

## **Report of the Academic Organizer**

For many years, the European Association for Japanese Studies has supported the career development of young scholars of Japanese Studies by hosting workshops for doctoral students on a regular basis. At all PhD Workshops, organizers include the opportunity for doctoral candidates to provide feedback and to state requests or recommendations for future PhD workshops. One request that was made very frequently was for information about publication options and related strategies, not only in the context of book publications, but also in the context of scholarly journals and the peer review processes. Such requests were often made by PhD students from non-English speaking countries.

Academics in Europe and elsewhere are increasingly set into a competitive environment in the early stages of their careers, and researchers feel more and more obliged to try and publish their research in peer reviewed international journals early on. For many young scholars, the peer review process is not transparent and they feel insecure about how to best proceed to publish their research findings.

To respond to this need, the EAJS Council decided to organize a workshop dedicated to the academic publishing process, with a focus on peer reviewed academic journals in English.

The aim we set out for the First EAJS Publication Workshop was to equip doctoral students and young postdoctoral researchers with essential knowledge about the academic publication process by providing advice about how to find the right journal for their work, how to write letters to the editor at the stage of manuscript submission and also in the process of revisions, and how to address critical issues raised in the review process.

The workshop took place at Freie Universität Berlin from 16 to 18 November 2015. Project leader was Professor Verena Blechinger-Talcott from the Institute of East Asian Studies – Japanese Studies at FU Berlin.

In organizing this workshop, the EAJS cooperated closely with FU Berlin's Graduate School of East Asian Studies, which allowed us to make use of university facilities and other local infrastructure.

The workshop's main events were hosted at Harnack House, a conference venue run by the Max Planck Society which is conveniently located within walking distance of FU Berlin's Institute of East Asian Studies.

All participants stayed at Motel One in Berlin-Charlottenburg, near one of the city's major junctions with excellent public transport connections to the university.

The workshop brought together young researchers at the doctoral and postdoctoral level on the one hand, and a team of senior academics who have experience as reviewers, as editorial board members or as editors of peer-reviewed journals on the other hand.

The advisors and areas covered were:

- Stephen Dodd, SOAS, University of London (member of the Editorial Board of Japan Forum, flagship journal of the British Association for Japanese Studies)
- Stanca Scholz-Cionca, Trier University (literature and cultural studies)
- Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Freie Universität Berlin (social science)
- Urs Matthias Zachmann, University of Edinburgh (history)

## **1st EAJS Publication Workshop (Berlin, Germany, 16-18 November 2015)**

The workshop participants were selected by the team of advisors based on online applications which included the applicant's CV, a letter of motivation, and an abstract of the manuscript intended for publication.

We selected candidates primarily based on the academic quality of the proposed article. At the same time, we took special care to select researchers who displayed high potential for research and whose native language is not English.

During the application period from 1 August to 1 September 2015, the EAJS office received a total of 22 applications, out of which the selection committee chose 11 candidates for participation.

In terms of nationality, the final group of participants comprised three researchers from Japan, two from Poland, and one each from Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy.

All selected participants were required to submit a full article manuscript intended for publication in a journal in advance of the workshop. All manuscripts were circulated among all advisors and participants.

The workshop used two formats: first, Steven Dodd as editor of the journal *Japan Forum* introduced the various steps of the peer review process and explained from the perspective of an editor which information was needed from authors at each point in time. The discussions focused on how to select the best journal for one's research, how to tell a peer reviewed journal from a non-peer reviewed journal and how to get more information about a journal's focus and policies. Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Stephen Dodd explained the various steps of the review process and addressed possible pitfalls authors should avoid (for example multiple submissions at the same time). Participants also received sample letters to the editor intended to clearly communicate the points of the manuscript submitted, thus ensuring that journal editors could find the most suitable reviewers.

We closed the first day of the workshop with an evening reception at Restaurant "Alter Krug" near the university, thus giving participants the opportunity to get to know each other and to learn more about each other's research.

The second and third day of the workshop were devoted to the intensive discussion of the individual article manuscripts. The conceptual idea was here to simulate the peer review process. Authors did not present their work, but senior advisors and later other participants played the roles of peer reviewers, summarized the points of each article manuscript and discussed the manuscript's strengths and weaknesses. At the end of each discussion, recommendations for revision were given by all advisors and participants.

The papers were grouped into the sections "history", "literature and cultural studies" and "social sciences", in line with the respective expertise of the advisor who chaired the discussion.

Each manuscript was discussed for about 45 mins. Senior advisors would take the lead in the discussion, followed by participants.

At the end of the discussion, authors were allowed to answer questions or respond to the comments received. Each session also ended with recommendations about which journals in the field of Japanese Studies or area studies might be suitable outlets for manuscript submission.

The presentation of a second set of general guidelines later on in the program supplemented the individual sessions, with Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Stephen Dodd discussing strategies on how to deal with problems in the submission process and how to respond to reviewer's comments. Issues discussed here were strategies for revision and for communicating with journal editors about how to

## **1st EAJS Publication Workshop (Berlin, Germany, 16-18 November 2015)**

address which revisions were made to a manuscript. Considerable time was also used on strategies in cases where manuscripts were rejected, given the high rejection rates of many academic journals.

Initial reactions by workshop participants were highly positive. On the one hand, participants were grateful for comments and suggestions received, but they also highlighted that they had a better understanding of the peer review process and related communication strategies. All participants spoke out in favor of making such publication workshops a regular EAJS event, maybe taking place every two to three years to complement the PhD workshops.

The organizers and participants would like to thank the Japan Foundation for generously providing funds for travel and accommodation during the workshop. Moreover, many thanks go to the EAJS Office staff for organizational support.