

## **Fourth EAJS PhD Workshop at Oxford**

Supported by The Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO), the fourth EAJS workshop for doctoral students was held at Oxford University from 3-5 May, 2007. There had been a very good response to the call for participation, with thirty applications and thirteen successful candidates, and the workshop itself was very successful as the following feedback reports of the candidates state.

### **Feedback Reports of Participants**

I had the great pleasure to participate at the 4th annual EAJS Ph.D. workshop which was held at Oxford University.

It provided me the wonderful opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas on my dissertation project and meet very interesting and friendly advisors and fellow Ph.D. candidates. I enjoyed the intense and constructive contact not only with my personal advisor Prof. Dr Ben-Ari, but all the participants of the workshop. Hence it provided an inspiring environment with people from different countries, cultural backgrounds and in particular different scientific disciplines. The benefits were technical (e.g. practicability of research methods etc.) as well as personal, as it is very important to participate in networks of scientists interested in Japanese studies and experience the support of advisors and fellow Ph.D. candidates.

The whole workshop was organised exceptionally well by Dr Parissa Haghirian and Dr Ian Neary. The participants were well prepared and very interested in the presentations given by each other, which led to lively and constructive discussions after and during the presentations.

The time with my personal advisor Prof. Eyal Ben-Ari was very constructive, which helped me to get over some obstacles in my dissertation project and was a huge source of motivation.

The good mood and exciting atmosphere continued into the participants' free time, and we enjoyed getting to know each other a little better and exchange

different experiences of the Japanese culture and society. As I have not yet had the possibility to visit Japan, this was a very interesting and important aspect for my dissertation project.

I sincerely hope to keep in contact with this inspiring and likeable group of people and I thank the EAJS, the Toshiba Foundation and the organisers for inviting me to this wonderful event.

*Workshop Participant*

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I would like to thank you for organizing the workshop. It provided me as well as all student participants with a unique opportunity to present our research plans and receive valuable and well-grounded feedback from renowned scientists working in related fields. I really enjoyed participating in fruitful and stimulating discussions and networking with world-class scientists. I am sure that the contacts established in this meeting will help me a great deal in my future research. I would also like to praise the excellent organization and thank all persons that contributed to it, in particular Dr Haghirian and Dr Neary who successfully managed the difficult task of coordinating the workshop. Last but not least I would like to express my gratitude to the Toshiba International Foundation for making this event possible.

*Workshop Participant*

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The 4th EAJS Doctoral Workshop at the University of Oxford (2007) provided me with a wider academic context to present my current research to the field of Japanese Studies. The variety of different backgrounds offered a platform to gain more insights in alternative research approaches, how to present my research topic to a different audience and how to deal critically with aspects of each stage

during the research process. Having presented my work on other occasions, I realized during the workshop, that this kind of event offered more direct and stimulating feedback, discussion and academic exchange.

Currently conducting my fieldwork in Tokyo, I was able to re-evaluate my current research perspective, which should focus again in the next steps on the central research questions, analysing and presenting the research results and contributing within a more rigorous theoretical context.

Dealing with interdisciplinary research questions of anthropological, urban and Japanese studies, I largely profited from the various presentations, styles and feedback given during the workshop. This allowed me to see my own research in a different perspective and to develop a more rigorous argument in the coming stages of data analysis and writing-up.

Personally, the workshop was a great opportunity to position my research and future work in the wider framework of Japanese studies, and especially establish contact with different scholars from European and Japanese universities. During the intensive workshop, the participants discussed and exchanged their different views in- and outside the seminars, and the informal atmosphere allowed a discussion of all kind of aspects and details relating to one's academic and personal development

I would like to thank Dr Parissa Haghirian, the Toshiba Foundation, and Oxford University for making such an event possible and allowing me to take part at an interdisciplinary workshop. Finally, I especially thank Prof. Eyal Ben Ari who gave important stimulating and personal feedback which encouraged me to develop the topic further and turn weak points into strong aspects of my future contribution to the field of Japanese and Urban Studies.

*Workshop Participant*

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First and foremost, my sincere gratitude to the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) for giving me the opportunity to participate in the 4th EAJS Doctoral Workshop, held at the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, Oxford University, from 3-5 May 2007. This year's event saw the congregation of, and rigorous deliberations on a diverse range of PhD research topics by outstanding doctoral candidates and renowned scholars from the broad fields of Japanese studies. In my opinion, this was a most intellectually stimulating and enriching experience. Personally, it was a great pleasure for me to be able to discuss my own doctoral research proposal with them, and, gaining valuable feedback, novel insights, and constructive advice, which were beneficial to improving my proposed study. Likewise, the presentations of other research proposals by fellow colleagues/participants, and the intensive discussions thereafter, not only gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own dissertation, but also broadened my knowledge on both generic/specific methodologies and research designs that can be employed within the inter-disciplinary context of Japanese studies. I was most impressed by the intellectual sharpness, dedication and ability of the research advisors, all of whom had provided constructive suggestions and comments, which will undoubtedly be of immense benefit to all participants. The workshop also provided a useful platform for the development of a network of young scholars working on Japan. I especially would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Paul Midford for the valuable personal feedback and suggestions, and last but not least, the organizers, not to mention, the Toshiba International Foundation, for making this possible.

*Workshop Participant*

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The workshop was a great success from many perspectives: developing further PhD research, receiving feedback on methodology and research plans, discussing challenges with other PhD students, and learning about many topics in Japanese studies. In an inspiring atmosphere we discussed various issues on

Japan: Culture, Society, Politics, and Management. The multidisciplinary environment supported a holistic understanding of the various topics. The workshop was ideal to create new links and supported understanding neighbouring research fields by identifying and studying similarities in research ideas. I hope to further collaborate on various topics with other EAJS workshop participants.

I really appreciated having the opportunity to participate in the workshop, and I would like to thank Toshiba Foundation for the generous funding, and also Parissa Haghirian and Per Larson for the excellent organization. Special thanks to all professors for giving inspiring and constructive feedback.

*Workshop Participant*

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The three day EAJS PhD workshop was a unique opportunity for me as an interdisciplinary researcher (Political science, Japan studies & European studies) focusing on Japanese Politics to hone my understanding of Japanese realities. Such a remarkable coming together of a broad range of researchers—both junior as well as senior—sharing a common interest in Japan has been a remarkable exercise both in knowledge-building as well as in further cultivating analysis of Japan. Moreover, these three days were an excellent networking opportunity as well as a very successful effort to further disseminate information on the nature and function of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS). The seminar therefore fulfilled three essential goals: in depth debate on the content as well as the methodologies involved in Japanese Studies; increasing mutual recognition within the Japanese Studies community throughout Europe (beyond the limits of specific institutions or fields of study); and strengthening the profile as well as the perceived utility of the EAJS amongst a diverse group of PhD students and their promoters. Finally the opportunity to enjoy individual tutoring was undoubtedly the best way to conclude a remarkably productive three day exercise.

As for the organization one can only applaud and congratulate the organizers on an impeccable job. The three day workshop proceeded very smoothly and in a relaxed atmosphere allowing for optimal networking and feedback. Any suggestions one might make do not in anyway reflect negatively on the seminar as it was held but suggest various possible courses of action. Thus, fully appreciative of the multidisciplinary nature of the workshop I do think this would be better harnessed if the organizers opted for thematic session, grouping presentations on parallel subjects (or at least within contiguous fields) in groups of two under a common session heading. Furthermore, a presiding chairperson might provide for some more structure in the ensuing debates allowing for more structured feedback. A final element which would contribute to the seminar's popularity and relevance for researchers is considering various publication opportunities or contacts that might be interwoven into the workshop's agenda.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the workshops main value: its incredible variety of participants all bound by a common interest and methodology: Japanese Studies. The seminars inherent flexibility and broad selection of topics combined with its disciplinary openness (supported by the choice of English as its working language) created a particularly beneficial atmosphere which supports the efforts of the various participants striving to contribute to a better understanding of their research object: Japan in all its complexities

*Workshop Participant*

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Presenting my work in front of the audience of fellow Japanese Studies graduate students and academics was a useful experience, and good practise for me. The feedback was especially helpful, as it allowed me to hear some points of view from people who had different approaches or whose work is not so closely related to my topic, and also made me realise the weaker points of my argument that needed sharpening up. On a less formal note, the workshop was a good social experience, and I was able to meet someone from the university in Tokyo, where I will shortly be doing fieldwork.

*Workshop Participant*

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Participating in the EAJS Doctoral Workshop 2007 proved to be a highly rewarding experience. I met a lot of very interesting people and we had excellent discussions. Learning about other people's research projects and their approaches to conducting research in Japan has broadened my understanding of methodological issues as well as providing me with various intriguing insights into Japanese politics, culture, sociology, architecture and culture, among others. In addition, receiving feedback on my own research project from people with such diverse backgrounds made me think about aspects of my research anew as it was interesting to see people approach my questions from different perspectives than I would have. This provided me with possible solutions that I probably would not have identified alone and gave me additional food for thought. The individual coaching sessions added further to the benefit of the workshop. During this session, I received valuable feedback and suggestions which will surely prove most beneficial during the further development of my research project. I would like to thank the organizers for their efforts and the wonderful experience of participating in this workshop.

*Workshop Participant*

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In the beginning of the workshop Professor Haghirian said that the workshops she attended as a doctoral student had saved her a couple of years in the completion of her thesis. I couldn't agree more. Especially the individual time with Professor Ben-Ari was extremely relevant for me.

On the whole, this has been a great experience and I would like to thank the Toshiba International Foundation for offering the means for organizing such an event, as well as the professors involved. I would definitely like to attend the next similar event.

*Workshop Participant*