

Reports by the Participants of the 17th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students

I applied to the 17th EASJ workshop following the suggestion of my supervisor, who was herself a participant during her Ph.D. years. I was extremely glad to have been accepted and to have had the chance to spend two intense days with other professional and highly prepared Ph.D. candidates and experienced faculty members. Even though the workshop had to be held online again, due to the worsening pandemic and the stricter travel restrictions, it was an extremely rewarding and productive experience. As a first year Ph.D. candidate, it was an honor to share my preliminary plan with other more advanced Ph.D. candidates and to get their insights on my work. All their feedback has been valuable and allowed me to consider theoretical and methodological issues I did not consider before.

I am also particularly grateful for the fruitful discussions we had during the panels and in the more informal meetings, such as coffee breaks and online dinners. Sometimes, carrying out a Ph.D. project can be a very solitary endeavor and we forget how essential insights from colleagues working in other research fields and with other methodologies can be to our own work. Especially in this pandemic year, during which in-person events have been either cancelled or moved online, it was a pleasure to find such a highly motivated group that was able to provide thought-provoking feedbacks in a very kind way.

I am very grateful to the organizers and to Prof. Jan Schmidt who helped us build a community in which we felt safe to share both intellectual and personal matters. I would also like to thank Prof. Daniel Poch for providing essential insights on my work, and all the other participants who contributed with their research to create a productive space for inquiry.

Giulia Baquè

Ca' Foscari University, Italy / Heidelberg University, Germany

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 more than one and a half years ago, I have listened to many different voices on the ways how the pandemic reshapes academic practices. Some of the most obvious remarks regard the struggles of not being able to go to the field, the limitations of creating a network with peers, and canceled or postponed funding opportunities. A more positive development, on the other hand, is the ability to join events all over the world through which very specific knowledge is made available to a wider audience. In this light, I have been joining numerous online lectures, roundtables, and workshops in and outside of the field of Japanese Studies throughout these times. Yet, the 17th EAJS Ph.D. workshop was the first occasion where I felt that the inability to physically meet did not take away from the success of the event.

Over the course of three days, the fifteen participants and senior scholars exchanged meaningful thoughts, expressed personal doubts, and built genuine personal and professional relationships.

Discussing my Ph.D. project in this environment provided me with new insights and energy to develop my research further. What I found especially valuable were the thought-provoking conversations about academia as a work environment and the choices that our generation of young scholars must make to determine its future direction. These discussions that combined both personal and institutional topics stood out most for me during the two workshop days.

With the above I hope to illustrate that, rather than simply a platform for knowledge-sharing, the 17th EAJS workshop provided a very intimate experience full of encouragement and care. I would sincerely like to thank Prof. Dr. Jan Schmidt, Prof. Dr. Daniel Poch, Prof. Dr. Shimizu Yuichirō, Prof. Emeritus Dr. Willy Vande Walle, EAJS, the Toshiba Foundation, and the Japan Foundation for making this possible. Further, I am particularly grateful to Dr. Deborah Giustini. Her personal thoughts on my project were extremely helpful and our honest and open talk during the private consultation session a valuable guidance for my future career.

Sarah Bijlsma

Freie Universitaet, Germany

The EAJS 17th Ph.D. Workshop 2021 was the highlight of my first year doing postgraduate research. Not only did I have the opportunity to present my research in a time when doing so is limited, I also received a huge amount of helpful and constructive feedback on my ideas from both peers and the incredible supervisors. Yet the value of the workshop, I felt, lay in the ability to network, collaborate and discuss in a friendly and encouraging atmosphere. After a year of working from home in total isolation, I felt for the first time like part of a wider community of scholars, which helped my confidence in myself and my research immensely.

Even over zoom, the conversation never felt awkward or stilted, as can occasionally happen when social events move online. The online dinners on day 1 and day 3 of the workshop really helped to create a relaxed environment, and any initial nerves I had were dissipated almost instantly. While we did have a real laugh together, we also had moments of seriousness. In a roundtable, we discussed numerous poignant themes such as life after the Ph.D., research and parenthood, and gender equality in academia. It was great to have such a ‘safe space’ to talk openly and freely about these important issues with both supervisors and Ph.D. colleagues.

Particular thanks go to Prof. Dr. Jan Schmidt for his invaluable feedback and for making the entire workshop a thoroughly enjoyable experience, but a huge thank you also goes to everyone involved in making the event a success. I would advise anyone who is thinking of applying to the next EAJS Ph.D. workshop to definitely give it a go.

Lauren Constance

Cardiff University, UK

In the light of the ongoing Covid19 pandemic, possibilities for scientific exchange – let alone international exchange – have been rare. Hence, I was especially excited about the opportunity to join the 17th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop of 2021 in Leuven. Even though the event was unfortunately held as an online format, the organizers and senior advisors really made an effort to design the workshop as interactive and vivid as possible.

The atmosphere was productive and appreciative during the whole time of the event. My fellow Ph.D. candidates listened to the projects of others with interest and even after long hours in front of the screen, thoughtfully asked questions and gave useful tips. It was enriching and motivating to be given the chance to gain new insights and learn from the different perspectives and methodological approaches of the interdisciplinary participants.

I especially would like to thank the senior advisors Prof. Dr. Schmidt, Dr. Giustini, Prof. Emeritus Dr. Vande Walle, and Prof. Dr. Shimizu as well as Prof. Dr. Poch for their openness to share even personal stories and their straightforward advice which I am truly grateful for. My advisor Prof. Dr. Shimizu, who's valuable comments I greatly appreciated, further stunned me by committing himself to the Belgian time zone while actually being in Japan during the event.

I am very much looking forward to being part of the EAJS network and keeping in touch for the years to come and to hopefully having the chance of getting together in person in the near future.

Katharina Dalko

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks for receiving the chance to be one of the participants of the 17th EAJS Workshop for Ph.D. Students. The Workshop was originally designed to be attended physically at KU Leuven from the 18 to 20 August 2021. As Covid-19 and its Delta variant caused an increase in the number of cases, the Workshop was moved and took place online. Despite being skeptical about the online format, I wanted to take the best from this great opportunity I was offered.

I think that the Workshop was useful in different ways. It was organized in four main panels which gathered together the research projects of the participants in accordance to the field of study and/or the thematic kinship. The presentation of each research project was followed by the remarks of the assigned Senior Advisor and by a discussion among all the Ph.D. students involved in the workshop. I believe that the opportunity to receive feedback about the project from the experts and the participants of the workshop constituted an important tool to improve the quality of the research. Considering that each Ph.D. student and each advisor has different majors, the workshop gave the possibility to think about your own research from a multitude of perspectives, therefore becoming an ideal laboratory to exercise your skills and your “imagination” as researcher.

The workshop was not limited to the academic realm. Coffee breaks, dinners, and ad hoc sessions were relevant moments during which the Ph.D. students and the advisors discussed important “academic life” related topics, such as mental health issues, life balance, and gender gap in Academia.

My initial skepticism was replaced by new energy received through the Workshop. For this reason, I want to express my gratitude to every single person that made this amazing experience possible.

Mattia Dello Spedale Venti

Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" Farizova, Italy

There is not a single activity nor element of the 17th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students that I would have planned otherwise. Despite the initial frustration after the communication that the Workshop would turn out to be an online event and my assumption that so many opportunities would have been lost, fortunately, I stood corrected. Professors and organizers have successfully built a two-day event that little had to envy to some on-person events I have attended so far. Firstly, the interdisciplinary character of selected students' researches allowed me to delve into a wide range of Japanese studies disciplines that up to that moment I was only superficially aware of. Sessions have been organized in such a way that presentations, although framed in quite different areas of study, were still very approachable and no matter the background, all students could easily intervene with comments or feedbacks. Secondly, participating senior supervisors came from different fields of expertise allowing again for a diverse but always reliable wide range of high-quality feedbacks and comments on students' presentations. What I also personally and highly appreciated was the keen and passionate participation of such supervisors in interacting with students and creating genuine chances for open dialogue. Thirdly, besides the tight schedule allotted for students' research, the Workshop included several moments for more informal interactions, ending up to be precious networking opportunities with both students and supervisors.

Lastly, I do believe the EAJS Workshop is a critical occasion especially for doctoral students who do not have the chance to be supervised in the Japanese area studies at their home institution and seek to receive confirmation that their work is navigating towards the right path. Personally, finding myself in such a situation, participating in the Workshop allowed me to regain confidence in the quality of my doctoral dissertation and boosting my commitment to enthusiastically carry out my research.

Giulia Dugar

Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, Italy

Despite being in an American university, I was kindly admitted to the EAJS Ph.D. Workshop in August 2021, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity. The workshop has helped me in advancing my research in multiple ways.

First, I was motivated to sit down and write a proposal of my future research and think through my next steps carefully. Moreover, the fact that I had to present it to a group of people who were not familiar with my ideas boosted my incentive to put my research into words carefully. Second, I got the chance to meet people from my field of Japanese studies who were doing their research in spheres totally different from mine, and it led to the variety of opinions and suggestions that I was looking for. As my research is interdisciplinary, advice related to other disciplines besides art and literature was extremely beneficial for me. Finally, it was my immense pleasure to connect with people in Europe. Despite the ongoing pandemic that somewhat spoilt the experience, I managed

to get to know marvelous scholars. On top of that, I did not expect to enjoy dinner events as much as I thought! It might be awkward to eat in front of the screen, but I surprised myself when I talked over several hours after the workshop was over with everyone in breakout rooms and fully enjoying my time.

I would like to thank the organizers for this amazing opportunity, especially Lorenz Denninger and Dr Jan Schmidt for going above and beyond for all participants, despite the challenging times.

Natalia Egorova
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

The workshop was a great experience for me and I was able to advance my dissertation project by a big step. The interdisciplinary exchange was an enrichment for my own research and I got to know a variety of topics, theories, and methods within the Japanese Studies which I was hardly aware of. A unique feature of the workshop is the one-on-one consultation with senior supervisors. My supervisor raised exactly the right and critical questions that had been bothering me for a long time and so I was able to grasp my problems and prepare the next steps to solve them. Although the workshop took place online, we were all able to get to know each other and engage in both a scientific and casual exchange. The interaction with each other was extremely respectful, so that it was possible to openly communicate one's own problem areas within the scientific work and to receive constructive and valuable feedback. Working on your first research project can be a solitary experience, especially due to the current pandemic situation. I struggled moving from the period of fieldwork, analysis of data, literature, and visual material into a phase of successive, routine writing. The EAJS workshop provided me with the necessary motivation and energy to approach my problem. The diversity and internationality of the participants was so inspiring that I realized that in the future I would like to work in a scientific environment with diverse and as international as possible perspectives.

Thank you very much for this unique and encouraging experience!

Olga Isaeva
University of Bonn, Germany

The 17th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students offered participants a great opportunity to gain insight into young scholars' current research regarding Japan, and gain feedback from peers and senior researchers of Japanese Studies. While usual networking activities were not possible due to well-known circumstances, the organizers nevertheless managed to create an informal atmosphere surrounding the presentations and ample time to converse with other participants during the lunchbreaks and online dinners.

I personally enjoyed hearing about the diverse research topics and approaches, of which all were very well thought through and deeply insightful. Discussing the various disciplines and research interests enabled me to see my own dissertation project from a new point of view and got me thinking about integrating new approaches, like virtual ethnography, for gathering further data. It was uplifting to hear about the various ways researchers manage to adapt to the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic holds for conducting fieldwork around the globe and create fascinating

studies regardless of this difficult situation. Further, I am thankful for the openness and approachability the senior advisors demonstrated in giving constructive feedback and sharing their own experiences in academia in different settings all around the world during the roundtable “Daigaku-in wa deta keredo... then what?”

Overall, participating in this workshop enabled me to strengthen my own research approach and figure out upcoming steps in my dissertation project, gain new insights in ongoing research regarding Japan, and connect with peers from different universities and research backgrounds. As exchange among likeminded peers is something of a rarity in the current times, and networking during online-conferences is limited, participating in this workshop was a highly welcome experience.

Antonia Miserka
University of Vienna, Austria

Like last year, the 17th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop took place under adverse circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was initially disappointed that the workshop had to be moved to an online format, as it would have been an exciting prospect to meet other Ph.D. candidates and scholars in person after more than a year of online courses, lectures, and meetings. However, the organizing team from KU Leuven and the EAJS, especially Prof. Dr. Jan Schmidt and Lorenz Denninger, did a great job of putting on an online workshop that created a productive as well as collegial atmosphere among the participants.

I applied for the workshop because I hoped to receive valuable feedback on my dissertation project, as I am still in the early stages of my Ph.D. work. Furthermore, I had hoped to get new impulses for my project through the exchange with other Ph.D. candidates and scholars, helping me to look beyond my own horizon. These hopes have been more than fulfilled. My senior advisor Dr. Daniel Poch not only helped me to find the gaps and missing links in my dissertation outline, but he also provided me with a list of recommended reading and advice on working as a researcher in a more general sense. The feedback from my cohort, especially those outside my discipline, also helped me to look at fundamental parameters of my project in a new light and to rethink them where necessary.

I cannot emphasize enough what a valuable experience the EAJS Ph.D. Workshop has been, and I would like to thank the EAJS and everyone involved. My sincere thanks also go to the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation for making this workshop possible.

Sarah Puetzer
University of Oxford, UK

On 18-20 August 2021, I had the privilege of attending the 17th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop, hosted by KU Leuven. It was an immensely stimulating experience, both intellectually and socially, and I will remember it for the rest of my life (although it may sound hyperbolic, I promise this last part is actually true!).

I was initially disappointed to learn that this year's workshop would be held online due to the spread of the delta variant of the now not-quite-so-novel coronavirus. I imagine that all participants – professors and Ph.D. students alike – would have preferred to meet in the flesh, since there is always something lacking about virtual events. However, I want to commend the organizers for doing such a good job with what they had been given – although the schedule was strenuous, there was a definite sense of an 'atmosphere' throughout the workshop – probably the most tangible 'atmosphere' at any digital event I have attended thus far. Here, I wish to highlight one particular aspect of the workshop: On Thursday, the senior scholars had arranged a *zadankai* of sorts where they shared their personal experiences and career advice regarding life after the Ph.D. Not only did I learn much from this roundtable, but it was also a very warm and cordial discussion – for a brief moment, I almost forgot the screens separating us!

I want to use this occasion to thank Professor Willy Vande Walle for his insightful feedback on my project, as well as professors Jan Schmidt and Daniel Poch for their ideas and suggestions to my project. I also want to thank all my fellow Ph.D. students for sharing their projects and feedback throughout the workshop – it is humbling to think that I have been included in a group of such bright minds. Also, I think I owe it to the Toshiba Foundation to say 'thanks for dinner!' – not to mention a thank you for funding the workshop itself.

Finally, on a personal note: A part of me was also relieved that I did not have to travel to Belgium after all, since my newborn son, who was originally due to be born in July, chose to arrive fashionably late: He was less than a week old by the beginning of the workshop, and I spent many of our 'coffee breaks' changing diapers – my memories of my son's first days on Earth will thus forever be inextricably tied to the EAJS workshop – thank you all for making this a good thing.

Jonathan Puntervold
Aarhus University, Denmark

As a doctoral student that works between the disciplines of Japanese Studies and the Study of Religion, it was an honor to participate in the 17th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students to be held at KU Leuven, Belgium. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from meeting face-to-face. Nevertheless, I still felt like we met at KU Leuven due to the great atmosphere during the workshop. I personally felt very connected and close to the supervisors and participants throughout the whole time, which is most definitely thanks to the great organization of both the EAJS and KU Leuven.

During the three days, we had the opportunity to present our projects, discuss academic life and challenges as well as socialize. Presenting one's own project in front of such a generous and intelligent audience from various disciplines not only made it very easy to feel confident, but also made the conversations about our topics, methods and progress much more fruitful. Since the supervisors and the Ph.D. students brought with them different perspectives from the sub disciplines of Japanese Studies, such as history, linguistics, media and communication studies or

social sciences, I considered the high-level debates extremely helpful in rethinking my own project. Being able to receive input from experienced colleagues that took the time to intensively study one's thesis' topic and give feedback from a new perspective aided me in taking into consideration a broader field of study. I value their advice.

Besides the high academic level discussions, the very supportive atmosphere of the workshop and the one-on-one coaching sessions, I am grateful for the honest roundtable discussion about academic life on the second day. In addition to the personal talks over dinner, we discussed the uncertainty about one's future in academia as well as the many opportunities our globalized world has to offer. Since we are now all connected thanks to the workshop, I felt a very strong sense of belonging, equal respect and support from all sides, and I have to say that I am very thankful for having been able to participate in such a great workshop.

Dunja Sharbat Dar
Ruhr University Bochum, Germany

I am grateful to EAJS, Japan Foundation, and the Toshiba International Foundation for organizing the 17th EAJS Ph.D. Workshop and for choosing me as one of the participants. Running the workshop over two intense Zoom days without any issues is no small feat, and the tech team did wonders in ensuring a smooth operation. I especially want to thank my workshop supervisor, Dr. Jan Schmidt, and the other supervisors on the team for providing valuable feedback. Their feedback and the questions and feedback from my fellow Ph.D. colleagues highlighted to me important aspects in my writing and communication which would help me improve. As I am in the final stages of my Ph.D., writing up these days, this was invaluable feedback and one I was very grateful to receive.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing it brought with it led to a slight sense of disconnection and isolation over the past 18 months, but the organizers of the workshop managed, together with the supervisors and the attendees, to create a welcoming, collegial atmosphere, where Ph.D. students and established and experienced academics could share opinions, ideas, and techniques. It was a pleasure also to hear about others' research and the variety and scope of topics they cover. The discussions were interesting, stimulating, engaging, and after a year of lockdowns and social distancing, it was heart-warming to regain the sense of community again, an academic community of scholars, who share curiosity about Japan which is at the root of all research. I am looking forward to meeting everyone in person one day and continue to develop the friendships we started in the workshop.

Julia Stobyar
SOAS University of London, UK

“Don’t do your Ph.D. alone!” was a piece of advice I received when I just embarked on my Ph.D. last year. After an exhausting year of social distancing, I finally got to fully understand its meaning during the 17th EAJS workshop for doctoral students. In addition to being an environment for me to present and get feedback on my work, the workshop was a place where ideas were exchanged, friendships were fostered, and inspiration was given.

I am extremely grateful to Prof. Shimizu Yuichiro for giving me a much-needed dose of reassurance in what I am doing. Prof. Shimizu has given me many valuable suggestions on how to proceed forward, i.e., who to contact, when to reach out, and what to read. I really look forward to meeting him again at Keio University during my upcoming fieldwork. Besides, Prof. Jan Schmidt’s advice for my future career also inspired me greatly, keeping me awake at night to think about the question “What’s next after the Ph.D.?”.

Throughout the workshop, I got to learn about multiple topics in Japanese studies from my fellow Ph.D. candidates, which I was ignorant about. More importantly, I really enjoyed the fireside chats, where we could discuss a variety of matters, from the life of a Ph.D. student to biases in climate change discourse. I am greatly thankful to all my new friends and mentors for the inspiration.

Although we could not visit KU Leuven for the workshop this year, the online format was skillfully executed. Hence, I would also like to thank the organizing team of EAJS for making this workshop happen.

“Don’t do your Ph.D. alone!”. This tongue-in-cheek piece of advice has proven to be true. The inspiration, the academic and emotional support, and the get-together dinners are all important factors that can push me towards the finish line. And the EAJS Ph.D. workshop has given me all of them.

Ngo Tu Thanh (Frank Tu)
Freie Universitaet Berlin, Germany

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Jan Schmidt, Mr. Lorenz Denninger, and the rest of the organizing team from the Leuven Catholic University. Despite the fact that the epidemiological situation did not allow us to meet physically, the organizers were successful in creating a friendly yet academically stimulating atmosphere.

I applied for the 17th EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students after hearing about it from my seniors. My high expectations were fully met and now I consider the workshop as one of the most meaningful experiences during my Ph.D. candidate life so far. Moreover, considering that I am studying in Japan and the pandemic disrupted much of the traditional scholarly exchange, the mainly European audience helped me gain a fresh perspective on my doctoral dissertation.

In addition, on the second day of the workshop we had planned a roundtable during which we enjoyed a very frank discussion regarding the career pathways of young academics. The senior advisors offered us information about the challenges, but also the rewards of an academic career. As Ph.D. candidates, we have numerous chances to receive feedback for our research, but there are little opportunities to gain clarity about what follows after getting our degrees. For this reason, I personally think that the roundtable was one of the highlights of the workshop.

Lastly, I would like to thank Prof. Emeritus Dr. Willy Vande Walle for his careful reading and insightful comments during the individual consultation. As I am entering the final year of my Ph.D. program, the whole experience gave me more confidence that I will be able to finish my project.

Alin Gabriel Tirtara
Osaka University, Japan

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