

Report on the 9th EAJS PhD Workshop, Frankfurt, Germany

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Report by Academic Organiser

The 9th EAJS PhD workshop took place in Frankfurt between Thursday 7th and Saturday 9th March 2013 in cooperation with the Goethe University Frankfurt. The workshop covered all disciplines in Japanese Studies from history and literature to the social sciences. It was organised into 7 sessions which were made up of the following topics: Triviality and Distance (session 1), Japan in Asia (session 2), From Pre-Modern to Modern Japan (session 3), Concepts of Modernity (session 4), Dynamism in Japan's Regulatory Framework (session 6) and Management and Labour Markets in Transition. Additionally, we put emphasis on constructing spaces and time for informal social interaction, in particular by a welcome dinner on Thursday, 7th, a dinner on Friday, 8th, and in-between coffee breaks. The logic of the sessions followed the topics mentioned above, but was additionally among somewhat similar disciplines. To give an example, session 6 on the Dynamism in Japan's Regulatory Framework was a political-economic session, with contributions from energy policy, political science and anthropology. Doing so, the papers were sufficiently close to be discussed by one or two supervisors, but also, thanks to this broad framework, shed light on the topic from different angles.

In total, a group of seven professors was invited to join the workshop as academic supervisors: Reiko Abe-Auestad, University of Oslo, for literature, Michael Kinski, Goethe University, Frankfurt, for history of thought, Paul Midford, Norwegian University for Science and Technology in Trondheim, for political science, Karen Shire, University Duisburg-Essen, for Sociology, Sébastien Lechevalier, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris), for economics, Moritz Bälz, Goethe University, Frankfurt, for Law and Sven Osterkamp, Bochum University, for linguistics. I presented management science. This broad range of disciplines allowed us to give very specific comments on the PhD papers presented, as the PhD projects were very close to the ongoing research of the supervisors. The PhD workshop participants came from a wide range of European, US American and Asian universities and were working on issues in diverse academic fields ranging from Japanese history and literature to managerial labour markets in Japan. This year the number of applications for participation in the 9th EAJS PhD workshop reached 47 (despite the relative proximity to the 8th PhD workshop) and resulted in a total of 16 presenting participants (we had one cancellation at short notice).

Next to facilitating networking activity and to establishing contacts among young scholars, the overall aim of this PhD workshop was to support dissertation projects of promising PhD candidates and to provide the students with constructive feedback on their doctoral

research by multi-faceted points of view. We had about 40 minutes for each presentation and the presentations were structured in a 20+10+10 format: 20 minutes for presentation, 10 minutes for comments by the supervisors, and 10 minutes for open discussion. In addition, there was plenty of time for bilateral discussions between supervisors and PhD students, which were carried out during the breaks, including dinner, lunch, coffee breaks, or at the farewell event at the end of the workshop. All PhD students agreed that they were able to benefit a lot from the supervisors' comments and suggestions and the discussions among themselves.

In the final round of the PhD workshop we organised a feedback round. The PhD students commented that they appreciated in particular:

- The detailed comments of the supervisors, and the careful way in which they read their proposal. All supervisors commented on content, relevance of the topic, method, and the arguments made, which helped the PhD students to more clearly formulate their research questions and how they will continue to answer them. The fact that the workshop is addressed to PhD students in the middle phase of their PhD made the comments particularly valuable.
- In the final feedback round, students were also informed about other organisations that might be of interested for exchanging their ideas on their ongoing research. To date, many students did not have access to this kind of information.
- Another issue related to general topics of writing a PhD such as which method to choose, which journals to publish in, and how to publish a paper in an international journal at all. While some advice was also given in this workshop, it was recommended that in future an additional workshop focusing on methods and academic writing should be offered.
- Finally, the students highly appreciated the opportunity to create a network of European students, doing research on Japan. As the project outlines were sent in advance to all participants, and all participants were asked to read the material of all other students, the exchange also between different disciplines was made easier. As one student formulated it: "Even if some topics were from very different disciplines, I felt that they 'echoed' what I did". To put it differently, the workshop also opened up the opportunity – besides the discipline-based comments from the supervisors – to broaden the horizon and to link up one's own research with ongoing research in other disciplines.

There were several suggestions by the participants, e.g. to introduce a section on methods/ academic writing, to have parallel subgroups with a supervisor and the supervised PhD students, to make all project outlines accessible on the EAJS intranet, and also some logistical suggestions to have reimbursement in advance for those who are in need of it. All these suggestions will be communicated within the EAJS. At the same time, the consensus

was that the current format - supervisor of the discipline, presentations + comments by the supervisor + open discussion, no separation of the workshop into disciplines, breaks for informal interaction – is the ideal set-up for the PhD students and should not be changed.

In my position as organiser, I wish to add that I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to organise the 9th EAJS PhD workshop in Frankfurt and that I enjoyed the discussions with the PhD students and supervisors. I would like to thank the organisation team, in particular Dr. Susanne Brucksch and Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott from the EAJS office (at the Freie Universität of Berlin), and Elssy Kiradjieva from the University of Frankfurt. Finally, I would like to thank all sponsors of this PhD workshop. The workshop was funded by the Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO), the Japan Foundation and the Association of Friends and Sponsors of the University of Frankfurt (VFF), and supported by the European Japan Advanced Research Network (EJARN). We are very grateful for this financial support, and are very glad to have had the opportunity to hold the 9th workshop in Frankfurt.

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