

Vol.19 Professor Erica Baffelli

**Professor Erica Baffelli**

Professor of Japanese Studies, Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, The University of Manchester

Biography

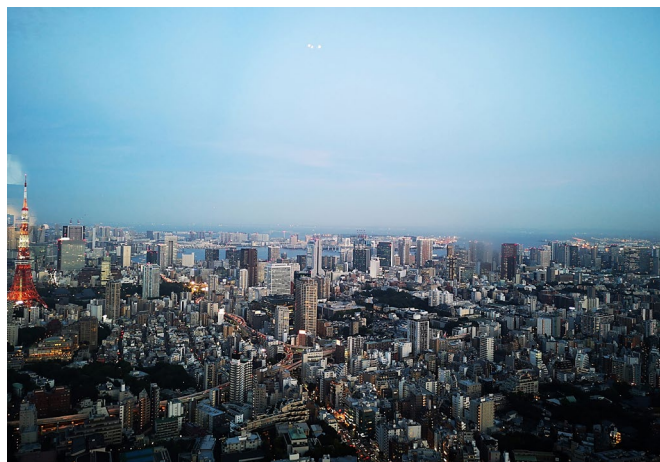
Current	Professor of Japanese Studies, Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, The University of Manchester
2013 – 2020	Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies, Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, The University of Manchester
2007 – 2013	Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Asian Religions, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Otago, New Zealand
2005 – 2007	JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow, Hosei University
2005	PhD in East-Asian Studies (Japanese); Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, Italy

I started my JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship immediately after obtaining my doctoral degree in East Asian Studies (Japanese) at Ca' Foscari University in Venice (Italy) in 2005. During my Ph.D., I spent one year in Japan as a Canon Foundation Fellow at Keio University to conduct fieldwork for my Dissertation. After returning to Italy to complete my degree I looked for opportunities to continue my postdoctoral training in Japan to increase my fieldwork experience and to strengthen my research collaboration with colleagues working in Japan.

During my Fellowship I was hosted by the Faculty of Social Sciences at Hosei University, therefore I had the opportunity to expand my network outside religious studies and Japanese studies and to collaborate with colleagues in media studies and social sciences. My main research interests lie in the development of religious movements in the 1980s-1990s Japan. In particular, for my postdoc fellowship, I explored how some religious groups (called *shinshūkyō*, 'new religions', in Japanese) used the media in the early stage of their development to attract new members and to create an image of successful and up-to-date religion. One Buddhist group, for example, was one of the first organizations in Japan to use satellite broadcasting and it created a new ritual to fit exactly the 30 minutes slot of the satellite transmission. In this case, the media are not just being used by the religious organization as an advertising or proselytising tool, but they play an essential role in reshaping its religious practices.

My research also focused on the role played by media in defining religious movements and in affecting how religion is perceived and defined in contemporary Japan. In particular, it investigated how the image of religion changed in Japan after the sarin gas attack perpetrated by a religious group called Aum Shinrikyō in Tokyo in March 1995.

The research conducted during my Fellowship resulted in several publications, including the monograph *Media and New Religions in Japan* (2016, available in Open Access). Some of the material collected during the Fellowship also formed the basis for later work, in particular the co-authored book (with Ian Reader), *Dynamism and the Ageing of a Japanese 'New' Religion: Transformations and the Founder* (2019, also available on Open Access).



View of Tokyo (photo by Erica Baffelli)

During my Fellowship, I was introduced by my host professor Uno Hitoshi to a research group on the anthropology of business at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. This opportunity led to further collaborations with another research group on Japanese pop cultures. In Japan, I also had the opportunity to discuss my findings with leading scholars working on religion in Japan and to receive their comments and guidance. The long-term Fellowship also allowed me to connect with other early career researchers working on related topics.

During my Fellowship, I secured a permanent position as Lecturer in Asian Religions at the University of Otago, in New Zealand, which I joined at the end of my two years in Japan.

After six years at Otago, in April 2013 I moved to Manchester to take up a new position as Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies at the University of Manchester.

At the University of Manchester, I teach courses on religion in Japan and I had several administrative roles, including being appointed as Director of the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (funded by the AHRC), a consortium for doctoral training including seven universities, from 2017 to 2020. Religion in Japan is still the main focus of my research, addressing issues related to religion and media, new and minority religions, gender and violence, Buddhism and emotion.



Presenting my research at Toyo University (photo by Takahashi Norihito)

After my Fellowship, I continued visiting Japan often, at least once a year, and to build new collaborations with researchers working at Japanese universities. In 2019, I successfully applied for a UKRI AHRC-ESRC UK-Japan Connection Grant with Professor Takahashi Norihito at Toyo University. The project is titled: "Religion and Minority: lived religion, migration and marginalities in secular societies" and our interdisciplinary research group includes researchers from the UK and Japan working on religion in contemporary societies.

Unfortunately, travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on some of our activities, but we were able to organize two international workshops and to support three early career researchers in their field visits in the UK and Japan, before moving online and setting up a monthly discussion group.

The JSPS Fellowship has been crucial for my career, it helped me develop an international research network and it supported me in the transition period between the end of my Ph.D. and my first academic job. It also allowed me to deepen my knowledge of Japan, a country I can now call home, to conduct long-term fieldwork and to build up important connections for my research. I highly value collaborative research and dialogue between different disciplines and the JSPS Fellowship provides an ideal environment for long-term fruitful collaboration to develop and flourish.

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As a former JSPS Fellow, we would like to ask you to join the JSPS Alumni Association of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Our Alumni Association was established in 2003 and carries out a number of activities throughout the UK and RoI with numerous benefits for members. One of them is "The JSPS London Symposium and Seminar Scheme." The aim of this scheme is to provide support for members holding a symposium or seminar and to create high quality collaboration in cutting edge/ internationally competitive areas at institutional or departmental level between research institutions in the UK or RoI and Japan. Under this scheme, JSPS London will partially support the following matters*:

*The detailed support is subject to change.

1 Costs for inviting symposium/ seminar speakers from Japan

2 Costs for hiring a venue, printing materials, advertising and so on*

3 Strategic support to help advertise and organise the event.

The application details of this scheme will automatically be e mailed to registered Alumni members during our next call. For further information please contact JSPS London by email at enquire@jps.org. Again, this is exclusively open to the JSPS Alumni members.

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