



School of Modern Languages
Newcastle University

Japanese@Newcastle

Edited By Gitte Marianne Hansen
Reader in Japanese Studies

Spring 2025

In this edition of the Japanese@Newcastle newsletter you can enjoy a few glimpses of what it is like to study and work in Japanese Studies at Newcastle University.

Matteo Giacchè starts by reflecting on his almost four years as a PhD student in Japanese literature, revealing how as an Italian he came to enjoy life in Newcastle so much that he hopes to stay. Matteo's journey is followed by final year UG student Lia Price, who recalls losing her suitcase as she settled into Kobe, a stressful start to what turned out to be an 'incredible' and 'unforgettable' Year Abroad experience.

We then turn to Caitlin Atkinson who reports on her time running a Japanese club for West Jesmond Primary School children, a seminal experience that made her want to pursue a career in teaching. Caitlin assisted Fumika Cartledge who has been our forefront staff in running Japanese clubs and taster sessions at local schools and libraries. After nine years of teaching Japanese with us, I regret to report that Fumika has now left the university to work for one of the Japanese companies in the North East. Fumika's contribution, especially regarding outreach activities, cannot be overstated and she will be missed greatly by students and staff! This is clearly seen in the next article by Japanese Language Coordinator and Project Director of the Japanese Outreach project, Kumi Casey who takes the pen to write the 'legacy' of our dear colleague and teacher.

Finally, Professor Kojima Motohiro whom we have had the pleasure of hosting as a visiting Professor from Kyoto University reflects on his nine months at Newcastle. During his time with us, students and staff enjoyed many engaging conversations not the least during the Murakami reading group sessions and his fascinating lecture for the SML seminar series in November 2024.

Get in touch

For information about admissions, Please email sandra.salin@newcastle.ac.uk

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From Rome to Newcastle: A PhD journey in Japanese literature

Matteo Giacchè,
PhD candidate, Japanese Studies

In September 2021 I moved from Rome to Newcastle to pursue my PhD at Newcastle University with a project investigating the role of music in the novels of Murakami Haruki. At the School of Modern Languages, I found an incredibly supportive environment. Starting with my supervisors, Dr Gitte Marianne Hansen and Dr Fernando Belezza Pinto, I have been surrounded by people who share a commitment to mutual enrichment and growth.



I have had the pleasure of meeting individuals who genuinely care, and I have learned how approachable professors and staff are, including the Head of School and the Director of Postgraduate Research. This encouraged me to apply for the position of PGR representative on the School Research Committee, a role I have held for the past two academic years.

The School's international environment and the diversity of PhD students have made my doctoral research a continuous journey of discovery and excitement. With dedicated study spaces for PGRs, it is easy to meet with my cohort, exchange ideas, and thrive in such a stimulating academic setting.

Beyond my fellow PhD students in the School of Modern Languages, it has been equally rewarding to connect with researchers in Japanese Studies through workshops organised by the British Association for Japanese Studies and the European Association for Japanese Studies. These experiences have given me the opportunity to engage with other PGRs researching Japan both in the UK and around the world, as well as to receive valuable feedback from experts in the field. A particularly fulfilling experience was attending the 54th NeMLA convention in Buffalo, USA. This was made possible by funding from Newcastle University, and I was able to engage with experts on Music in Literature studies, broadening the scope of feedback I received.

Another highlight of my PhD journey has been the opportunity to teach. Since 2022, I have worked as a Teaching Assistant alongside Dr. Hansen and Dr Yoshioka in the *Introduction to Japanese Society* module, which I have had the pleasure of teaching in subsequent years as well. Since my second year, I have also contributed as a TA for *Literary and Cultural Expressions in Contemporary Japan*, and this year, I joined the *Contemporary Japanese Pop Culture* module. These teaching experiences have provided me with valuable insights into higher education in the UK. Coming from Italy, I have found it particularly interesting to observe how the education system is structured here. I have had the privilege of working with brilliant students, moderating their presentations, and engaging in stimulating group discussions.



My submission deadline for my PhD is just around the corner. The support I have received from my supervisors, professors, and staff, along with the vibrant international PhD student community, has made my PhD experience truly special. Despite the cold weather, Newcastle is a warm, vibrant city, and I hope I will be able to prolong my stay.

Unforgettable Memories: My Year Abroad in Kobe, Japan

Lia Price,
BA Hons in Japanese Studies



Six months have passed since I returned from my study abroad placement at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, and I can safely say that my year abroad was filled with unforgettable experiences.

I arrived at Kansai Airport in Osaka, Japan, in September 2023. Within ten minutes of entering the country, I was already dealing with my first challenge – my suitcase was missing. Thankfully, I had flown out with my friend James, who was in the same situation, so we had each other as moral support. There were a few tears and some confusion, but the airport staff were extremely understanding and did their best to help us. We fumbled through describing our suitcases in broken Japanese, before being sent on our way with only our hand luggage. In hindsight, this ended up being a blessing in disguise. Sure, it was unbearably humid outside, and I only had two

sets of clothes for the next four days, but I didn't have to lug my massive suitcase through the busy train stations in Osaka and Kobe to get to my university. Instead, the suitcase was waiting for me in my flat when I finally arrived.

The university had a language partner system in place to support us through the process of registering our residence, and after that, we were free to make the most of university life! I was definitely overwhelmed when I first arrived, but instead of letting worries about being on the other side of the world take over, I made it a point to use every moment I had to explore and experience something new. I made the most of my savings and traveled to many incredible places, including Himeji, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, and Okinawa, among others. I also made amazing friends from



both Japan and all over the world. I joined the university swimming club, participated in training, and supported my teammates at competitions. And, of course, I studied a lot of Japanese! I cannot emphasize enough how valuable this experience is for language learning.



If there's one thing I've learned, it's that language learning is so much more enjoyable when you can use it in everyday situations, embrace your mistakes, and have fun with it. Don't get me wrong—it was exhausting—but I took the time to care for myself and made sure to seize every opportunity. I would much rather have tried something and not liked it than passed up an opportunity I might never get again. If anything, I can say that I worked hard and played hard. My time abroad was truly the most incredible experience, and if you ever get the chance, I highly recommend it.

Running a Japanese Club for West Jesmond Primary School

Caitlin Atkinson,
BA Combined Honours, Japanese and Sociology



In 2024, together with another university student, I had the immense pleasure of running a Japanese Club alongside the talented Fumika-sensei for children at West Jesmond Primary School, and I must say: it was nothing short of fantastic!

I have always been passionate about sharing my love for Japanese culture and language and helping run the Japanese Club was the perfect opportunity to do just that. It was lovely to see the enthusiasm of the children, and it inspired me each step of the way. Every week, we got together with club members and from the very first session, the students showed a remarkable willingness to embrace the Japanese language. We started off by teaching them basic words in Japanese and how to use the words in context. I had previously worked with children of a similar age in both Japan and England which came in very handy, and with that experience under my belt, I found it

lot easier to explain words and meanings to the children. It was great to see how they took to it 'like ducks in water'! They were very interested in the language and in listening to me and Fumika-sensei which was lovely to see.

One of the highlights was when we ran the session on traditional Japanese games. Fumika-sensei had brought some games and toys from Japan and the children were so excited to learn about them – where they come from and how to play with them. There was a *kendama* (けん玉) (pictured), which is a little ball on a string attached to a cup. The point of the game is to catch the ball with the cup (there are different levels of difficulty) and a competition – not only between the children themselves, but between me and Fumika-sensei too – quickly took off! Fumika-sensei also brought a *daruma otoshi* (ダルマ落とし), which is a little tower made of round bricks with a *daruma* face. The point of this game is to hit the little blocks out of the tower with a small hammer, but without knocking it over. It was very lovely to see how the British children engaged so energetically with games and toys that I had seen children playing with in Japan.

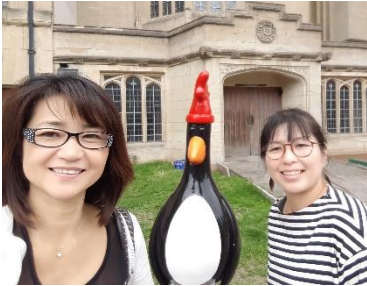


My experience of running a Japanese Club for West Jesmond Primary School, as well as my experience of teaching in Japan during my year abroad, has played a pivotal role in my decision to pursue a career in teaching. The joy of teaching our students about Japan and seeing their excitement affirmed my passion for education. I loved every session I ran with Fumika-sensei and hope that the children enjoyed it at least as much as I did!

Fumika's Legacy: Leading Instructor in the SML Japanese Outreach Project

Kumi Casey

Project Director of the Japanese Outreach project



Since becoming a member of the Japan Foundation Sakura Network in 2015, the School of Modern Languages (SML) at Newcastle University has continuously promoted Japanese language education within the local community.

Fumika Cartlidge joined us eight years ago and has been instrumental in running Japanese clubs and taster sessions at local schools in the Gosforth area and at Gateshead Library, effectively promoting Japanese language and culture.

Fumika's friendly and humorous personality has encouraged everyone to participate in the activities she meticulously prepared. She always ensured that her sessions were inclusive, offering fun activities suitable for all levels of Japanese proficiency, ages, and backgrounds. Activities included paper sumo fights, sushi-making sessions, calligraphy sessions, and more. The positive feedback from participants in her classes, submitted annually in our final report to the Japan Foundation, speaks volumes about her impact. Here are some examples:

- "Fumika-sensei is incredibly helpful and friendly. Despite the different levels in our group, she was always patient and helped everyone with whatever they needed. Her lessons greatly aided me during my time in Japan, enabling me to converse with Japanese people and understand their culture better."
- "Fumika is a great teacher who made the lessons fun."
- "Fumika is a lovely teacher who keeps her students engaged and interested."
- "Fumika is an excellent facilitator. She made the sessions fun and interesting, responded well to our learning pace, and adapted her lessons accordingly. Fumika is very patient and friendly, providing a range of good resources to help us learn."

Fumika also created numerous resources for outreach activities and was part of a project group led by Ms. Ofune from the Japan Foundation to develop resources for Japanese outreach activities, which will be published soon. She generously shared her resources and tips with her successors, ensuring her legacy continues.

As highlighted in Caitlin's article, Fumika also mentored student assistants, helping them gain valuable experience and improve their employability. Some of these assistants have pursued careers in teaching, inspired by their experience with Fumika.



As Fumika has moved on to a new role at a Japanese company in the region, we hope to strengthen our connections with Japanese companies through her. We wish Fumika all the best in her new endeavour and look forward to her continued involvement in our employability events.

Bridging Worlds: Haruki Murakami Studies in the UK and Japan

Professor Motohiro Kojima,
Visiting Professor from Kyoto University

From April 2024 to January 2025, I had the privilege of staying at Newcastle University as a visiting researcher during my sabbatical leave from Kyoto University. My choice of Newcastle was largely influenced by Dr Gitte Hansen, a leading scholar in English-language studies on Haruki Murakami. In 2018, she organized the international conference *Eyes on Murakami* <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/murakami/>, where I had the opportunity to present my research. The conference was the first time I fully grasped the extent of Murakami scholarship conducted in languages other than Japanese. To date, approximately 100 academic papers on Murakami have been published in English, around 300 in Japanese, and an astonishing 1,200 in Chinese.



Despite being a writer whose works transcend linguistic boundaries and captivate readers worldwide; Murakami scholarship remains largely fragmented by language. If linguistic barriers are the main obstacle, then their resolution may be imminent. AI has already surpassed human capabilities in language translation, and within the next two to three years, the Tower of Babel may well be rebuilt. In this envisioned future, we will read, write, listen, and speak in all languages seamlessly. Yet, my time in Newcastle has tempered my optimism regarding the future of global Murakami studies. The objectives and methodologies of academic writing in English and Japanese are often fundamentally different. English-language scholarship tends to be context-oriented, while Japanese-language scholarship is predominantly text-oriented. This stark contrast makes meaningful dialogue between the two traditions exceptionally challenging.

The UK feels distant. Many Japanese have long felt an affinity for Britain—a small island nation that, like Japan, flourished in the 19th century due to its peripheral position relative to the centres of civilization. In some ways, Japan may have perceived a closer cultural connection to Britain than to its geographical neighbours, China or Korea. However, my time in Newcastle made me question whether this was merely an illusion. I witnessed protests in front of Northern Stage Theatre and heard reports of riots in Sunderland, yet I remained an outsider to both. The monotheistic world, with its internal strife and deep-seated animosities, seemed far removed from the Sinic cultural sphere to which Japan belongs. The bridge between the Far East and the Far West is long—perhaps too long.

At the same time, Newcastle introduced me to individuals striving to cross that bridge. The Japanese faculty members in the School of Modern Languages—Etsuko Suda, Kumi Casey, Fumika Cartridge, and Shiro Yoshioka—spoke about Japan in English, and their students listened intently. Gitte Hansen herself, born in Denmark, traverses this bridge through her work on Murakami. Soon, I will do the same—standing in a classroom, speaking to students in Japanese about *Pride and Prejudice*, *Finnegans Wake*, and *Great Expectations*.

Perhaps we are all walking across a bridge that will never truly reach the other side. And yet, when despair threatens to overtake me, I will remember the sights I witnessed in Newcastle. They will remind me that even an unattainable destination is worth striving toward.