

My Research Experience

Alessio Patalano
(JSPS ID No.: PE 08522)

Current Position: Lecturer in Asian Warfare and Security
 Department of War Studies
 King's College London

Host Institution during fellowship: Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo

Title of Research in Japan: ‘Beneath the waves’: Submarine Warfare and Japan’s
 Post-war Naval strategy (1955-2006)

Fellowship Period: 27 March – 26 July 2009 (4 months)

My post-doc research period in Japan was a most rewarding experience. During my four-month stay in Tokyo, I had the opportunity to be based at the School of International Politics, Economics and Business of Aoyama Gakuin University. The atmosphere at the university was very pleasant whilst colleagues, senior academics and administration personnel were all supportive and friendly. Prof Takagi, my host and supervisor at Aoyama, was patient enough to meet me regularly to discuss my research agenda. He provided me with stimulating thoughts and feedback on my research and organised a seminar at the school for me to present the findings of my research. From a logistical point of view, Aoyama’s strategic location in Shibuya – Tokyo’s beating heart – gave me the opportunity to walk to almost all core libraries and institutions crucial to my research whilst enjoying the quiet beauty of Aoyama’s gardens and the intriguing dynamism of Tokyo’s daily life!

My research project unfolded from my PhD thesis which examined the historical, strategic and socio-cultural features of Japan’s post-1945 defence and naval policies. The project focused on the development of the JMSDF’s submarine force to address crucial questions on Japan’s maritime vulnerability. As an island-nation poor in primary resources, Japan relied heavily on seaborne trade for its post-war economic recovery. As such, the safety of maritime transportation assumed paramount importance in the country’s security. In particular, Japan’s critical ability to protect its three straits (Soya, Tsugaru, Tsushima) and its western peripheries to ensure the flow of goods to and from the archipelago led the JMSDF’s leadership to consider the submarine as a central asset in its defensive matrix in the Cold war and beyond.

In order to conduct my research, I concentrated on four different source materials. The archival research was conducted primarily at the internal library of the National Institute for Defence Studies (NIDS). These materials were integrated with unpublished official documents provided by the Headquarters of the JMSDF’s Submarine Force and relevant interviews with civilian and military authorities. In addition, to better understand Japan’s post-war submarine culture and strategy, I was given the possibility to visit the submarine base and training school in Kure, as well as the Submarine Force headquarters in Yokosuka. There, I interviewed serving personnel and explored the professional and social features of the force.

Crucial to my ability to research sensitive issues concerning Japanese contemporary security was the opportunity to establish a network among academics and practitioners working on defence matters. A long and repeated exposure to Japanese security circles, civilian and uniformed men was essential to create the necessary understanding of the goals of my research. In this respect, I had the advantage that I could take advantage of previous visits in Japan during the doctorate. This meant that I could rely on strong ties with senior officers in the

JMSDF developed throughout the years. Their assistance was pivotal in enabling me to access official documents that, though not classified, had never circulated outside the JMSDF.

Needless to say, the JSPS post-doctoral grant represented a unique opportunity to enhance the results of my research activity and the assistance provided by the JSPS was outstanding. It was an enriching experience I recommend strongly, particularly because it enabled a young foreign researcher like myself to spend time in Japan to interact with the civilian and military environments as a way to learn more about the country and to give them the possibility to appreciate foreign academic interest in Japanese security. It is in light of such spirit of mutual exchange that satisfactory results were achieved.

I am very glad to advise potential applicants on possibilities of research on Japanese security, military history and defence policy. Please contact me at my email address.