

## Reports by the Participants of the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students

The 16th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students was originally designed to be held as a face-to-face event at Freie Universitaet Berlin from 28 to 30 October 2020. However, due to the worsening pandemic, it was finally decided to hold it online only. It quickly became clear that it was a wise decision not to travel to Berlin and meet in person, as at the time of the workshop several European countries, including Germany, had decided to deepen their anti-pandemic measures.

The pandemic and the politically hectic situation, as well as the non-physical form of the meeting constituted some sources of stress and anxiety that we all had to learn to deal with and overcome. And in this sense, I would like to truly congratulate and thank everyone, the senior advisers, participants and EAJS staff who helped to organize this meeting. They certainly succeeded in creating a warm atmosphere despite the digital format and the difficult circumstances. It was a wonderful experience from which I have learned a lot and which helped me greatly to advance my research. All the comments and advices I received were truly helpful, positive and well-meaning.

I would especially like to emphasize three innovative new formats of meetings that took place during this virtual workshop. These new formats were really great and should be repeated in the future: the one-on-one consultations with the senior advisors, the informal meeting where all Ph.D. students could freely ask questions and learn from the personal experiences of the senior advisors, and the “coffee time” meeting just between the Ph.D. students. These three types of meetings, all rather informal, were all very helpful in their different ways and allowed us to overcome the limitations of this non-physical and isolated form of online meeting.

To put it all in a nutshell, the 2020 EAJS Workshop was a really great experience, full of human and academic learnings that wonderfully overcame the difficult context to create an even better form of meeting, connecting people despite distance and isolation. I would really like to thank everyone for this great experience and hope to meet everyone “in the flesh” in the very near future at the EAJS conference or other academic meetings.

*Myriam Akian*  
*Université de Paris, France*

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I was honored to be selected to participate in the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS Ph.D. Workshop organized by the EAJS and Freie Universitaet Berlin. Although I was disappointed that it had to be held online because of the worsening pandemic, it turned out to be a great success and highly rewarding. The workshop program was very well-organized, with the technical arrangements made well in advance. Of the 12 participants, only one other had a research focus similar to mine. Before the start of the workshop, I was curious how much I could learn from the doctoral projects of the other Ph.D.

candidates working in different fields. What I actually learned from them was that there are different ways of structuring a thesis, how to use theoretical frameworks to analyze cases, which are all common problems that we face as researchers, regardless of disciplines. With Japan as the common denominator, it was fascinating to read and listen to others' work and I learned a lot about the country I am also studying. One of the things I valued most was the one-on-one meeting time with my assigned senior advisor, Prof. Blechinger-Talcott, and the pragmatic advice she provided.

I am very grateful to Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Prof. Urs Matthias Zachmann for their leadership and organization, and to Mr. Lorenz Denninger for his assistance in organizing this workshop. I would like to thank all the senior advisors for joining the workshop, with particular gratitude to Dr. Guibourg Delamotte for her valuable comments on my work. Finally, my sincere gratitude goes also to the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation for their generous support for this workshop despite the pandemic. It was my pleasure meeting all the wonderful participants and I look forward to staying in touch with them.

*Nanae Baldauff*  
*Ghent University, Belgium*

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Experiencing a sense of community has rarely been as needed as in this year. Amidst these turbulent times, I am very grateful to the organizers for the possibility to connect with amazing people in the field of Japanese studies. At a moment when our globalized world feels much more divided by borders and physical distance, sharing the brilliant insights of lovely people working on Japanese society, culture, history, and politics was one of my highlights of this year. I felt that the current crisis strengthened everyone's amazement for their area of study. Divides of disciplines and research traditions were quickly forgotten, and a collective thought process enabled.

In this environment, I was able to find enriching perspectives on my own dissertation project. Subsequent weeks have turned out to be some of the most productive and motivated periods of dissertation writing since the beginning of my journey. I found renewed joy in translating political speeches, which was triggered by a Ph.D. project on ancient poetry. I happily re-evaluated the theoretical conceptualizations of my thesis, which was prompted by a project on happiness through political participation in rural Japan. Every Ph.D. project presented had a similar effect on me.

In summation, I am deeply thankful to the organizers, Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Prof. Urs Matthias Zachmann, and Lorenz Denninger, as well as all the supervisors and Ph.D. candidates for this experience. Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation for making this workshop possible.

*Andreas Eder-Ramsauer*  
*Freie Universitaet, Germany*

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The 2020 EAJS Ph.D. Workshop took place under adverse circumstances. But even as they were detrimental, they also enhanced the event. We sorely missed the opportunity to walk together through the streets of a European city, enjoy a cup of coffee in a cozy café or taste local beer, and to build camaraderie through laughter, through networking face to face, and through the sheer sense of shared adventure that an in-person event could have given us. Yet we were able to come

together and to exchange ideas—and what is more important for us as scholars now, when many of us feel so isolated? The online format may not have been optimal, but the organizers and we, the participants, managed to adapt it to our needs so that we could make the most of it.

My personal goals for the workshop were twofold. First, I of course hoped to receive feedback on the dissertation project outline that I had prepared. I am truly grateful for the detailed comments and the encouragement that I received, especially from Dr. Anna Andreeva and Dr. Urs Matthias Zachmann. Second, I wanted to reconnect with the world of Japanese studies in Europe from which I have been somewhat disconnected as I am pursuing my Ph.D. work in the United States. I am beyond happy to have met so many wonderful colleagues and mentors in the field. I have initiated informal monthly online meet-ups for the workshop's cohort of graduates, and we have been staying in touch, which, once again, is a precious opportunity in these pandemic times. I also enjoyed the panels during the workshop in which career possibilities spanning the biggest job markets in Japanese studies, i.e. Europe, Japan, and North America, were discussed. I would like to be a member of multiple research communities in different parts of the world, and events like this help me to see beyond the academic institutions in Russia or the USA that I am most familiar with, and hopefully prepare me for a successful international career in the future.

*Nina Farizova*

*Yale University, United States of America*

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I would like to begin by thanking the faculty, the special advisors, and the IT/support staff for making the 2020 EAJS Doctoral Workshop such a thoroughly enjoyable and intellectually enriching experience under unprecedented constraints. My fellow students were also a joy to work with.

I felt we had a truly interdisciplinary spirit, with participants coming from fields as diverse as art history, archaeology, literary theory, international relations, gender studies, and manuscript analysis. As an anthropologist, my primary approach to Japanese culture and society is ethnographic: I was therefore fascinated to hear from scholars and research students who engage with Japan in very different disciplines from my own. I learned a great deal from reading and hearing about other researchers' methodologies and forms of meaning-making within Japanese cultural and literary contexts. I especially appreciated how clear and approachable everyone's research reports and presentations were; topics about which I knew very little (or indeed nothing!) prior to the workshop, such as bilateral defense strategies, or the history of Japanese-European fusion weaponry, were very accessible and interesting as presented in my fellow students' papers.

Although this year's circumstances have sadly precluded us from meeting in person, I am delighted to announce that a strong core of participants have formed a WhatsApp group and are continuing to offer each other support, encouragement, friendship, and academic feedback through the academic year and beyond. As so many of us find ourselves in academic and social isolation beyond even the usual constraints of Ph.D. life, it is wonderful to experience such rapport and to be able to support others in turn. I look forward immensely to seeing (offline!) my fellow 2020 EAJS cohort members and the faculty members who worked so hard to make this a fulfilling experience for us when it is safe to do so again.

*Lyman Gamberton*

*University of Oxford, UK*

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I applied for the 16th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students because I had heard very positive comments from several colleagues who had participated in the previous events. I am currently in the third year of the Ph.D. program. It was the perfect opportunity to present my research design, preliminary findings, and current issues before starting my fieldwork in Japan.

Similar to many academic activities planned this year, the workshop had to be reorganized as an online event due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was new for this format and very different from the original plan. However, the unexpected and great “bonus” was that every participant benefitted from individual consultations with a senior scholar after his or her presentation. This extra session was essential in obtaining a far better understanding of the comments, which I would otherwise not have digested so well. I sincerely appreciate the critical comments by my assigned advisor, Dr. Guibourg Delamotte, which made me realize the crucial issues I still need to overcome. I would also like to thank all the senior scholars and peer participants, who are all at various stages in their research, for sharing their precious experiences, challenging insights, and thoughtful advice. The atmosphere was a perfect combination of friendliness and professionalism. It was also a unique chance to get acquainted with other brilliant young researchers from different fields across the world.

Overall, it was a great experience, and I recommend the workshop to other Ph.D. candidates involved in Japan studies. I am grateful to the EAJS office, the Toshiba International Foundation, and the Japan Foundation. I would also like to thank the project directors, Prof. Dr. Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Prof. Dr. Urs Matthias Zachmann, for their enthusiasm in carrying out this invaluable learning opportunity despite all the challenges.

*Nanako Hattori-Ishimaru*  
*Freie Universitaet Berlin, Germany*

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I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the 16th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students. The workshop has an excellent format of producing a project report paper as well as a presentation. I greatly enjoyed reading my peers’ project outlines in advance, which also provided a very helpful context for each presentation. The project report assignment also proved to be very useful to elucidate more succinctly the core argument of my research project, which I have occasionally lost sight of during the writing phase.

It is a shame we could not meet in person, but I wish to thank the organizers for all their hard work in converting the workshop to an online format. It worked very well given the circumstances, and individual consultations with advisors were a particularly good idea. I also appreciated the ability to socialize in the lunch breaks with my peers, especially as I have been stuck at home these past months, and I enjoyed very much the roundtable discussions in which senior scholars shared their personal experiences and advice on the research process.

I appreciated hearing the other Ph.D. candidates’ stimulating research concerning aspects of Japan that I was previously completely unaware of. I wish to thank fellow doctoral students and senior scholars for their constructive feedback. The multi-disciplinary and Japan-related nature of the workshop provided me with viewpoints that I have so far underappreciated in my argument. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Delamotte, who acted as my advisor at the workshop, for her

valuable expert comments. All the constructive feedback I received at the workshop has helped me to better frame my research question.

I would like to thank the EAJS, the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation for arranging this brilliant event. I look forward to catching-up in person and reading the outcome of everyone's research projects.

*John Jacobs*  
*Freie Universitaet Berlin, Germany*

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The 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS Ph.D. workshop was a very meaningful experience for me, as a young researcher taking my first steps in the academic world. Working on your first research project can be a solitary experience, intellectually speaking, but this workshop gave me the opportunity to benefit from the insight of my peer Ph.D. students in Japanese studies and from generous expert scholars who always offered kind and useful advice. This helped me see my research with fresh eyes.

Thanks to our attentive senior advisors, we were able to share our hypotheses and our doubts, our strengths and our weaknesses, in a relaxed and warm atmosphere, and to receive constructive criticism and encouragement. I think it was a useful experience especially for me, since I was the most inexperienced of the participants, being only in my second year and still having to do my fieldwork. Thus, I had the most to learn and to gain.

Interdisciplinary exchanges are vital to understand something as complex as socially constructed ideas of the family and the nation in Japan, which are at the guiding questions of my research. At my home university there are not many occasions to meet other researchers who work in the field of Japanese studies and to engage in discussions. But in the workshop, despite the online format, I was able to build a network of delightful fellow Ph.D. students with whom I will definitely stay in touch to further help and inspire each other. Since I will shortly complete my first year of Ph.D. which I dedicated to archival research, I believe this workshop was a fundamental step towards my fieldwork.

*Anna Lughezzi*  
*University of Padova, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, University of Verona*

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The 16th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop was a very stimulating experience for me and I am very grateful that I was offered the chance to participate in this year's virtual event.

As is well known, the Covid-19 pandemic brought some constraints that unfortunately also affected this year's workshop, which was supposed to have taken place in Berlin. Faced with the impossibility of organizing a face-to-face event, the organizers swiftly prepared an online workshop, for which I would like to thank them for all the work they put into providing a virtual networking experience for all participants.

The multidisciplinary quality of this workshop brought together young researchers to present topics from a wide variety of fields, including gender studies, archaeology, art, political sciences, literary studies, anthropology, amongst others. Despite the disparity of the fields covered, all participants engaged in friendly and constructive discussions, not only beneficial from an academic perspective,

but also fundamental for creating a supportive environment of exchange, often difficult to accomplish in virtual settings.

Thus, the workshop was a unique opportunity to present the current state of my research to a group of senior advisors and fellow colleagues from the area of Japanese studies. The feedback and insights I received both from the group and the individual tutoring session helped to rethink some aspects of my project as well as to define the next steps of my research. The individual consultation with my assigned senior advisor, Prof. Melanie Trede, was particularly productive since it provided the time for a more in-depth discussion of my project and for going through some of the points highlighted in the group discussion.

I truly benefited from this workshop and I would like to thank the EAJS, the workshop organizers, the senior advisors and the other Ph.D. students for making this two-day intensive event such an effortless and fruitful experience.

*Madalena Matos*  
*NOVA University of Lisbon*

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It was a true privilege to participate in the 16th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop at Freie Universitaet Berlin. I applied for the workshop following my fieldwork in Tokyo, and the chance to present my findings and gain feedback from colleagues and senior academics in Japanese studies has been invaluable to the writing up of my thesis. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Dr. Melanie Trede for her thoughtful and detailed comments on my research topic, and her suggestions for how I could strengthen my research. I was also overwhelmed by the helpful comments, suggestions, and questions that came from the other participants. Presenting in a virtual workshop is a strange feeling but thanks to the other Ph.D. students it was a great experience. It was fascinating to discuss their projects, and the truly interdisciplinary nature of the workshop meant I learned about areas of Japanese studies I had never considered before. The organizers and senior scholars created an environment that made it easy to discuss each other's projects with great enthusiasm!

It is difficult to recreate the atmosphere of a physical three-day event virtually. However, the presentation structures, individual sessions with a senior advisor to discuss our projects, and virtual lunch break and evening roundtables made this workshop academically stimulating and a lot of fun. I highly recommend this workshop to any Ph.D. student as it was a fantastic opportunity to meet new colleagues, discuss research findings and difficulties, and feel less daunted by writing a thesis in the time of Covid! Given the extraordinary circumstances under which it took place, I am very grateful to the organizers at Freie Universität Berlin, Prof. Dr. Urs Matthias Zachmann and Prof. Dr. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Mr. Lorenz Denninger, the senior scholars, the EAJS, the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation for creating an excellent Ph.D. workshop.

*Elizabeth Noble*  
*Freie Universitaet Berlin, Germany*

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The 16th EAJS workshop for doctoral students was a great opportunity to discuss preliminary findings of my dissertation project with other Ph.D. candidates and senior advisors. Further, the roundtables provided insight into how the advisors managed to complete their dissertations and

offered possible solutions to the many difficulties that emerge while working on one's own project. Even though held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions and consultations did not fall short in the workshop. Without exception, every presentation was discussed thoroughly in a warm atmosphere and the organizers made sure that presentation time was equally divided among all participants.

I especially wish to thank the organizers for providing the opportunity to have a personal consultation with one of the senior advisors. The comments by Prof. Christoph Brumann, my assigned advisor, were more than helpful and he showed great interest in my project, which encouraged me to immediately continue writing on the draft of my thesis. I enjoyed discussing my project in length with an expert on fieldwork in Japan, but also receiving precious feedback from the other participants.

Although casual chatting was difficult due to the current global conditions, the organizers installed a virtual room during lunch to meet and talk to the others. It was truly inspiring to listen to so many different projects and I am very grateful for having met colleagues from all over the world during the workshop. I would be more than happy to see everybody at another conference, hopefully in person.

Thank you very much for this unique and encouraging experience!

*Sebastian Polak-Rottmann*  
*University of Vienna*

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First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for being given the chance to participate and to present my Ph.D. project during the 16th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop. I am especially thankful for the thoughtful comments and critique from the senior researchers as well as from my fellow Ph.D. candidates. The informal and positive environment of the workshop combined with the diverse backgrounds of the attendees gave me new insights and motivation for my project. Further, I enjoyed learning about many other fascinating Ph.D. projects, topics, and approaches.

Especially the lively discussions and the individual consultations had a great merit for me. Even though personal exchanges in breaks and in the evening, as well as a change of the location was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the organizers, advisors and participants all made every effort to connect virtually on an academic and personal level. And I think we made the best of this challenging situation.

In any case, the workshop also provided me with further tools to achieve my intended goal and to move from a research stay in Japan at the German Institute for Japanese Studies and the period of fieldwork, analysis of data, literature, and visual material into a phase of successive, routine writing, with the phenomena of textual and visual circulation and re-use as a key concept of my project. Moreover, the advice 'to tell a story' with our theses made me think about how to write a good thesis, and I will try to just that.

*Kevin Schumacher*  
*Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet München, Germany*

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