

Sixth EAJS PhD Workshop, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 21–24 March 2010, University of Cambridge, UK

Reports of the EAJS PhD Workshop Participants

The 6th EAJS PhD workshop at Cambridge University provided our diverse group with a great forum to present and discuss our ongoing PhD research projects. While many conferences mainly focus on a particular aspect of the field, this particular workshop invited us to think about topics different from our own focus.

In addition, the disciplinary diversity of the group allowed us to see our own topic from a different angle and think about possible different approaches. Topics ranged from pre-modern to modern, and engaged all the participants in discussions of questions in areas of religious, anthropological, political or historical interest. What really set apart this Workshop from similar events, was the opportunity to consult with a senior scholar who acted as supervisor for the duration of the workshop. In my case, I was able to receive constructive academic feedback as well as advice regarding further career planning.

*Mikael Bauer
University of Harvard*

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To me the 6th EAJS PhD workshop provided strong evidence of the sound and firm state of the European tradition of Japanese studies. I was glad to meet representatives of different schools from various countries, gathered together at Cambridge in order to discuss the common issues of their PhD papers. And the most important impression left with me after the event was over, is that all of those, whom I could see and hear during the workshop, should be undoubtedly judged as belonging to a common European school of Japanese studies. During the workshop session I was truly convinced that Europe possesses at least the same level of tradition of Japanese Studies as the US and Japan.

And after being able to listen to and understand the quality of the topics presented during the workshop, I understood fully that the tradition is not going to come to an end soon, but instead keep developing. Until there are enough students ready to carry out intensive, multi-aspect and fully-fledged research, there will be always a need to organize events such as this one, in order to pass the experience of generations of European scholars of Japan to those just starting along this path.

Moreover, this meeting made clear for me a sense of belonging too. Though for some of us the tradition of my country is considered as somewhat separate from the European tradition, I understood wholly that the only reason for this separation is the language barrier. And I do hope that soon this (the last) barrier will be overcome as well, letting lots of researchers join the European school, enriching it, making a part of each other, thus promoting the sphere of Japanese studies even further.

I do not speak a lot about the circumstances of the Workshop, since it was simply perfect in all aspects, but I hope that the EAJS meetings will become even more European, not centering on the EU only, but including participants from countries which are increasingly conscious of their scholarly affinity to the European school. And after the discussions that I had with the Workshop participants, I realized that sooner or later this is bound happen.

Konstantin Belov
St Petersburg State University

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The workshop was a wonderful opportunity to meet with other graduate students in Japanese studies. Given the small size of many Japanese departments, studying at a post-graduate level can be an isolating experience. I particularly enjoyed discovering the breadth of topics out there and being able to discuss matters relating to the study of Japan with others who share my enthusiasm.

I enjoyed meeting all of the students who participated in the workshop, and have since been in contact with several who are working on matters related to my topic of study.

We have discussed the possibility of joint conference panels, as well as sharing book suggestions and useful academic contacts.

It was also especially rewarding to meet the supervisors who were kind enough to spend time giving us the benefit of their perspectives and experience individually and also during the presentations.

I am most grateful to the EAJS and to the Japan Foundation, the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee, the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge for sponsoring this workshop. Many thanks also to Dr Steger who was tireless in organizing the event and ensuring that it was a success.

Rebekah Clements
University of Cambridge

I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend the EAJS Doctoral Workshop held at Cambridge University in March 2010. Participating in such prestigious event has been an awe-inspiring and stimulating experience. The workshop was intensive and challenging: we spent two entire days engaging in lively discussions about our projects and I was able to see how research approaches and methodology may vary from country to country. At the same time, I was glad to find out that, in spite of the heterogeneity of our research topics (spanning social studies, humanities and science) a number of dissertation projects were exploring - from different perspectives and disciplines - similar issues to the ones I am currently interested in.

I also believe that the discussions not only raised in the candidates an awareness of the weak points in their thesis but they also provided an opportunity to improve those dialectical skills that will be further needed when defending the thesis. I am also thankful for the advice I was given during the individual tutoring as well as for the feedback and comments I received from the supervisors and the other candidates.

Last, but not least, I wish to express all my gratitude to the organizer, Prof. Brigitte Steger for her kind hospitality in Cambridge, to the advisors for their constructive comments, and to EAJS for their generous funding.

Yours Sincerely,

Emanuela Costa
University of Naples "L'Orientale"

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Every doctoral student acknowledges the importance of networking with other scholars related to his/her area of expertise in order to receive thesis feedback. In this regard, the 12th International Conference of EAJS was the best one could have asked for.

It was an honour and a fruitful experience to attend this PhD workshop along with some of the best international PhD students researching on Japan. Thanks also to Cambridge University, with its academic infrastructures and its impeccable organization, the conference saw all its participants actively working with enthusiasm and a cooperative spirit. Schedules were indeed efficiently optimized and aimed to encourage academic discussion, for the benefit of both the presenter and the audience.

Such a good format contributed to keep all the participants active, helped them to strengthen their presentation skills and allowed them to receive precious feedback for the development of their Ph.D. research.

Finally yet importantly, the private supervision provided by internationally known senior scholars at Cambridge University alone was certainly worth the trip to Cambridge.

I would like to express all my gratitude to the sponsors and the EAJS for this great opportunity, Professor Richard Bowring for his precious and inspiring supervision, and Dr. Brigitte Steger for perfectly organizing every aspect of the workshop. For the benefit of European scholarship, I hope that in the future the EAJS will be able to organize more and more successful events like this.

Enrico Giulia
"La Sapienza" University of Rome

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The 6th EAJS PhD workshop which took place in Cambridge offered me a great opportunity to discuss my PhD project with other doctoral candidates, post-doc scholars and professors. Not only the critical responses to my presentation, but also the advice, the supervision and the ideas and comments given to me while talking in the coffee breaks or during the meals were very helpful. Furthermore, listening to and thinking about other projects, which seemed at first sight not directly related to my topic, have turned out to be fruitful for my own work. To me the two and a half really dense days of discussion were helpful to sharpen my own approach and to get insights into topics I was not too familiar with.

I appreciated the fact that the participants were well prepared and had read the papers, so that the discussions were lively and stimulating. I also found the workshop's format (presentation of 10 minutes, 5 minutes for the discussant and a 30 minute discussion) very good, because it made an intense and lively discussion possible. Another conceivable format could be panel discussions focusing on different topics, which seem pivotal to various PhD projects, such as 'identity', 'nationalism' or similar broader topics.

Another very important aspect of this workshop was the incorporation of occasions for socializing. Meeting other PhD students and professors and getting to know each other was as important as the panel discussions itself, especially since international networking in such a small discipline as Japanese studies cannot be underestimated. Talking to other participants also gave me the chance to exchange opinions on future prospects and opportunities.

I want to thank the EAJS, Dr Brigitte Steger and all the other organizers of this workshop, as well as its sponsors, for having given me the opportunity to join this great event in such a historical place.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Mak
Free University of Berlin

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Until I received Dr Steger's email informing us that 70 persons had applied to attend the 6th EAJS doctoral workshop, I had not realised how highly coveted a place on the workshop was. I feel fortunate to have been selected because it was a wonderful experience that has helped me better articulate the goals of my doctoral project.

Japanese studies are new at the University of Manchester, having been established here in 2006. This certainly has its positives – the department is close-knit, supportive and enthusiastic. On the other hand, it also means that there are few PhD students. In fact, at the moment here are only two of us. The other – Hannah - was also an attendee at the workshop. This meant that the opportunity to interact with other doctoral students working on Japan was highly valuable. The topics covered at the workshop were diverse and covered a range of historical periods in various disciplines. At first, I was unsure if I would be able to provide useful feedback outside my area of research but I quickly realised more important than subject knowledge was honing the ability to clearly formulate research ideas and to think critically about how they could be improved.

My supervisor at the workshop was Dr Godart of the Needham Research Institute. I was not sure what to expect, and had come prepared for an inquisition. Instead, our meeting turned out to be a relaxed one-hour chat in which we bounced around ideas, and many of his suggestions spurred me into exploring various ways I could approach my topic.

The major benefit of this workshop was building a network of supportive colleagues. I am sure we will be meeting each other regularly throughout our careers. In fact, I have since bumped into one (Laura) on a recent trip to in London.

Thanks to EAJS for putting on this workshop and to Dr Steger and her Cambridge colleagues for their hospitality. I would also like to thank Dr Godart for his encouragement and advice.

Ruselle Meade
University of Manchester

First of all I would like to thank EAJS for the possibility to participate in the Doctoral Workshop in 2010. It proved to be an important opportunity to receive feedback for my work from both fellow students and senior scholars. The participants came from different countries and from different disciplines and this gave a broad dimension to the workshop. The confrontation with works of the other doctoral students helped me to see my own research from a different perspective. This is very useful especially for students who come from smaller departments and have few opportunities to discuss their work with a broad audience. Therefore, I think that the EAJS Workshop is important in particular for being able to put together students from diverse backgrounds and for helping them to gain feedback for their projects. The individual consultation with Dr. Steger was very fruitful and one of the most important contributions of the workshop for me. To have feedback from more senior scholars also during the 'public' part of the workshop would, in my opinion, enhance even more the positive outcome of the event.

I would like to thank again the Toshiba International Foundation for its generous support and Dr. Steger and her colleagues at Cambridge University and at EAJS for the excellent work they have done. I recommend to all doctoral students working on Japan to apply for the workshop.

Melinda Pappova
Charles University of Prague

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The PhD workshop in Cambridge has really encouraged and inspired my work on my thesis. I especially benefited from discussing my thesis with other PhD students and senior researchers from different fields within Japanese studies. To learn about the other students' research and their difficulties and to discuss different theoretical approaches and research methods not only broadened my horizon but actually made me realize how much we all face very similar problems. To present each other's work was a good way to engage with the other participants' projects. I especially enjoyed the individual supervision with Brigitte Steger. I am very thankful for her advice. She helped me to (re)realize that my empirical data is the most important evidence to strengthen my arguments. I also found the workshop on publishing very useful.

But besides all the useful advice I have been given, I really enjoyed meeting all the other European PhD students and taking a glimpse into the very special academic environment in Cambridge. I would like to thank Brigitte Steger who not only organized the PhD workshop, but also was a very inspiring supervisor. I also want to thank the generous supporters of the workshop and the Faculty

of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge as well as Downing College for their hospitality.

*Cornelia Reiher
University of Leipzig*

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As a DPhil student with little experience of academic conferences, the EAJS PhD Workshop offered the perfect opportunity to present my ideas to a wider audience for the first time. I think that all of the participants would agree that it was an immensely valuable experience with benefits reaching far beyond our individual projects. I would particularly encourage those in the formative stages of their research to apply. It was very reassuring to find that my topic, 'Representations of Apocalypse in Modern Japanese Culture', was received with considerable interest and enthusiasm.

I met with my advisor, Dr. Mark Morris, on the afternoon before the workshop began and was greatly encouraged by his positive and supportive comments. He also provided me with some very useful practical advice about how to proceed with my work and pointed out areas I might look into further.

The format of the panel sessions worked very well, incorporating short, unscripted presentations followed by the comments of a discussant and a good amount of time for questions from the other participants. These discussions were challenging and rigorous, whilst the atmosphere remained supportive and friendly throughout.

One of the things that I appreciated most about the workshop was the chance to meet and socialise with other DPhil students from various countries and universities. It was great to be able to informally share our experiences and ideas outside of the seminar room, and created a real sense of a network of European scholars engaged in the same field of endeavour. I would like to thank Dr. Brigitte Steger, the EAJS, the University of Cambridge FAMES, the Japan Foundation and the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation for making all of this possible.

*Paul Rollason
University of Oxford*

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The 6th EAJS PhD Workshop, held at Cambridge University 22-24 March, was a very interesting and positive experience for me. The event was well organized, the debates were lively and well-informed, and it all took place in a very friendly and cozy atmosphere.

Although the research projects spanned a very broad range of topics, the organizers had managed very well to group presentations together in a way that made it possible to have focused and nuanced discussions on each cluster of topics. For my own part, I received a lot of very valuable feedback, questions and concerns that I will certainly benefit from as my dissertation project progresses. My discussant, Martyn, and I had a lot to talk about during our session, and I think his questions to my paper opened up for discussion some of the issues and difficulties central to the type of questions we're both working on, and which seemed to be of interest to large parts of the audience.

I particularly liked that the format of the workshop emphasized discussion rather than presentation. That way, individual presenters gained experience in responding relatively unprepared to questions, critique, or comments from an informed and enthusiastic audience, who themselves also had a chance to engage each presenter much more directly and dialogically than in more traditional, presentation-based formats.

The only problem I noticed with this type of format is the difficulty it creates with shaping debates on particular topics as the workshop progresses. There were a number of us who became interested in discussing particular concepts or ideas during the event that seemed to be important to many of the projects and often surfaced during discussions, but it was very difficult to carry out an ongoing debate on particular issues. Of course, I don't know if the majority of participants would have liked a more focused debate on particular terms and problems rather than the debates we did have, so I might be alone in feeling that that option was missing. As it was, it was still a very interesting and thought-provoking experience.

I would like to thank all the participants (I think we all made some new friends during those days, and I hope to see as many of you as possible again sometime!) and all the organizers, both in the EAJS as well as at Cambridge. I am particularly grateful to those who were directly involved in my own presentation: Dr. Kushner who chaired the session, Dr. Swenson-Wright who supervised me, and, of course, my discussant Martyn Smith as well as those who asked me questions or commented on my paper. I came away with a lot of constructive feedback and I want to thank all of you for making that possible.

*Jens Sejrup
University of Copenhagen*

The EAJS workshop was for me an inspiring and revitalising experience. Not only was it extremely helpful to discuss my thesis with other Japanese studies PHDs and my adviser, but seeing how other researchers in very different fields apprehended the same kind of difficulties I had gave me further confidence that I would be able to reach the end of my project. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Kushner, my advisor, for his very helpful remarks and his direction.

Beyond purely intellectual benefits, this workshop also enabled me to meet and forge links with students whom I might not have otherwise been able to talk to. I sincerely hope that we will be able to meet again and renew our friendships, and that we may prove of use to each other in our academic careers. The friendly, warm spirit with which we were received at Cambridge by Dr Steger helped foster a feeling of camaraderie which led to many interesting exchanges.

As always with Japanese studies, the very diversity of the discipline studied can be sometimes overwhelming, but here I believe was an example of how it can be used as a true strength. I found that advice from researchers outside my own discipline (post-war history) was insightful, useful, and enabled me to gain a better understanding of the cross-disciplinary implications of my research.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone who made this possible, and all the other PHD students for their kindness and interest in my work. I hope that we will all be able to meet again at some future EAJS event.

*Constance Sereni
INALCO, Paris*

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PhD workshops can do three things (in my experience): They can disappoint, they can discourage, or they can motivate. The 2010 EAJS PhD workshop at Cambridge University certainly fell into the last category.

Conversations with fellow devotees of thorough disciplinary investigations of Japan contemporary and past, provided me with confidence that research on Japan is not only alive (which *per se* is nothing commendable), but vibrant, creative and daring. In the course of three days, I saw pre-modern Buddhist rituals explained through Habermas; listened to a polyglot addressing 'profane' rituals of childhood that others had written off as too commercialized to merit serious scholarly attention; and marvelled at the immense and important undertaking of a cultural history of translation in Japan.

In terms of benefit to my own work, Prof. Maki Umemura (Cardiff University), ever the economist, forcefully but kindly applied Ockham's razor to my historical-political exploration of a good 400 years of public policy regarding the elderly across three continents. I have since rewritten the paper, and those who have been kind enough to read my work as it slowly progresses, have commented favourably on its increasing clarity. Overall, the workshop was an excellent occasion to discuss the Japan-related part of my dissertation, as the focus of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (my home institution) is more on political economy and less on Japan.

It is precisely this sort of opportunity allowing Japan specialists to meet and exchange approaches with disciplinarians with a strong interest in Japan that will keep Japanese studies strong, vibrant, interesting and meriting the attention of other disciplines. I would like to thank the European Association for Japanese Studies, the Japan Foundation, and Brigitte Steger and Cambridge University for putting time and effort into our intellectual development, and for funding a forum in which young scholars can critically expose their work.

Anna Skarpelis

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne

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The sixth EAJS workshop held in Cambridge was a fantastic opportunity to meet and discuss my project with other PhD students from around Europe. The workshop gave me the first chance to discuss my thesis with other PhD students working in Japanese studies and receive feedback from people with different background and interests.

Presenting my ideas to a group of fellow students with wide ranging knowledge of Japan was daunting and, while the questions were challenging they helped me to think through my project and the problems I have experienced during my research in many different ways. The comments and questions were invaluable and the energy and commitment of all the organisers and participants helped create a friendly and academic atmosphere which was supplemented by the shared lunches and evening meals, not to mention the occasional (social) trip to the pub.

I have realised how greatly I have benefitted from the workshop as I am undertaking my fieldwork in Tokyo. The meeting with my senior adviser was a great chance to think through my project with somebody with knowledge of and interest in my topic, and the lively discussion which followed the presentations made the experience enjoyable as well as intellectually stimulating, (we will,

one day, get back to the issue of identity!). I would like to thank Brigitte for the time and energy she devoted to organising all the participants, my senior adviser Barak Kushner, and to Harald Fuess and the EAJS along with all my fellow participants for allowing me to participate in an enjoyable and stimulating workshop. I sincerely hope to meet everyone again and look forward to reading everybody's (finished) dissertations in the near future!

Martyn Smith
SOAS, University of London

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Participating to the 6th EAJS doctoral workshop at Cambridge University proved to be a unique opportunity and a wonderfully enriching experience.

My topic was the only representative in the area of Japanese cinema, yet I found the feedback received from fellow PhD students and senior advisers both inspiring and helpful. Questions and suggestions were constructive and beneficial for my research, revealing weak points and offering cues to scenarios I previously overlooked. This is a confirmation of how effective the workshop interdisciplinary approach can be.

This was the first occasion for presenting my work to an audience with such a varied range of interests in the field of Japanese studies, and the workshop also functioned as a litmus test for the kind of responses that my topic is likely to raise. This experience greatly helped me to build more confidence and enthusiasm about the project, particularly thanks to the advice and support I received from my local senior advisor, Dr. Morris. He has been an invaluable guide and I am grateful to him for clearing many doubts and indicating key points to develop.

Discussions and comments on the papers were not limited to the panel presentations but also extended over meals and socials during the workshop. Every discussion was lively and intellectually stimulating, revealing a common genuine interest in each of the works presented. This contributed in creating a relaxed and positive atmosphere which developed in an extremely collaborative and dedicated working group.

Our local hosts at the University of Cambridge welcomed us warmly and took great care of all throughout the stay, not only intellectually but also providing visitors with anecdotes and a taster of life in this centuries-old, beautiful town. I would especially like to thank Dr. Steger for the excellent organization, her hard work and dedication, and Prof. Bowring's hospitality.

For all these reasons I feel privileged for having been offered the chance to take part in such a prestigious event. Therefore I would like to express my deepest gratitude to EAJS and the persons in charge who selected my work, and extend it to all the organizers, the advisors and the other participants for their efforts in making this workshop such a successful and memorable event. Last - but not least - all of this would not have been possible without the generous support of the sponsors.

*Laura Treglia
SOAS, University of London*

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I have only positive things to say about the entire experience. Having travelled from Taiwan I can safely say that it was well worth the arduous journey. From the moment we arrived and were shown to our rooms by the very helpful university accommodation staff, it was clear that everything would be perfectly organized. Both rooms and meals were of high quality, and I think played an important part in contributing to the positive atmosphere in the group. There was no need for anyone to complain about how we were being looked after. Indeed both within the group, the college and the city itself, all inter-personal contact was friendly and positive.

The content of the workshop itself was also perfectly structured. Limiting each presentation to ten minutes helped to alleviate the problem that Japanese studies workshops often have, which is that most of the audience do not share the same area of expertise as any given speaker. With such a strict time limit facilitating the opportunity for extended questions, the audience was much better able to participate with presenters even in fields that were unfamiliar. All unnecessary detail was left aside in favour of a discussion of core issues. Often such issues would centre on methodology, an area that is of course of primary concern to all participants. I feel I learned an enormous amount from my fellow presenters, and certainly came away from the two days with a new perspective.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the value of the workshop to students at varying levels of progress in their PhD. As someone who is still at a very preliminary stage, I was worried that perhaps I could draw only limited benefit from this experience, and that it would be more suitable for those more advanced with their studies. However, this was certainly not the case, as I learned many important lessons from the three days that will certainly be of benefit as my studies progress. For this credit goes to the organizers and faculty at Cambridge who managed to draw the best out of everyone. I would like to finally take the opportunity to thank the EAJS for giving me the

opportunity to spend three days learning from in such an exciting and stimulating environment.

Dermott Walsh
University of Leiden

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I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to participate in the 6th annual EAJS PhD workshop in Cambridge. Coming from a small newly established Japanese studies department, the opportunity to meet fellow students from across Europe and learn more about the kind of research taking place was invaluable.

I found the two intensive days spent listening to and debating the projects of my peers fascinating and enlightening and although the research topics were so diverse, many of the discussions and ideas raised proved useful for the development of my own thesis. Furthermore, the opportunity to chat informally about postgraduate life was both inspiring and reassuring and I hope some lasting friendships were formed. Life as a PhD student can sometimes seem isolating, so workshops such as this one can provide priceless opportunities to develop networks with other researchers.

I would like to express my gratitude to my individual supervisor, Maki Umemura, for her valuable advice. The opportunity to have an expert with a fresh perspective examine my work closely was one of the highlights of the workshop and I'm sure will prove beneficial for my final thesis.

In addition to the student-led presentations, I found the extra sessions on publishing and the role of the EAJS provided practical advice and inspired me to think about how young researchers could become more involved in the future of Japanese studies.

Finally I would like to thank Brigitte Steger whose huge organisational efforts were rewarded with a very successful workshop, and the EAJS for the opportunity to take part in such an event.

Hannah Waterson
University of Manchester