

Reports by the participants of the 20th EAJWS Workshop for Doctoral Students

Attending the 20th edition of the EAJWS doctoral workshop was a wonderful experience. I received some really interesting insights and meaningful feedback from not only the supervisors, but also from my fellow PhD students. Hearing about others' research projects and the difficulties they were facing really helped me not feel alone on my journey. Although our research themes were often very different, both in terms of aspiration and scope, I found inspiration in the way they envision their research and the methodology they are using. Many comments addressed to other projects were also beneficial to my own research. Two in particular caught my attention. First, the importance of a good research question. Then, that one well analyzed study case is better than a multitude of studies with low quality analysis.

This workshop was amazing for a lot of reasons. Meeting with other PhD students from Europe and helping one another really was a memorable experience and I hope we will foster long-term connections. It reminded me of the importance of being in contact with other countries' academic communities in order to not be limited to what is happening in one's country of origin. Last but not least, I would also like to point out the Bulgarian generosity! Although the temperature was excruciatingly hot on some days, the kindness and care of the Sofia University staff made up for it and was truly the highlight of this event. They took every opportunity they had to introduce us to the local culture; we had delicious meals and the opportunity to watch traditional dances. I am thankful for their warm welcome and I would definitely recommend every PhD student they attend an EAJWS workshop!

Laura Agnel
EPHE University, France

I had the pleasure and honor of attending the 20th EAJWS Workshop for Doctoral students in Sofia, Bulgaria, this summer. It was my first experience participating in an event run by the EAJWS and my first trip to Bulgaria. Besides the beautiful landscape of Bulgaria and the artistically inspiring city of Sofia, the event organizers at the "Saint Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University allowed for us to make the most out of our workshop days.

The supportive and friendly environment sustained throughout the workshop created a perfect atmosphere for exchanging ideas, opinions, and feedback. This I feel we, as students and researchers, benefitted greatly from. Although the topics were heterogeneous, the senior advisors encouraged discussions and had great insights and advice for each panel. I am grateful to Professor Brigitte Steger for our roundtable at the end of our first panel. The discussions we had with the other students presenting during the first session were extremely helpful. The diverse perspectives

and fields of our projects did at times make it difficult to give proper suggestions, but Professor Steger always managed to find the right words to make us think and meditate upon our doubts. In the end, I realized we shared the same fears at each level of our doctoral path, and professors confessed for it to be normal.

In my opinion, the strong point of the doctoral workshop for Japanese studies was its multidisciplinary aspect. I am beyond grateful to have had the opportunity to share these few days with my fellow participants, all the senior advisors, and the organizers of Sofia University. It was truly a pleasure to be part of the workshop, and I am looking forward to another traditional Bulgarian evening together.

Marzia Altano
University of Montreal, Canada

In June 2024, I had the privilege of participating in the 20th EAJIS PhD Workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria – an experience I am certain will remain one of the highlights of my PhD Fellowship. Engaging with a diverse group of PhD students was incredibly inspiring, especially given our varied approaches to studying Japan. The discussions, both during the workshop and at the dinners afterward, were lively, good-natured, and intellectually stimulating. Receiving feedback from scholars across fields ranging from Art History to Humanitarian Forensics was invaluable.

I applied to the workshop to present my research project on Japanese robotics and innovation policy through the theoretical lens of Science and Technology Studies, and of course, to network with fellow Japan scholars in Europe. The workshop exceeded my expectations: the participants were wonderful, and the academic staff at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski offered kind and insightful comments to all the presenting PhD students. The event was well organized, and the Senior Advisors for each panel provided extensive feedback. I was especially grateful for the comments from Prof. Dr. Judit Hidasi.

I would like to thank the EAJIS for giving me the opportunity to attend this workshop, as well as for the funding that covered my travel expenses and accommodation. A special thank you goes to the Japan Studies team at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, as well as the Senior Advisors, who made the workshop a remarkable experience. And, of course, a huge thank you to all my fellow PhD student participants! It was great meeting you all – I look forward to seeing you again and hopefully collaborating in the future.

Amanda Brødsgaard
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

The 20th EAJIS Doctoral Workshop proved to be an incredible opportunity for growth on both an academic and a personal level. I attended the event just a couple of months before finishing my fieldwork in Japan, a critical moment in my research project. As I was confronted with the amount of data gathered, as well as with a few ethical questions, receiving feedback from my advisor has definitely helped me re-orient my research and better define the scope of my thesis before I start the writing process. The guidance of the senior scholars, as well as the comments from my peers, allowed me not only to look at my data from a different perspective, but also to find new research lines which will definitely enrich my thesis as well as my future research. I am incredibly glad and

grateful for the advice received, and I cannot stress enough the impact of this workshop on my doctoral journey.

Furthermore, meeting both established scholars in the field of Japanese Studies and promising young researchers undoubtedly enriched my network, hopefully allowing for future collaborations furthering the internationalization and interdisciplinaryization of Japanese Studies. It was incredibly thrilling to get a peek into the latest research on Japan, and I am looking forward to reading the final output of my peers.

Finally, I am also incredibly grateful for the amazing hospitality of Sofia University. The staff made our stay incredibly pleasant and enriching, allowing us to experience Sofia and Bulgarian culture to the fullest during such a short stay. Their hard work and dedication made the event an incredibly productive one, alternating between intense sessions and more relaxed moments to network and exchange advice. Therefore, I am beyond grateful to both Sofia University and EAJIS for their contribution to my formation as a researcher!

Marco Del Din

Heidelberg University, Germany and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

To put it succinctly, my participation in the 20th EAJIS Workshop for Doctoral Students has proved to be a fruitful undertaking. Although I still find the concept of networking quite intimidating, I am positive that the valuable feedback I have received from the senior academic advisors and my peers will be a tremendous help in elevating the quality of my research.

For example, the handbook “Studying Japan”, which was recommended to us by Dr. Brigitte Steger, seems to offer a possible solution for some of my anxieties regarding research design. Following the advice of Dr. Hans Thomsen, I am also exploring the links between Ainu and modern manga featuring Ainu culture to expand my research. Additionally, a fellow attendee suggested that—in order to strengthen my theoretical foundation in memory studies—I should incorporate the work of researchers who offer a different perspective from Pierre Nora and his “places of memory”, which are currently a core component in my working theory. In addition to this theoretical help, I have also received some practical advice about the design of my presentation slides, which I will take into account in the future to create more eye-catching and easier-to-read presentations.

To conclude my brief report, I would like to reflect on what I will try to do differently next time, as this was my very first workshop experience. Although the kindness of everyone involved in this event resulted in a relaxed atmosphere, I was still too nervous to express all my opinions in the round table discussions, so I will need to work a bit on finding my voice. Lastly, I would like to thank everyone involved in organizing the Workshop for letting me participate - it was a wonderful opportunity!

Zsófia Keller

Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE), Hungary

I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of the 20th EAJS PhD workshop held at Sofia University. The workshop provided a valuable opportunity for sharing and discussing my research, despite it not being directly within the field of Japanese studies. The warm and welcoming environment cultivated by the participants and organizers greatly contributed to the constructive feedback I received.

I was initially concerned that my research, which focuses on the management of the dead, issues of identification, and the search for missing persons in the aftermath of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan (which also lies at the intersection of forensic anthropology and social anthropology) might be outside the workshop's scope. However, the audience's openness to exploring interdisciplinary perspectives allowed for meaningful exchanges.

I would like to extend special thanks to Professor Steger from Cambridge University for her insightful feedback and invaluable advice. Her expertise helped refine my research and prompted me to consider additional dimensions related to policy making.

Overall, the workshop was a significant opportunity for professional growth and interdisciplinary engagement. I am sincerely thankful to all who made this experience possible.

Sora Duly

Aix-Marseille University, France

I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to present my dissertation project in Bulgaria, at Sofia University. I am also grateful for the helpful comments and that I got to meet and get to know my senior advisors and fellow PhD students. The supportive and friendly environment which was sustained throughout the workshop created an encouraging atmosphere for exchanging knowledge, ideas and opinions, from which I feel I have benefitted greatly. Reading the other participants' project reports alone sparked many ideas in me.

The workshop was very well-organized. Sadly, the weather was so hot that sometimes focusing was really hard. However, the length of the event provided not only sufficient time for all 20 participants to present their projects, but also allowed for stimulating conversations with the other participants. I enjoyed learning about other PhD projects. And while it was challenging to introduce my project to such a wide-ranging interdisciplinary audience, it was an instructive experience that I will be able to draw from in the future. Furthermore, I am very grateful to the senior advisors for their insightful and motivating comments. I would like to thank the hosts for their excellent organization and the EAJS, the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation for their support in creating this wonderful platform for PhD students. Finally, I would like to strongly recommend the workshop to any young academic researcher engaged in Japanese studies!

Máté Kovács

Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

The EAJS 20th PhD Workshop 2024 has been one of the highlights of my first year of postgraduate research. The opportunity to participate in dynamic and stimulating discussions with contemporaries in the field of Japanese studies has been galvanising as I progress with my project. The interdisciplinary interests of the participating researchers ensured that there was never a dull

moment of discussion and permitted me to acquire knowledge that I would never have obtained otherwise. The diverse perspectives of all the attending researchers have enabled me to broaden my understanding of current research within the field of Japanese Studies, which will undoubtedly improve the quality of my research. The strengthening force of this programme will be far-reaching within the developments of my thesis. The session where I presented an overview of my proposal was incredibly beneficial, with feedback from Professor Hans Thomsen and discussion from my peers highlighting points of interest and directional advice. The experience of being in a space that encouraged intellectual exchange and facilitated supportive discussion resulted in an invigorating workshop.

The connections I made during the conference have been invaluable; it has already led to conversations about developing panels for other conferences and sharing research ideas with other participating members. This fruitful outcome is thrilling, as prior to this event I did not have an extensive network of contemporaries to share concepts with. The opportunity to connect socially with my peers has made me feel less solitary in my research, and filled me with excitement for more conversations to come.

I would like to thank Sofia University for hosting an incredibly informative and joyous experience. All members of the Sofia University team were wonderfully friendly and inspiring. I was so pleased to share a dance with many at the restaurant on our final nights in full Bulgarian flare.

Joe Nickols
University of London, Great Britain

It was a great honour and pleasure for me to participate in the 20th EAJS PhD Workshop. I am extremely happy to have had the chance to present my doctoral project and receive valuable bits of advice from my senior colleagues and other participants. I am sure that this is a rather important and much-needed stage in working on my dissertation.

In addition to the very friendly atmosphere created by the organizers, senior advisors and doctoral students of the workshop, I had the unique opportunity to look at contemporary Japanese studies from a much broader perspective. Moreover, I am exceptionally glad to have met new interesting Japanese scholars, and to even have made friends among them in such short time!

I would also like to highlight the conduct of the event by the host party. Everything – accommodation, the venues and the meals – was very well planned and prepared. Many thanks to the team of organizers!

Purely as a wish: it would be great to have the opportunity (in addition to personal contacts) to learn about the successes of other participants in the implementation of their doctoral projects (on the official website of the EAJS, for example).

In summary, the workshop exceeded my expectations in terms of content and process. I am sincerely grateful to all the organizers and participants of the event and excited for the future of this program.

Yuliya Osadcha Ferreira
Bonn University, Germany

I am very grateful that I could attend the 20th EAJIS PhD Works in Sofia, Bulgaria. This workshop provided me with a valuable opportunity to develop my research further and enrich my doctoral journey in various ways.

Despite the diverse backgrounds of the participants, which span from pre-modern religion studies to contemporary cultural studies, the challenges we face in designing a feasible dissertation project, establishing a robust theoretical framework, and selecting an appropriate analytical method are remarkably similar. In this sense, introducing a work-in-progress project to a multi-disciplinary audience was an instructive experience for me. The insights gained from my excellent peers in the workshop were particularly inspiring. I am confident that this workshop could serve as a starting point for fostering future academic collaborations.

The encouraging comments from Prof. Marcovic about the overall framework of my project drove me to think outside the box. In addition, during the free discussion session, I was deeply enlightened by Prof. Steger's advice on how to deal with the tension between theory and empirical data. After the two-day intensive exchange program, the delicious Bulgarian cuisine comforted my brain and stomach. A traditional Bulgarian dance show at the farewell dinner added a joyful taste to this unforgettable event.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the EAJIS Office for helping me arrange an additional travel document, the Sofia University team for their organizational efforts, and the generous support of the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation. Your support has made this fantastic event possible!

Sian Qin
Ludwig-Maximilian-University of Munich, Germany

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of this workshop, which provided me with excellent learning and networking opportunities with PhD candidate peers across Europe and Japan. Throughout the course of this workshop, I truly felt the significance of cooperating with EAJIS members, as each of us has different areas of expertise. I was inspired by my peers' passion for their research, which motivated me to complete my PhD thesis. The feedback and comments I received from my peers were insightful, allowing me to think about my research from different perspectives.

In addition, the topics that each participant is working on were inspiring, and I learned a lot from their work. I found we have many potential future research opportunities if we can work together. I truly believe that the peer relationships I formed during this workshop will not end with this opportunity but will continue. We can be the research colleagues and help each other in our future academic careers.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the supervisors and organizers. It was a pleasure to receive feedback from experts in Japanese studies on my topic. As I am based in a department that does not have Japanese studies, I was keenly seeking opportunities to gain

comments from experts in the field. This great opportunity allowed me to receive such feedback, and I am now more motivated to keep working on my projects thanks to their positive comments. Thank you very much.

Sayaka Saito
University College London, Great Britain

I found participating in the 20th EAJS PhD Workshop to have been very rewarding. During it, I managed to get a better perspective not only on my own work, but also its relation to other ongoing dissertation projects in the field of Japanese studies. For someone who is still in the early stages of their project, this event proved helpful in situating my project, and refining its focus, as I received plenty of positive encouragement that helped in both of these aspects.

Some of the concerns that I already had about my project were also presented to me, such as the potential relevance of the project, stressing the importance of developing an effective response to that. What was also brought up during the sessions and conversations outside of them was the need to better define various terms used within the project, which I found to be beneficial.

The workshop also proved useful in getting acquainted with doctoral students and other experts engaged in a similar field from other countries. This greatly helped me expand my vision from a rather small and insular national level to a more international level. I also received plenty of pointers to experts I should be get in touch with in the future.

This event was also an excellent opportunity to gain some experience on how to present my research. I got a good idea on what went well with the presentation during the session, and what points I could improve upon in the future.

Given all these factors, I think that the workshop was especially useful for someone in an early stage of their dissertation project.

Ville Sava
University of Turku, Finland

I am extremely pleased to have had the chance to engage with a diverse group of fellow Ph.D. candidates and esteemed faculty members over three stimulating days.

The diversity of topics and methodologies represented was astounding. The breadth of research interests within the framework of Japanese studies among the participants was deeply inspiring and encouraged me to approach my work from multiple perspectives.

The inclusive and welcoming atmosphere at Sofia University was palpable throughout the workshop. The organizers fostered an environment where we felt comfortable sharing our ideas and exchanging constructive feedback. This sense of community was further reinforced by the lively discussions during panel sessions and the more informal interactions during coffee breaks and dinners. Moreover, I really appreciated the effort of Sofia University team to present to us the richness of Bulgarian culture and unique atmosphere of the city of Sofia.

I am particularly grateful for the valuable insights provided by Prof. Dr. Judit Hidasi regarding my

presentation. I found it extremely stimulating to present my work in Sofia, as my research partially touches upon the region of East-Central Europe – the comments I have received were thought-provoking.

Additionally, the opportunity to interact with colleagues from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange, and the rich perspectives it brings to our work.

The workshop at Sofia University not only helped me refine my research, but also reminded me of the significance of a supportive academic community. It was inspiring to be part of a group so dedicated to advancing knowledge and fostering a culture of kindness and intellectual generosity. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the organizers, the faculty, and my fellow participants for creating such a dynamic and welcoming space for scholarly exchange.

Anna Shimomura
Osaka University, Japan

Taking part in the workshop proved to be an amazing experience. All other participants, as well as professors and Sofia University staff members were very kind and willing to discuss various aspects of research and Japanese studies in general. Participants differed by their fields of specialty and background, which created a strongly varied, pluralistic environment, which was excellent for networking. I have high hopes that the acquaintances which I made will have interest in future cooperation.

Every project presented at the workshop was of high value. I learned a lot by participating in the discussions and by listening to the experiences of other PhD students. All the advice given by the professors was also of great help to me and my project. I feel as though I grew immensely as a scholar and as a person during these four very eventful, wonderful days. I believe that participating in the EAJIS PhD Student Workshop is a great experience for every young researcher specializing in Japanese studies, regardless of their background and specialty. I am also very grateful to the professors for their dedication and willingness to help us grow as scholars. Toward the staff at Sofia University, I extend my thanks for the amazing organization and warm reception that was provided to every participant.

Marek Skurski
University of Gdańsk, Poland

This year's edition of the EAJIS Ph.D. Workshop was an excellent opportunity to network with what I believe to be the next generation of Japanese studies experts, and a great chance to meet the growing Japanese studies department in Sofia. Over the course of the conference, we had the pleasure to engage in critical debates on a multitude of fields, ending on some vital points on the importance of both Japanese studies and the EAJIS PhD Workshop.

What this workshop made clear to me is that in an ever more interdisciplinary humanities, area studies are valuable academic assets. Engaging across disciplines, I believe, is vital for the growth of the humanities.

Personally, the debates that were held during the workshop were of huge importance to me, and will be taken into consideration as I prepare my manuscript over the course of the next year. I am grateful for the suggestions made by Prof. Judit Hidashi. Her remarks were valuable feedback to me. Her point on “ethnorelativity” in how POWs were punished, is something I might need to clarify. The notion that Japan demonstrated only a superficial level (also called a “veneer”) of civilization, is now believed to have been born from discriminative ideas following World War 2. What I got out of this workshop was that I need to clarify how the theory and practice of punishment relate to Japan’s ideas of modernity and civilization.

Nicolas Stassar
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

I am very grateful to have been accepted to participate in the 20th EAJS PhD Workshop held in Sofia, Bulgaria. This workshop offered a chance to meet, interact and connect with PhD students and senior advisors in an informal and relaxed fashion, both during the official sessions and during the breaks, lunches and dinners. The organizers from Sofia did a great job of making sure we all felt welcome and at ease.

I am at a stage in my thesis where I still have questions and concerns about some aspects of my research. Participation in this workshop may have not completely resolved them but gave me valuable feedback and input to ‘nudge’ me into the right direction. Even though the presentation session may seem like the most important aspect in terms of getting feedback or advice, the informal discussions with other participants and the questions they ask you about your research are also very valuable and, in some cases, even more so due to the time restraints of the formal presentation session. It is interesting to hear opinions of others who are not in your field, because it can prompt you to take a new viewpoint on your research.

This workshop was a great opportunity for me to discuss my topic and, through interaction with others, to gain ideas on how to improve it and where. I was also happy to meet great people from various fields of Japanese Studies and hope I will have the opportunity to meet or collaborate with them in the future.

Katarina Šukelj
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and University of Zagreb, Croatia

Upon the suggestion of a previous participant of the EAJS PhD Workshop, I decided to apply for the 20th edition and had the opportunity to be part of this cross-continental encounter. The 20th EAJS PhD Workshop in the Bulgarian capital city of Sofia was an enriching experience, offering a diverse range of themes and a welcoming atmosphere for academic exchange. The event also provided an excellent opportunity for networking with PhD students from Japan and various European countries.

My presentation on the exhibitions of Japanese avant-garde in Europe was part of a panel on Japanese art and culture. I received constructive feedback from Prof. Hans Thomsen, who chaired the panel during my dissertation project presentation. His insights were invaluable for refining my future work, and I am deeply grateful for his thoughtful comments and guidance.

I also had the chance to engage in in-depth exchanges with peers who work on Japanese art. Notably, three presentations by Joe Nickols, Hui Wang, and myself explored the concept of the “avant-garde” across different periods and contexts, which significantly deepened our understanding of the term and inspired potential future academic collaborations.

Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude to Stella Zhivkova, a professor at Sofia University, who introduced Hui and me to Zlatka Dimitrova, a curator from the National Gallery of Bulgaria. We were given a guided tour of the museum, where we learned about the history of Iri and Toshi Maruki, a left-wing Japanese artist couple, in Bulgaria. This experience was both informative and inspiring.

Finally, the workshop offered a wonderful immersion into Bulgarian art and culture, including their renowned hospitality and culinary delicacies. I am thankful for the warm reception and the rich cultural experiences provided by our hosts.

Wei Sun

Heidelberg University, Germany and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

I received a lot of useful feedback on my PhD research from both common and different professional perspectives across various disciplines. Although I study history, my research topic is related to interdisciplinary fields, such as genealogy, social anthropology, law, religion and gender, so this was quite beneficial for me. The findings I made at the workshop will contribute to the completion of my PhD thesis. I also had the opportunity to meet Japanese studies specialists and postgraduate students from all over Europe, which helped me build connections and gain a better understanding of the academic environment for Japanese/East Asian studies in each country. The range of topics covered by the other presenters was very broad and interesting, and I was able to deepen my interest in areas outside my field of expertise, while at the same time finding unexpected hints for my research from seemingly unrelated topics.

It was also a great experience for me as a PhD candidate specialising in the Imperial Family of Japan to be able to visit museums and cultural heritage sites related to the former Bulgarian royal family in between workshops. In addition to watching traditional Bulgarian music performances during the dinner at the end of the workshop, the opportunity to sing 'Sakura Sakura' in Japanese with a local professional singer was one of the most memorable experiences for me as an amateur enka singer.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all the senseis, Sofia University, the European Association for Japanese Studies, the Toshiba International Foundation and everyone involved. Arigatō gozaimashita.

Hirohito Tsuji

University of East Anglia, Great Britain

The workshop was a highly beneficial and rewarding experience. It provided a supportive scholarly community and brought together a diverse group of scholars, including peers and professors from various institutions across Europe. This provided a broad spectrum of perspectives and expertise for me to find out about current dynamics of the field.

One of the most valuable aspects of the workshop was the constructive feedback I received on my own research. The critiques and suggestions from both peers and experienced professors have provided insightful feedback for improving my theoretical and methodological approaches as well as the structure of my argument, helping to improve the quality of my work. Additionally, learning about the research projects of other participants was enlightening. It was fascinating to see the wide range of topics being explored within Japanese Studies, and I gained many new insights and ideas from their presentations.

The workshop's panel arrangement, however, was somewhat challenging. Particularly on the second day, with three panels scheduled back-to-back, the sessions became quite intense. By the final panel, many participants, including myself, found it difficult to maintain focus and fully engage with the presentations due to fatigue. Despite this, the overall structure of the workshop was well-organized, and the quality of discussions remained high.

The social opportunities provided during the workshop were incredibly constructive. Ample time was allocated for networking, allowing us to build deeper relationships and understand others' research interests more thoroughly. These interactions were not only beneficial for immediate academic exchange, but also for forming long-term connections. I am confident that the relationships and collaborations established during this workshop will continue to be valuable resources throughout my academic career.

Hui Wang
University of Heidelberg, Germany

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support for this event from:

