

Report of the Academic Organizer

The 17th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop took place 18-20 August 2021 as a virtual event. It was organized by Prof. Dr. Jan Schmidt (KU Leuven).

Originally, the workshop had been planned as 16th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop in 2020 to take place in August at KU Leuven. The EAJS had chosen Leuven as the venue for the workshop following the tradition of holding EAJS Ph.D. Workshops directly before the EAJS International Conferences at locations not too far from the conference venue. Originally, the EAJS had selected Ghent, Belgium, as location for its 2020 conference. However, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic forced the EAJS to postpone the main conference. After the 16th EAJS Ph.D. workshop had instead been organized by Prof. Dr. Matthias Zachmann and Prof. Dr. Verena Talcott-Blechinger at Freie Universität Berlin in 2021, the Ph.D. workshop at Leuven was postponed along with the EAJS main conference to August 2021. Due to the advent of the Delta variant of the Corona Virus, the decision was made that, both the main conference and the Ph.D. workshop, would be held completely online.

The EAJS received applications from 35 eligible students from all parts of Europe and from EU nationals affiliated with Japanese and US universities as Ph.D. candidates. The EAJS Council reviewed the applications and ranked them according to the quality of their project description and the reference letters. The workshop director decided on the final composition of the 15 workshop participants based on the ranking and the expertise of the invited academic advisors. All 15 invited candidates submitted their project reports of 5,000 words prior to the workshop, addressing research questions, methodology, current state, and future work plan in due time for the advisors to prepare comments and advice.

Prof. Dr. Schmidt invited the following four scholars to join them as academic advisors during the workshop. The advisors were selected to cover a wide range of fields within Japanese Studies, including social sciences, art history, literature, and history:

Dr. Deborah Giustini (National Research University, Higher School of Economics Moscow/KU Leuven)

Prof. Dr. Daniel Poch (Hong Kong University)

Prof. Dr. Shimizu Yuichirō (Keio University, SFC)

Prof. Emeritus Dr. Willy Vande Walle (KU Leuven)

The workshop was held using the regular time format. To benefit from the possibilities of the online format, the workshop was using a “main room” and several “breakout rooms”. For the four sessions the “main room” was used; each Ph.D. candidate had a time slot of 45 minutes, starting

with a 15-minute presentation, followed by a 10-minute comment by a senior advisor and then 20 minutes open discussion. The 15 presentations were grouped in four sessions: Panel 1: Politics and Media (Chair: Giustini), Panel 2: Art History and Linguistics in History (Chair: Schmidt), Panel 3: Literature/Museum Studies/Media Studies (Chair: Shimizu), Panel 4: Sociology/Regional Studies/Religious Studies (Chair: Poch). While the projects themselves varied in their thematic focus and theoretical approaches, similar questions relating to forming a theoretical framework, how to collect and approach primary material, and also how to design and stick to a working schedule were discussed. The Covid-19 pandemic had posed many challenges to most of the candidates, many of whom were not (yet) able to enter Japan to work there on their projects. An additional 20-minute time slot per Ph.D. candidate for individual consultations in extra time blocks after two sessions of presentations at each of the two workshop days. For the participating Ph.D. candidates, discussing these issues in a safe space among peers in a similar situation proved to be fruitful. The workshop was closed at the end of the second day with a final joint feedback session.

Furthermore, two online dinners, one on the evening of 18 August and one on the evening of 20 August, were held. Each academic supervisor had a virtual “table”, and the 15 Ph.D. students were shuffled three times per dinner so that over the two dinners further conversations on research and career planning could take place. After the first two sessions on 19 August, a roundtable discussion on “*Daigaku-in wa deta keredo...* then what? Ph.D. Experiences & Post-Doc scenarios, including positions in Japan” was held. Prof. Shimizu introduced useful websites for announcements of academic positions in Japan and strategies how to apply and prepare beforehand for possible positions on the academic market. Daniel Poch and Jan Schmidt shared their experiences with obtaining a Ph.D. in the US (in Prof. Poch’s case Columbia University) or Germany (Jan Schmidt from Ruhr-University Bochum) and how to apply for tenure-track assistant professorships afterwards. This resulted in a lively discussion with the 15 Ph.D. candidates about the strategies for their future careers, including questions such as how to keep a work-life balance and how to possibly balance having children during the Ph.D. or in the direct aftermath. During the discussion about possible Post-Doc positions and professorships at Japanese universities, it became obvious that the closing of the borders by the Japanese immigration authorities even to persons with a multiple re-entry/work visa in 2020, lead to a loss of trust into the willingness of the Japanese government – and perhaps of most of the society – to fully integrate foreign academic professionals on a lifelong basis. The discussion, which went overtime because of the enthusiastic commitment of the supervisors and all the Ph.D. candidates, was perceived as very open and stimulating by all sides, with personal experiences being shared from all sides and useful advice being given to the Ph.D. candidates.

During the final feedback round it was mentioned by several Ph.D. candidates that not only the feedback on their projects by a highly motivated peer-group of fellow Ph.D. students and by the supervisors during the “official” sessions and the individual feedback moments, but also the many informal conversations during dinners and in the virtual “tea room” and “coffee room” during lunch breaks as well as the exchanges during the roundtable discussion had turned the entire Ph.D. workshop into a successful and memorable academic event. All participants expressed their

gratitude to the EAJS, to the Toshiba International Foundation and to the Japan Foundation for organizing and funding it. This immediate feedback was further confirmed in the very positive final reports by the Ph.D. candidates. While the opportunity to hold a virtual event was generally wholeheartedly welcomed in light of the ongoing pandemic situation, most of the Ph.D. candidates and the supervisors would strongly suggest a return to an in-person format for future EAJS Ph.D. workshops, as the already very successful academic exchange that the virtual format now allowed could benefit even more from the longer, more informal conversations that would be possible during coffee breaks and in-person dinners.

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