



Joyce Ackroyd

JOYCE IRENE ACKROYD 1918 - 1991

Joyce Ackroyd will be remembered as one of the pioneers who changed the pattern of Japanese studies in Australia, a hardworking scholar who continued her work until her body gave up in its fight with her powerful spirit; she will also be remembered as a person of culture, both Japanese and her own.

The principal academic contribution of Professor Ackroyd to world scholarship has been her work on the thinker and public figure Arai Hakuseki (1657-1725), work for which she received international recognition and the prestigious Japan Translator's Cultural Prize in 1978 and the Yamagata Banto Award in 1983. This work required a well-rounded understanding of Tokugawa Japan and an excellent command of the classical language. When asked what attracted her to Arai Hakuseki she wrote in 1991: 'His conscientious studies as a child. It is well known that when he was about 8 and up late studying calligraphy, he would pour a bucket of cold water over himself to revive him! I felt an immediate affinity to him and his powers of concentration as I too would go for 72 hours at a stretch without sleep when I was doing my thesis.' This was her relationship to life. Because of it, much work has remained unfinished: she worked hard until her death on August 30th, 1991.

Professor Ackroyd's early resolution to study Japanese encountered many hurdles. While taking her first degree at the University of Sydney she was not permitted to include Japanese as a subject in her degree. She undertook her first studies of Japanese in evening classes and later completed a PhD in Japanese and Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge. Although in 1951 she was the first recipient of the Saionji Memorial Scholarship for study in Japan, at the time academics were not frequently provided with the opportunity to spend many years in Japan, as became common later.

The significance of Professor Ackroyd's work will stand out if we realise how many Australians could speak, understand, read and write Japanese and, more importantly, understand Japan in 1965. Without firm foundations there could be no further development of Japanese studies in Australia. The mid 1960s was a decisive time for changes. From modest beginnings limited to one and later two universities and a handful of areas of study, the profession developed into a nation-wide establishment that could not be ignored. Four centres took part in this process and the contribution of the University of Queensland, with its Japanese department headed by Professor Ackroyd, was essential.

When in 1965 Professor Ackroyd moved from Canberra (where she headed the Department of Japanese) to Brisbane, some expected that the traditional European pattern of Japanese studies with little emphasis on the contemporary spoken language would be replicated in

the new department which she was elected to create. After all, the Professor's training at the University of Cambridge was mainly in the traditional areas of Japanese studies.

However, the reality was different. Professor Ackroyd introduced courses that not only taught Japanese literature but also the modern Japanese language, both spoken and written. She herself, with other members of her staff, wrote a textbook, the first Japanese language textbook authored and produced in Australia. She encouraged and supervised the work of other members of her department who followed with a number of other language teaching texts.

Professor Ackroyd was one of the first among the professors of Japanese in Australia who understood the progressive role of the teaching of Japanese at the secondary level. She was an enthusiastic promoter of the introduction of teaching Japanese in schools in Queensland and supplemented her activities in this area by lecturing for schools both about Japanese and Japan. She herself gave and arranged for continuous assistance to secondary and primary teachers of Japanese.

On the other hand, she also fully understood the importance of the training of honours and postgraduate students in the Japanese language. She organised courses for honours students in Japan and was the moving force of the University of Queensland post-graduate courses in interpreting and translation. This represented a completely new development in Japanese language teaching which, until that moment, mainly consisted of undergraduate courses covering lower levels of linguistic competence. Certainly an achievement hard to expect from a scholar of classical Japanese history, thought and literature.

Professor Ackroyd's work was not limited to these areas. At a university that could not be staffed by experts in all areas of Japanese culture and society, she did not hesitate to teach courses and supervise students in undergraduate work within other disciplines: linguistics, religion and philosophy, social problems of Japan, political history and regional studies. She conducted research on the history of the Japanese women's movement, the ceramic traditions of Japan and many other topics. These activities make us recall the great Western discoverers of Japan of the past who did not hesitate to study Japan not only in individual disciplinary slices but also as a whole in which all components contributed to the understanding of the whole.

Without the life work of Professor Ackroyd, the growth of informed and interdisciplinary Japanese studies during the 1980s might have been difficult. She was one of the pioneers who built the foundations on which Japanese studies in the country stand.

Professor Ackroyd was an OBE, held the third class of the Order of the Precious Crown and was elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1983.

J.V. Neustupný