

**Seventh EAJS PhD Workshop
21–24 August 2011, Tallinn University, Käsnu, Estonia**

Reports of the EAJS PhD Workshop Participants

First I would like to thank the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation for sponsoring the 7th EAJS PhD Workshop. I also would like to extend my gratitude to the organizer, Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, and the supervisors Prof. Reiko Abe-Auestad, Prof. Harald Fuess and Dr. Urs-Matthias Zachmann.

This year's Workshop took place in Käsnu, a small coastal village in northeastern Estonia. The working space for our group's participants, who came from seven countries, was a room awash with light in the local Maritime Museum. Throughout the sessions, which were grouped into panels with assigned commentators and discussion periods, I had the chance to hear about dissertation fields from literary through historical to religious studies and beyond – a truly multidisciplinary experience. Not only did the richness of today's European Japanese Studies become apparent, but points of linkage and overlap to my own field as well. The atmosphere was relaxed and intellectually stimulating with debates carried on into the night at the guesthouse or the tiny bar we found for our second evening.

I am especially thankful for the second day's input and advice on writing and publishing by our senior advisors as well as the possibility to attend the EAJS conference in Tallinn afterwards together with many of the colleagues I had met in Käsnu for the first time. Writing this report from the UK where I am currently based at SOAS as an ERASMUS student, I am happy to have already met some of the UK participants again here in London.

A book is something we are all bound to write at some stage, but a book is never written alone. Thus, I want to strongly encourage PhD-students to apply for and take part in the next Workshop for doctoral candidates.

I am grateful for the unique time, unforgettable experience and the insights I gained in Käsnu, Estonia.

Biru D. Binder
University of Heidelberg

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The 7th EAJS PhD Workshop in Käsnu was a unique experience in terms of both academic interaction and human relations. I was positively impressed by the way it was organized, because it was so different from many other workshops where people are stiff and tense, and where participants have a very limited discussion time. I enjoyed immensely the friendly atmosphere and the stimulating conversations with my peers and the supervisors. It was an excellent opportunity to interact with researchers specializing in different branches of Japanese Studies all over the world. Due to the participants' different academic backgrounds, I was able to look at my research from a different, interdisciplinary perspective. I could

identify the strong and weak points of my work, focusing on some aspects that I had previously neglected and reconsidering some structural issues in my research layout.

I appreciated the workshop format because there was plenty of time to discuss after each presentation and, in addition to this, we continued to talk even during our meals. All the participants showed a very cooperative attitude, giving feedback to improve each other's work. Among the factors contributing to the success of this workshop, I would mention also the beautiful location, a small village on the Baltic Sea, in a peaceful environment where we could focus on our debates and create a 'small academic community'.

I would definitively recommend this experience to all Ph.D. candidates, even to those who are experiencing some difficulties, because this workshop can be an opportunity to share them with other scholars and look at them from a different viewpoint. I would like to thank all the scholars who shared this experience with me and all the supervisors, Prof. Harald Fuess, Prof. Verena Blechinger, Prof. Matthias Zachmann and especially Prof. Reiko Abe Auestad, whose insights were particularly illuminating. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation, which supported this wonderful workshop and made it possible.

Luciana Cardi
"L'Orientale" University of Naples

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The 7th EAJS Workshop for doctoral students held in Käsmu (Estonia) was a very intense and enriching two-day event. I am very thankful I had the opportunity to participate, especially in view of the expected completion of my doctoral course in a few months. The workshop was a unique opportunity to present my research project on women and faith-based volunteering in Japan to expert academics from different disciplines, and other doctoral students doing research on Japan. The questions I was asked by fellow doctoral students, as well as the feedback and great advice I received from the supervisors were extremely helpful towards reshaping the overall structure of my dissertation, and outlining its conclusion.

In my opinion, three elements have made this workshop especially enriching. First, the format of the workshop through which everyone could present her or his work in front of all participants was a great chance to test my ability and discuss my research project so that it could be intelligible to those not dealing with Japanese religion and faith-based volunteering. Moreover, it was surely the best way to receive the largest number of comments and questions from fellow PhD students who are researching in different topics and are at different levels of their PhD work. The type and level of questions I received provided me with a critical response to my draft dissertation: they helped me to redefine what difference religion makes in volunteering as compared to secular civil society, as well as the role of faith-based volunteering as a gateway for participatory democracy. I am particularly grateful to my EAJS supervisor, Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, who carefully commented and advised on my research topic after the presentation, as well as during a relaxing walk in the village. Her external supervision with expertise in civil society helped me to define and refine my findings. Moreover, she gave me a very helpful piece of advice for my conclusion, for which I am really indebted.

Second, the workshop helped in establishing connections both with young researchers working in related or different fields, and with academic scholars who may give further suggestions on future research directions. From this perspective, the workshop was surely a source of interesting and challenging ideas for present and future research.

Last, from a logistic point of view, the village of Käsmu facing the Baltic Sea made the stay a unique experience. The traditional Estonian house where we stayed, the museum where the workshop took place, and the old boat along the seashore where we had lunch, are but a few of the unforgettable wonderful memories I have brought back with me. I am very grateful to the organizers of Tallin University for suggesting this location for our workshop, and I hope to visit Käsmu and Tallin again and enjoy the unique atmosphere of these places.

I would like to end with my heartfelt thanks to the Toshiba Foundation and Japan Foundation for sponsoring the EAJS PhD Workshop, and EAJS organizers for giving me the opportunity to have this constructive experience. Special thanks go to the organizers at Tallin University, and to Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Prof. Harald Fuess for their efforts and for granting me this great opportunity.

Paola Cavaliere
The University of Sheffield

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I would first like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to participate in the 7th EAJS PhD Workshop in Käsmu, Estonia, as well as both the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation for financing it and thus making it possible. It was indeed a great opportunity as well as a wonderful experience for me, being at the stage of my research, where I needed to reconsider my previous ideas and had to decide on the direction to follow in the future.

Doing this alone is of course a much harder or even impossible task, and it is here that academically gatherings such as this conference perform their most vital role. It was indeed vital for me, being just on the way back to Japan to continue and possibly conclude my dissertation, to reorganize my ideas and theses, to present them to other researchers of Japan and to discuss them at the forum as well as at coffee breaks and dinners and other informal occasions. It was also a great opportunity to meet with other PhD candidates from academic institutions across Europe and thus to create further connections and friendships with interesting people of similar interests.

I would like to express my gratitude on this occasion to the organizers from Tallinn University and to the supervisors who took it on themselves to spend three days with us in a remote Estonian village discussing academic topics and giving us valuable advice. My gratitude thus goes to Dr. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, to Dr. Harald Fuess, Dr. Reiko Abe Auestad and last but not least to Dr. Urs Matthias Zachmann, for giving me their critical evaluation of my research project and making me reconsider some of my, sometimes perhaps over-confident ideas as to how to continue my research in the future.

Finally I would like to thank all my fellow participants for being great company over those three days and I hope we will continue to stay in touch in this academic world of Japanese studies in Europe.

Luka Culiberg
University of Ljubljana

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The EAJS Workshop experience was a unique occasion for the development of my dissertation. I am really thankful for having been selected for this valuable event, in which I was able to make new acquaintances and friends working in Japanese studies. Due to the absence of a proper Japanese Studies department in my university, this programme was a special opportunity for me to compare and contrast the substance of my research with other fields and projects. Such a rich multidisciplinary context, which I lack in my university in Spain, fostered the development of my thesis and even in a number of different senses corrected it. From now on, I will bear in mind different aspects that are related to the theme of my dissertation and I will try to bring it into being within a nexus of concerns related to contemporary cultural studies.

Together with this multidisciplinary approach, the concentration of the seminar into a period of three days allowed the creation of an exclusive network of PhD candidates that can be the basis of useful and enriching relations in the future. The common attribute of these participants was their youth, which from the beginning implied enthusiastic energy. Affinities among us were easily created. Moreover, the privilege of being assisted by professors specializing in Japanese studies provided me with ideas and bibliography that otherwise I would have never considered.

My attendance to the Workshop and the Conference were also meaningful in order for me to realize my inexperience in these kinds of events. It was my first time in such a Conference, and I was able to learn how a PhD candidate must take advantage of programmes like these and foster his knowledge as a result of exchange with the panel discussants and new acquaintances. The EAJS Conference was a valuable time for making me aware of the difficulties of my research and encouraging me to take it forward.

Benito ElíasGarcía Valero
University of Alicante

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It was a great privilege for me to be selected to participate in the 7th EAJS PhD Workshop 2011.

It was a very precious opportunity to get feedback on my research project from so many participants and from various perspectives. It was an interdisciplinary workshop and the wide range of subject fields covered by the participants included literature, linguistics, sociology, politics, and economics, and I was happily surprised at how much I gained from listening to the presentations of other participants, even those in different subject fields

from mine. Regardless of the research subject, I found some interesting common themes that many of us were interested in, such as Japanese national identity as well as reconstruction of Japanese traditions and history in modern and contemporary times. Thanks to that, everyone was engaged in exchanging ideas on the presentations throughout the entire workshop. I enjoyed the lively discussion and I was also able to gain many new perspectives for my own research project in the process. All the professors who participated as a discussants were also very helpful in giving us thoughtful advice for our projects, for which I am also very thankful.

I believe for us, young researchers, it is very important to get to meet other researchers with similar research interests. This workshop was a perfect occasion for this and I was able to exchange contacts with many like-minded PhD students all over Europe whom I hope to keep in touch with in the future.

I am therefore very grateful to the EAJS and the Toshiba Foundation as well as all the professors, organizers and student participants at the workshop for making this workshop so worthwhile. I hope that many other PhD students in the field of Japanese studies will be able to enjoy such a great opportunity in times ahead.

Naoko Hosokawa
University of Oxford

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First and foremost I must express my immense gratitude to the organizers for giving me the chance to attend the 2011 EAJS PhD Workshop in Estonia. It was a highly valuable and enjoyable workshop, an opportunity which was too good to miss out on.

The workshop brought a number of talented PhD students from a range of countries and academic disciplines together, offering the participants a diverse group with which to bounce ideas off and share research experiences. The quality of feedback from fellow PhD students and the participating professors has meant that I have gained immensely from this experience.

In particular, the combination of a multi-disciplinary group which at the same time shares a Japan focus, allowed me to benefit from opinions, approaches and insights that differ from those I would expect at my home department.

The other major plus of the workshop was that it has provided a platform from which young aspiring scholars connected to Japanese studies can build a strong network and basis for future collaborative, multi-disciplinary research. This was certainly not "just another workshop", and I am truly grateful to all those involved.

Steven Ivings
London School of Economics

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The EAJS PhD Workshop 2011 at Käsmu was a unique experience and great opportunity to meet other young scholars in the field of Japanese studies and to discuss all the interesting projects they are working on. I would like to thank the EAJS and the organizers for doing such a great job by making this workshop possible and giving me the chance to have such a nice time in Estonia.

At first I was not sure how a workshop with over a dozen PhD students would be a useful environment to discuss my and others' research projects in any detail. But as soon as the presentations and discussions on the respective projects started, my early judgment with its reservations was being cast aside. Not only were the talks very interesting and sophisticated, but so as well was the critique by both students and supervisors. We had a lot of interesting and helpful discussions which were being held not only as the panels went on, but also at any given moment at coffee breaks or at dinner between sessions. Even in the case of very different methodological approaches in the respective PhD projects, everyone was offering a lot of helpful input and critique. I think the panels helped me a lot to reflect on my own PhD project.

Also the remoteness of the town of Käsmu played a quite important role in the success of the workshop as well. Discussions that were started in the daytime continued into the late night and turned out to be very interesting and challenging. The ideas we shared, the networks we created and the friendships we made were not the least important aspects of the whole workshop.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Reiko Abe Auestad, Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Prof. Harald Fuess and Prof. Matthias Zachmann for being there as supervisors and giving a lot of helpful critique and hints.

Till Knautt
Heidelberg University

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The 7th EAJS PhD workshop held in Käsmu, Estonia was a unique experience for me which I appreciated very much. This is the first such workshop that I have participated in and of course before it I was a little bit afraid over whether I would present myself and my university in a good light, mostly because I am at the beginning of my PhD work. I had a lot of questions in my head about my research with no answers yet found and even no idea how to find the answers. But I was really surprised how the friendly atmosphere of the workshop both with the other participants and with the academic advisers relaxed us and made us speak frankly about the difficulties and problems that we encounter during our work. The academic advisers were very well selected according to the topics of research of the participants and we received very useful and practical advice and orientation. What is more, it was not only one-to-one conversation with the advisers but after each presentation there was a lively discussion and all the other participants expressed their highly professional opinions and constructive criticism. The selection of the participants was really very good because my colleagues showed rich knowledge in each sphere of Japanese studies. We had fruitful debates and exchanges of ideas till late at night and I really hope the network we

were given the chance to create will develop in the future and we will have more chances during the years to come to meet again.

If I were to sum up the workshop for future candidates in only one sentence, it would be: “Useful, devised according to the best academic practice, well organized – this is a chance not to miss.”

I would like once again to express my gratitude to the organizers from EAJS, personally to Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Prof. Reiko Abe Auestad, Prof. Harald Fuess, Dr. Urs Matthias Zachmann, Toshiba International Foundation and the hosts from Tallinn University for the wonderful opportunity, hard work and perfect organization of the workshop and I hope we will be given the chance again to show the outcome of our PhD research.

Eleonora Koleva
Sofia University, Bulgaria

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Thanks to the EAJS, participating sponsors and mentoring academics and, last but not least, fellow PhD colleagues, the two-day workshop was an experience not only intellectually insightful but also tremendously fun.

The eclecticism of academic interests brought together in the quaint meeting room of an Estonian maritime museum resulted in many lively discussions. The sort of healthy skepticism that arises in an inter-disciplinary setting was particularly useful as it prompted me to re-evaluate my research thesis from different angles.

More importantly, the workshop was a unique opportunity to meet and befriend future scholars with the same area specialization in what rather quickly became a kind-hearted and close-knit group. Aside from the obvious academic benefits of gatherings such as this, it was the enthusiasm and the ease with which everybody engaged with each other that made the workshop a truly memorable one.

I am extremely grateful for having been allowed the pleasure of taking part in the event and am jealously excited for those who will get to attend the next workshop.

AyakoKomine
University of Oxford

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I really enjoyed the 7th EAJS Workshop for doctoral students that took place at Käsmu, a lovely village near Tallinn. It was an amazing opportunity to learn about contemporary Japanese studies, to exchange ideas with others and to clarify some of my own. Last but not least I was able to get to know other young scholars of Japanese studies from all around Europe.

Meeting fellow doctoral candidates from universities all around the Europe who are doing research on many different topics starting with religion, history, literature and ending with social problems concerning Japan through the ages was a very inspiring and precious experience.

However, I must admit that what I liked the most was to learn again that people may find my topic interesting. It gave me faith and strength to carry on with my research. I also found other people's topics very interesting and I do hope they all manage to finish their projects.

I think that it is very important to meet people with different background as it always gives all of us a new angle and fresh look on the common problems we all may face, no matter what our discipline. Moreover, meeting and befriending people from all around Europe helps us all to build an international network of Japanese studies scholars. I am still in touch with most of the people I met during the workshop and I hope that this was just the beginning of long-lasting friendships.

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart EAJS, University of Tallinn and the organizer – Verena Blechinger-Talcott – for giving me the opportunity to take part in the workshop, and to all fellow participants for such a delightful and intellectually challenging time.

Barbara Micyk
SOAS, University of London

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I was more than happy after I had received the information that I could participate at the 7th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Candidates and, as I expected, I was given a great opportunity to improve my dissertation project. This was due not only to the organizers and academic advisers, who did much more than just provide support, and the friendly and intellectually demanding co-participants, but also to the quiet village of Käsmu with its beautiful and inspiring landscape.

In my presentation about the interrelation of sexual entertainers (*asobime*) and medieval Buddhist monks I received some critical comments. Admittedly, this was not what I had hoped for, but I was provoked to think about my research question, my sources, and my methodology, which gave me a unique opportunity to adjust the course which I had chosen, for which I am deeply grateful. My thanks go especially to Professor Rein Raud from Tallinn University, who gave me important and insightful advice with his vast knowledge of Japanese medieval literature. Further discussions with the other academic advisers and my fellow doctoral candidates have proven to be even more enlightening (if I may use the Buddhist term).

The further discussions were one integral component of this workshop, since the scope for individual engagement in the official parts was limited. At this point I have to thank Professor Urs Matthias Zachmann from Munich University, who helped me find my focus,

and one of my fellow candidates, Birgit Binder, who helped me with his challenging questions.

The PhD Workshop was an experience which has already had a huge influence on my project. I can only recommend that every PhD student in the field of Japanese studies looks for an opportunity to get involved with this programme. My thanks go to all those people who were involved with the organisation.

Kenji-Thomas Nishino
Bonn University

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After having partaken in a similar workshop in March 2009 at the University of Sheffield and having experienced the immense benefits of a PhD Workshop, I was delighted to be chosen once again to be given the opportunity to present my thesis at a more advanced stage to a European group of fellow PhD candidates.

The diverse backgrounds and perspectives of the fellow workshop participants proved to be extremely valuable for my project, and it was a great help for my project to receive further critical feedback. What I find also very rewarding was the chance not only to interact with a dedicated team of supervisors who gave clear and helpful suggestions for my work, but also to learn more about other participants' current projects. Therefore, I feel that both the exchanges on the interdisciplinary research topics and the networking between students and mentors were invaluable sources of inspiration and motivation for each dissertation project.

I hope that the contacts will be kept alive and I am very much looking forward to further exchange with all the participants, some of whom have become friends.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Blechinger-Talcott and the EAJS team for the preparation that they did for the Workshop, as well as the Toshiba Foundation for its generous funding.

Furthermore I would like to mention the unique setting of the EAJS Workshop at the Käsmu's Maritime Museum, which was truly a once in a lifetime experience.

Julia Obinger
LMU Munich, Zurich University

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The 2011 EAJS PhD Workshop, held in Käsmu, Estonia, was hard work, great fun and, not least, tremendously useful for my doctoral project. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been selected to attend. Back home, I am advising my fellow graduate students to make sure that they take the opportunity to attend future workshops, should they get the chance.

Personally, the workshop provided a useful experience in communicating my research to a diverse audience, as well as providing a wealth of new ideas and avenues to explore. The feedback of a range of different people, with different specialisms and from different places, opened my eyes to a wider European tradition of scholarship on Japan than perhaps I had been fully aware of, as well as to scholars pursuing similar themes and approaches in different fields.

In addition to my own work, it was very exciting to get to know other people engaged in research on Japan, and to hear about their projects. The setting was beautiful and proved to be perfect for a really intense series of discussions which spilled out of the formal sessions, to mealtimes and even deep into the night. Making a new group of friends with shared interests was one of the highlights of the workshop. I continued on to the EAJS conference in Tallinn immediately after the workshop, which helped to cement these new relationships.

My thanks go to the sponsors of the workshop, to the advisors who coordinated and led the discussions, and to the other participants, all of whom helped to make it such a rewarding experience.

Ian Rapley
University of Oxford

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I am very glad I was invited to participate in this year's EAJS PhD Workshop. I enjoyed the intellectually stimulating discussions, the interesting presentations and the great informal atmosphere. One of the reasons the workshop was successful was, I believe, the unique location where it was organized. Unlike the conference, the workshop did not take place in Tallinn, but in Käsmu – a lovely seaside village, located about two hours east of the capital. Before we arrived there, on Sunday evening, we were treated to a delicious Estonian dinner, in a traditional wooden restaurant. Thus we had the chance to get to know each other a bit before the actual workshop, as well as experience Estonian food culture – a perfect combination, in my opinion, and an excellent way to start.

The next morning, we walked from our guesthouse to the nearby maritime museum, where the workshop would take place. It was a wonderfully idiosyncratic place. The rooms were full of old objects used in ships – ropes, anchors, fishing nets, maps and so on – as well as dozens of small paintings of the sea, made by the museum director. In the workshop room, a long wooden canoe-like boat was lying under the tables we were sitting at. The museum was located next to the beach, where a larger open wooden boat was placed. We were served lunch in this boat, while enjoying unrivalled views of the Gulf of Finland.

There were only about fifteen PhD candidates invited, so everybody had the opportunity to present their research. Each presentation was followed by feedback from one of the professors present, as well as questions and comments by the other participants. Some of the feedback was critical, and there were several serious discussions; overall, however, the workshop proceeded in a friendly and respectful atmosphere. Naturally, every research project presented was somehow related to Japan, but there were significant differences

between the candidates in terms of theoretical and methodological orientations. While everybody fitted within that diffuse discipline called 'Japanese Studies', a variety of other disciplines was represented, including literary theory, intellectual history, economic history, religious studies, sociology, political science, gender studies and linguistics. As a result, there was much cross-disciplinary interaction, which I found both enjoyable and intellectually inspiring.

The workshop lasted two full days. I was one of the first who presented their research, on Monday morning. In my PhD research, I look at different ways in which Shinto has been defined and conceptualized in the course of modern Japanese history. In particular, I am interested in recent associations of Shinto with notions of nature and the environment, within academic discourse, popular media texts and shrine practices. In recent years, idealized notions of ancient 'Shinto' worldviews and practices – supposedly 'animistic' – have been combined with contemporary environmentalist rhetoric, contributing to the discursive construction of Shinto as a tradition of nature worship, fundamentally oriented towards 'harmony with nature' and environmental awareness. This development constitutes the main topic of my research.

I am grateful for the useful feedback and suggestions I got during the workshop. In addition, I am glad I had the chance to meet some fellow PhD candidates. At my university, I am currently the only PhD candidate doing research on a Japan-related topic, so I very much enjoyed meeting others who share the same interest. In addition to the official, academic programme, the workshop gave us the opportunity to spend a couple of evenings discussing our ideas on a more informal basis, and get to know each other better. Before long, we had discovered Käsme's part-time outdoor bar, were enjoying Estonian pear cider, playing quiz games and sharing our mosquito repellent – surely a great way to make friends. It would be hard to imagine a better location for a workshop. Many thanks to the EAJS and the Estonian organizers for the excellent organization, to all workshop participants for the useful feedback and interesting discussions, and to the Japan Foundation and Toshiba Foundation for their financial support. I look forward to more such inspiring meetings in the future.

Aike P. Rots
University of Oslo