

<b>Institution:</b> University of Aberdeen
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> NORTH/EAST: Cultural Links between Scotland and Japan, 19 <sup>th</sup> Century to Present Day
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study traces the impact on cross-cultural links between Scotland and Japan of <i>The Pure Land</i>, a historical novel by Alan Spence based on the life of Thomas Glover, a merchant from Aberdeen who emigrated to Japan in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Glover was an influential figure in the development of modern industrial Japan, and was instrumental in the founding of Mitsubishi. A revered figure in Japan, he was less well known in his own country. Publication of <i>The Pure Land</i> in 2006 transformed this, generating global interest in Glover and highlighting previously unrecognised affinities between Eastern (particularly Japanese) and Western (particularly Scottish) cultures. As well as inspiring a new biography, newspaper articles and radio programmes, and various educational initiatives, Spence's novel has enhanced cultural ties between Scotland and Japan, and extended public understanding of the history of globalisation. Other works by Spence on Scottish-Japanese themes have extended this influence.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Alan Spence is an award-winning writer who has taught Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen since 1996 and has been Professor in Creative Writing since 2005. In 1996 he was Scottish Writer of the Year, winning the McVitie Prize. He founded the annual WORD Festival in 1999.</p> <p>The research that underpins <i>The Pure Land</i> is Spence's previous creative work, archival research, collaboration with other Glover experts, and a series of research visits to Japan. Spence's publications include fiction, poetry and drama: in all of his writing there is a strong sense of place and historical context, but underlying this is a thread of the magical and poetical, a search for a deeper spiritual truth. This often takes the form of a 'journey to the East' and an exploration of Eastern – especially Japanese – philosophy.</p> <p>These interests, already evident in Spence's early poetry collection <i>Glasgow Zen</i> (1981; expanded edition 2003), are central to <i>The Pure Land</i> and to his other works on Scottish-Japanese themes, which include a mini-opera, <i>Zen Story</i>, commissioned and performed by Scottish Opera in 2010; a book of Japanese-form poems, <i>Morning Glory</i> (2010), with illustrations by Dame Elizabeth Blackadder; and his latest novel, <i>Night Boat</i> (2013), based on the life of the 17th-century Zen master Hakuin Ekaku. All of these works involve exploration of the 'Zen mind' and how it relates to the everyday: something perceived as esoteric is seen as universal, while also being framed in a distinctively Scottish context.</p> <p>Of the research visits to Japan, one – to Nagasaki in 1999 – had particular significance for the novel. As well as visiting Glover's home (now a museum and major tourist attraction which receives half a million visitors a year), Spence met the foremost Western expert on Glover, Canadian Brian Burke-Gaffney, who lives in Nagasaki, and discussed the project with him at length. Another important consultant was Alexander Mackay, based in Edinburgh, the author of the first book on Glover – <i>The Scottish Samurai</i>, published by Canongate in 1993. Both men shared with Spence their research materials: not only their own writings but also extensive archive material – books, newspapers, photographs and commercial documents relating to the topic of Glover and throwing light on his historical period. On-site research in Nagasaki also included visits to locations associated with Glover, such as the dock he imported from Aberdeen and the island where he developed coal-mining – first steps towards the industrialisation of Japan.</p> <p>This artistic, biographical and historical research enabled the author to capture and adapt Eastern</p>

modes of thought and expression for Western readers, and to use the medium of fiction to elicit imaginative understanding of the history of globalisation while also probing the deep historical and cultural ties between Scotland and Japan. *The Pure Land* is a novel 'grounded in historical research and filled with emotional truths' (*Daily Mail*) which has reached an international public and had a tangible influence on cross-cultural relations.

### 3. References to the research

#### Publications

##### Novels:

- *The Pure Land* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006). Winner of the Glenfiddich Spirit of Scotland Literature Award 2006.
- *Night Boat* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013).

##### Poetry:

- *Glasgow Zen* (1981; expanded edition Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003).
- *Morning Glory* (Edinburgh: Renaissance, 2010). Illustrations by Dame Elizabeth Blackadder.

##### Libretto:

- *Zen Story* (Glasgow: Scottish Opera, 2010).

##### Short story:

- 'The Emperor's Warriors' (Radio 4, *Glasgow Herald*, 2009).

#### Research Grants

- Creative Scotland Professional Development Award (£4500) funding research trip to Japan, November 2011.
- Grant from Hanazono University in Kyoto (£1200) to fund trip to Tokyo for participation in Zen Art conference January 2013 (keynote speaker). Awarded October 2012.

### 4. Details of the impact

The impact of *The Pure Land* is indicated first by its world-wide sales and translation into 16 languages, with other translations in preparation. In addition to many English-language editions, the novel has appeared in translation between 2008 and 2013 in French, Italian, Spanish, Brazilian, Portuguese, Hebrew, Greek, Czech, Russian, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, Finnish, Danish, Polish and Chinese, with editions forthcoming in Japanese and German. Book sales for English-language editions currently total over 50,000 copies, and for other languages worldwide in the region of 60,000. In each country, the critical reception of the novel has mirrored its commercial success, confirming its status as an important work of global fiction.

On its initial publication, the book was launched at the Edinburgh International Book Festival and featured at the Aberdeen WORD Festival (with audiences in excess of 200 for each of Spence's own readings, and attendance figures of 10,000 for the WORD Festival as a whole). Spence has since done numerous other readings, including at the Aye Write Festival in Glasgow, at festivals in Ullapool, Wigtown and Nairn, and at events in London (Poetry Society, ICA). Internationally, he has appeared at a conference on European literature in Turin, at British Council events in Madrid and Prague, and at events in Poland (Warsaw, Krakow and Wroclaw, 2008). On all of these occasions

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he has read from and discussed *The Pure Land* and other Japanese-themed works, reaching audiences beyond the academic.

Spence's ability to explore and crystallise through his writing the relationship between Scotland and Japan has made him an important cultural ambassador between the two countries as well as an artistic authority on the history of Thomas Glover. In 2006, Spence was the guest speaker at an event in the Scottish Parliament honouring Glover, and since 2008 has been a regular guest of the Japanese Consulate at functions in Edinburgh, notably in December 2011 when he read his work at a fundraising event for victims of the Japanese tsunami which raised over £3000.

In November 2011 Spence was awarded Creative Scotland funding for a research trip to Japan to further his work on Scottish-Japanese themes. There he linked with two prominent scholars – Norman Waddell of Otani University and Yoshizawa Katsuhiko of Hanazono University – both of whom have since visited Scotland. On the same trip, Spence visited Kanda University in Chiba and spoke to a group of professors and a class of undergraduate students about his own work, Scottish literature in general, and the teaching of Creative Writing. In January 2013 he was invited to return to Japan to speak at a conference in Tokyo on Zen Art.

In Scotland, *The Pure Land* has helped to foster public interest both in Glover and in the broader history of Scottish-Japanese relations. The novel has featured in articles on the business pages of *The Scotsman* and was discussed at a conference at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen (July 2008) in a panel on 'Glover Tourism' from Japan to Aberdeen. Spence's work has also influenced a generation of younger writers to explore Eastern spirituality in a Scottish context, and Scotland in the light of Eastern philosophy. These include Anne Donovan, Des Dillon and Kevin Macneil, all of whom acknowledge Spence's influence. A young academic, Michael Gardiner, wrote a new biography of Glover (*At the Edge of Empire*, 2008) inspired by the success of *The Pure Land*. Spence's influence can also be seen in David Mitchell's novel *The Thousand Autumns of Jakob de Zoet* (2010), which is set in Nagasaki and acknowledges Spence in its afterword.

The impact of Spence's writing has been extended through his collaboration with artists and musicians. These include public performances with jazz musician Dick Lee, Japanese koto player Mio Shapley and shakuhachi master Yoshikazu Iwamoto, as well as the creation of the mini-opera *Zen Story* with composer Miriama Young, commissioned by Scottish Opera and premiered in Glasgow on 26 May 2010. His collaborative work with artist Dame Elizabeth Blackadder on *Morning Glory* was presented at the WORD festival in 2010 and at the Global Pecha Kucha 'Inspire Japan' exhibition in Edinburgh in April 2011. These collaborations underline Spence's role as a cultural mediator whose work testifies to the importance of art in the relationship between the two countries at a time when public fascination with the East is dominated by economic concerns. The enthusiastic reception of Spence's new novel *Night Boat*, launched at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2013, is a further demonstration of his ability to capture and shape the public imagination on Scottish-Japanese themes.

A final area in which the impact of *The Pure Land* is evident is secondary education. Spence's work has long been used in Scottish schools, and a study of two of his books was published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 2010. The author, Dr John Burns, is a teacher at Dumfries Academy, and *The Pure Land* is among the other works that he discusses in the study and teaches to pupils. Spence's novel answers a widely felt need in the Scottish curriculum for contemporary writing that is sensitive to cultural difference and issues of globalisation.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Public readings (*The Pure Land*, *Morning Glory*, *Night Boat*): programmes for Edinburgh International Book Festival and Aberdeen Word Writers Festival, 2006-2013 (scanned extracts).
2. *Zen Story*, Scottish Opera programme, May 2010.

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3. Reviews of *Zen Story* and *Morning Glory* 2010 (online, print).
4. Global Pecha Kucha exhibition programme, Edinburgh, 16 April 2011.
5. 'Stand with Japan' fundraising event programme, Edinburgh, December 2011.
6. Testimonial letter from Japanese Consulate, 25 September 2013.
7. Contact details for Dr John Burns (Dumfries Academy).

Published citations:

8. Michael Gardiner, *At the Edge of Empire: The Life of Thomas Blake Glover* (Polygon, 2008).
9. David Mitchell, *The Thousand Autumns of Jakob de Zoet* (Sceptre, 2010).
10. John Burns, *Alan Spence's Its Colours They are Fine and Way to Go* (Scotnotes Study Guides, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2010).