks a return to the priorities of the NALSAS initiative of the 1990s.

Future changes in foreign language-in-education policy cannot be ruled out entirely, not least given the numerous priority shifts that have occurred since the institution of Australia's first national language policy, NPL, in 1987 (see Lo Bianco 2005). Despite the prevailing 'pro-Asian' language trend, many over the years (e.g. Gibbons 1994; Kirkpatrick 1995; Slattery 2009) have continued to argue that Australian schoolchildren be encouraged to concentrate on 'easier' cognate languages rather than 'difficult' non-Roman script languages' (like Chinese and Japanese). In Victoria, Spanish, a major world language, is still conspicuously underrepresented among LOTEs and would thus seem a logical focus for future development in the state's schools. Moreover, since different political parties can espouse very different causes, a change of government could result in another abandonment of an Asia-centric language policy, as occurred under the leadership of former prime minister, John Howard (see Henderson 2008).

To consider the situation in Victoria on the basis of actual statistics, there are few signs, as yet, of either a dramatic decline in the study of Japanese or a dramatic upturn in the study of Chinese in the state's schools. Perhaps the key point to appreciate is that Japanese *has* established itself as one of the top three LOTEs in Victoria, with enrolment figures several times greater than those of Chinese. Moreover, as Lo Bianco (2003) has explained, Japanese is, for Australians, the 'classic foreign language', which is 'transcending its 'trade' associations to function also as a language of culture in which the foreign is leavened with increasing familiarity' (Lo Bianco 2003: 182). Japanese LOTE already has established a strong infrastructure: a dedicated corps of teachers (most of whom are of non-Japanese ethnicity), an active support network and an established materials development capacity. From a policy perspective, there would seem to be little incentive to dismantle this infrastructure or allow it to become degraded. Although teacher retraining programmes have been undertaken in Victoria in the past—particularly during the 1990s, when NALSAS funding was used to help European LOTE teachers retrain as

teachers of Asian languages (particularly Japanese)—it is questionable to what extent Victorian educational authorities would be willing to sanction another drastic change of orientation, particularly one from one (non-Roman) 'scripted' language to another.

In view of the already considerable number of Chinese native-speakers in Australia, the instrumental value of Chinese to 'the average Australian' remains open to question. While a number of Australians will require a knowledge of Chinese for their daily work, it is likely that this number will remain relatively small. Indeed, it is highly probable that the vast majority of Australian exporters will still be able to sell their products to China without a large number of their employees being able to converse with their Chinese clients in their own language.

At the school level, it is conceivable, as China develops into a truly 'global' power, possibly challenging America for global economic supremacy in coming decades, that more school principals will feel compelled to offer their pupils the opportunity of studying Chinese LOTE. Thus far, however, the number of schools prepared to abandon Japanese in favour of Chinese has remained extremely small. On the basis of all the above, it would seem somewhat unwise to exaggerate the threat to Japanese from Chinese. In short, Japanese appears to have established sufficiently deep roots to enable it to remain one of the most widely studied LOTEs at least in the medium-term.

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