

Institution: SOAS
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: From Scholarly Historical Research to Prize-winning Popular Fiction – <i>The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet</i> (Timon Screech)
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Timon Screech's scholarship on under-researched areas of Japanese art, history and culture has reached a range of audiences outside of academia. Notably, it has produced a significant impact on cultural life, demonstrated most clearly by its influence on the renowned author David Mitchell in the writing of his best-selling historical novel <i>The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet</i>, set in Japan in the late 1700s (2010). Mitchell drew extensively upon several of Screech's publications to inform and, ultimately, enrich his work of fiction, furnishing it with historical contextual detail unavailable in any other scholarly source.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Screech has worked on the history of East-West relations in early-modern Japan since the 1980s, and has published extensively on Japanese history, art and culture, with a specific focus on the Edo period. After completing his PhD at Harvard University in 1991, he joined SOAS where he was elected Chair in the History of Art in 2006. He is also Permanent Visiting Professor at Tama Art University, Tokyo, having previously been Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago, and guest researcher at Gakushuin and Waseda Universities, Tokyo.</p> <p>Screech published his first monograph, <i>The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan</i>, in 1996. This book provides an original assessment of the material culture of Nagasaki (uniquely, an open port in the Edo period), and how that city came to influence the hinterland of Japan. Specifically, it explores the introduction of Western technology and scientific instruments to Japan, including glass, lenses, and mirrors, and their profound effect on Japanese notions of sight, and how this change in perception was reflected in popular culture. The text draws heavily on research undertaken in the archives of the Dutch East India Company and on early-modern Japanese books, many of which had never been subject to scholarly enquiry. The book was translated into Japanese, resulting in significant scholarly impact in Japan, and later reissued in an English paperback edition in 2002 as <i>The Lens within the Heart: the Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan</i>.</p> <p>In another important monograph, <i>The Shogun's Painted Culture: Fear and Creativity in the Japanese States, 1760-1829</i> (2002), Screech maintains focus on Edo culture of eighteenth-century Japan, this time exploring the career of chief minister Matsudaira Sadanobu who was integral to defining Japanese culture. The text proposes that, during the mid-Edo period, a conscious effort was made to establish a national Japanese identity through controlled use of imagery in officially sponsored art forms. As with his earlier work, Screech sheds new light on an under-researched area of Japanese cultural history, thereby making a significant and unique contribution to studies in this field. The same can be said of Screech's <i>Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Imagery in Japan, 1720-1810</i> (2009), which offers an altogether new and extensive analysis of the genre of Japanese paintings and prints known as <i>shunga</i>, seeking to re-establish it in its proper historical context.</p> <p>In addition to his monographs, Screech has edited the memoirs of two employees of the Dutch East India Company at the turn of the eighteenth century, making them available to English-speaking audiences for the first time in over two hundred years. These memoirs are introduced and meticulously annotated by Screech in <i>Japan Extolled and Decried: Carl Peter Thunberg and Japan, 1775-1796</i> (2005) and <i>Secret Memoirs of the Shoguns: Isaac Titsingh and Japan, 1779-1822</i> (2006). Using sources in Japanese and many European languages, Screech's in-depth commentaries to the original texts provide insightful contextual information, particularly regarding life in Nagasaki for European traders at the time.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Imagery in Japan, 1720-1810*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009, 2ND edition. (Also published in Japanese and Polish)
- b. *Secret Memoirs of the Shoguns. Isaac Titsingh and Japan, 1779-1822*. London: Routledge, 2006. (Published in paperback edition in 2009)
- c. *Japan Extolled and Decried: Carl Peter Thunberg and Japan, 1775-1796*. London: Routledge, 2005. (Published in paperback edition in 2012)
- d. *The Lens within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*. Richmond: Curzon, 2002, 2nd revised edition; first published in 1996.
- e. *The Shogun's Painted Culture: Fear and Creativity in the Japanese States, 1760 - 1829*. London: Reaktion Books, 2000. (Also published in Japanese).

Output b was submitted to the RAE in 2008.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Screech's treatment of little-explored aspects of Japanese history, art and culture makes him an authoritative voice, especially on the Edo period (1603-1868), when Japan was ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate and characterised by strict social order and isolationist foreign policies. Many of Screech's works constitute the only available resources concerning their subject matter, thus their contribution to understanding of Japan cannot be underestimated.

Screech's accessible and entertaining writing style makes his work available to audiences beyond academia, resulting in considerable impact on cultural life and creativity. Significantly, the publications listed above proved invaluable sources for the celebrated British novelist David Mitchell. Mitchell "relied extensively" on Screech's work to inform the writing of his 2010 historical novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (1, 2, 3 and 4, below). The novel, set at the turn of the eighteenth century, depicts Dejima, the Dutch East India Company's walled enclave in the harbour of Nagasaki (for almost two centuries, Japan's sole point of contact with the European world), and tells the story of a Dutch trader's love for a Japanese midwife. Mitchell incorporates into his novel numerous historical details, episodes and anecdotes featured only in Screech's work in order to afford it greater historical authenticity. Specifically, he drew much inspiration from Screech's editions of the memoirs of two Dutch East India Company employees, Carl Peter Thunberg and Isaac Titsingh. Although Mitchell does not fictionalise either, his understanding of the Edo period, and the complex encounter between East and West, owes much to Screech's lengthy introductions and highly detailed annotations.

Mitchell's novel was also heavily informed by two of Screech's monographs: *The Lens within the Heart* and *The Shogun's Painted Culture*. A close reading of these texts enabled Mitchell to recreate the intellectual world of the *rangakusha*, the Japanese scholars of European sciences and arts. A specific illustration of Mitchell's use of Screech's work is found in Chapter Four of the novel which features a description of bottles of pickled specimens outside the State Room of the Dutch East India Company in Dejima (pp. 37-8). These bottles, never before mentioned in scholarly work, figure prominently in Screech's analysis of medical and scientific exchange in *The Lens within the Heart*. Additionally, Mitchell's depiction of a Nagasaki brothel was very much inspired by Screech's *Sex and the Floating World*.

Mitchell himself, though never having met Screech, is frank about his "intellectual and imaginative" indebtedness to his publications, and explicitly attests to influence:

“He is the kind of academic interpreter of history and ideas upon whom more popular interpreters (lower down the food chain) rely (...). In my opinion, nobody else is doing what Professor Screech does: making accessible to interested non-specialists (like me), via primary research, areas of Japanese and East Asian culture which would otherwise lie buried, just as the Titsingh and Thunberg memoirs languished in untranslated antiquarian obscurity for two centuries until his work appeared (...). Nobody else I know of possesses so deep a knowledge of the Tokugawa period – its arts, economics, politics, religion trade, popular culture, its view of itself – and writes about this milieu so accessibly, and with such authority and verve.”

Mitchell’s use of Screech’s pioneering scholarship was also recognised in a review of the novel in the *London Review of Books*, in which Screech is quoted as an expert on the ‘cultural collision’ that took place in the unique context of the walled Dutch port of Dejima (5).

To date, Mitchell’s novel has sold in excess of 200,000 copies in over 15 languages, with a Japanese edition appearing in 2013. The novel won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature 2011 (South Asia and European prize) (6), was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2010 (7), and shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction 2011 (8). It was named among the books of the year by *The Time*, *The Washington Post*, *The Financial Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The New York Times*. It has also featured on several English literature university course reading lists, including Surrey (9) and Oxford (10).

Mitchell’s use of Screech’s research is noteworthy in its illustration of how research can inspire and inform a much-lauded work of literary expression, enriching it with historically accurate detail and enabling an under-studied period to be brought to life. As Mitchell himself states, “Had I tried to write *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* 15 years earlier, before Professor Screech’s work was published, it would have been an impoverished novel by comparison.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. David Mitchell, author
2. Mitchell, David. *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. London: Sceptre, 2010. (The novel has been translated into over fifteen languages, including Japanese)
3. Publisher’s website UK, with reviews: <http://www.hodder.co.uk/Books/detail.page?isbn=9780340921586> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
4. Publisher’s website US, with reviews: <http://www.thousandautumns.com/thousand-autumns/> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
5. Review of *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. Reynolds, Matthew. “A Smaller Island”. *London Review of Books* 10 June 2010: 23-24.
6. Commonwealth Writers’ Prize: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/mar/04/commonwealth-writers-prize-regional-winners> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
7. Man Booker Prize 2010: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/timeline> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
8. Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-12932522> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].

Impact case study (REF3b)

9. University of Surrey course reading list featuring Mitchell's novel:
<http://sits.surrey.ac.uk/live/ipo/ELI3013-0001.htm> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].
10. University of Oxford Summer School course reading list featuring Mitchell's novel:
<http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/details.php?id=q320-14> [Most recently accessed 15.11.13].