

Vol.7 Dr Felix Rösch



At the Sapporo Autumn Festival with a local dressed in a traditional Bavarian dress

This time, Dr Felix Rösch looks back on his experience of being a JSPS Fellow. His 2-month fellowship on a JSPS Summer Programme in Japan was a dramatic turning point of his research career, he is quoted as saying. The senior lecturer at Coventry University tells us about his encounter with Japan, which has led to his current, strong collaboration with Japanese researchers!

Inspired by a small book by the brilliant Austrian publicist Robert Menasse, I chose *The Permanent Revolution of Concepts* as the title for a talk I gave at the concluding conference of the JSPS Summer Programme 2010. Back then, on this hot summer day in Shinagawa, reflecting on my experiences, I had not nearly grasped how much this two month stay in Japan would affect my future research interests. I had sensed, however, that my experiences had provided me with practical insights what I studied theoretically in my doctoral thesis: knowledge is context-sensitive and – to allude to Edward Said – it is affected when it travels across time and space.

Although I had strong personal interests in Japan, particularly in its woodblock-prints, literature, and cinema, I had little hopes when I submitted my application for the JSPS Summer Programme, as my research at that time had nothing to do with Japan. Working on a German-American international political

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Biography

- 2001-2006 MA Political Science, Economics, Intercultural Business Communication, Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Germany
- 2003-2004 Diplôme du Programme International, Sciences Po Paris, France
- 2006-2007 MA International Studies, Newcastle University
- 2008-2011 PhD Politics, Newcastle University
- 2009 Visiting Scholar, Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., USA
- 2010 Visiting Scholar, Faculty of Law, Kansai University, Osaka (JSPS Summer Programme)
- 2012- Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities, Coventry University
- 2013 Visiting Scholar, Institute of International Relations, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

JSPS Concerning

- 2010 JSPS Summer Programme

theorist of the twentieth century, Hans Morgenthau, the only connection to Japan I could draw in my application was that Morgenthau had attended an international peace conference in Japan, taking place in the same year as the Tokyo Olympics. But perhaps, being out of the ordinary helped my application, as I was the only political scientist and indeed one of the very few social scientists, participating in the programme that year.

Having no research connection to Japan and no network, it took me considerable time to find a professor, willing to accept me as a visiting researcher. Fortunately, Professor Chieko Kitagawa Otsuru agreed to host me at Kansai University in Suita at the outskirts of Osaka. In these two months at Kandai's Faculty of Law, Professor Otsuru showed a level of kindness and support that since then I could experience so many times with Japanese colleagues. Having done archival research at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. the summer before, my

plan was to use these materials and draft the final chapter of my PhD in Japan. However, it was not without worries, as I feared that early twentieth century German legal and philosophical texts that I needed in addition to the archival records would be unavailable in Japan. After all, why should it be easier for me on the other side of the world if it was already difficult to access these materials in the UK? Most of them exist only in the British Library in London. Fortunately, it turned out that my concerns were ill-founded. Kansai University has an amazing library, containing all the books that I needed. Considering that one of these books, Morgenthau's own PhD thesis from 1929, barely sold a hundred copies when it was published, this is remarkable.

Given that I had the unique opportunity to spend several months in Japan, I also wanted to learn more about Japanese culture and society. Being an international political theorist, my first port of call was Japanese contributions to political thought. In my search, I stumbled across a collection of essays by Maruyama Masao, put together in a little orange book titled *Thought in Japan* (Denken in Japan). At the time I was reading this book, I did not know that Maruyama was the doyen of Japanese political science in the twentieth century, holding a similar status like his coeval Morgenthau for International Relations. What surprised me, however, was the realisation that Maruyama was concerned about similar themes and concepts than Morgenthau, albeit looking at the world from a very different perspective. Both, however, were influenced by Continental European thought and it was particularly the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim, who became decisive for Maruyama and Morgenthau. It was this *mega thaumazein*, a congruity in difference, that I did not expect which subsequently informed my research interests. I have published a paper in the *Journal of International Political Theory*, in which I elaborate a common method that Maruyama and Morgenthau used in order to study political thought. I call this method unlearning. This method, as I have argued, signifies not an attempt to forget, but a learning process to free oneself from the modern imaginary that preconditions everyday knowledge and intellectual thought by opening up new spaces to imagine a different reality. My interest in Maruyama brought me in contact with Dr Atsuko Watanabe from the University of Warwick, whom I first met at a workshop at Newcastle University in 2013. She also works on Maruyama and our common interest subsequently led to a paper published in the *European Journal of International Relations*, in

which we discuss one of the concepts – basso ostinato – that Maruyama developed in order to understand the unsynthesizable cognitive void between the self and the other.

Hence, it was the JSPS Summer Programme that triggered my interest in Japanese political thought and it allowed me to start building a research network. Since finalising my PhD in Newcastle and starting to lecture at Coventry University, I had further opportunities to do research in Japan and, in 2013, I even presented my work at the Japanese Political Studies Association Conference in Sapporo. Currently, Dr Watanabe and I are editing a book that introduces Japanese political thought to International Relations by looking at encounters of difference between Japan and the Western World since the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Amongst others, we collaborate in this project with Professor Kosuke Shimizu (Ryukoku University), whom I first got to know at a talk that I gave for the Kansai University-Kwansei Gakuin University Seminar in Osaka in July 2010. A workshop was organised in Kakunodate (Akita Prefecture) last year that brought all the collaborators from the UK, USA, and Japan for this project together. Results of this project will be published with Rowman & Littlefield in their *Global Dialogues: Developing Non-Eurocentric IR and IPE* series next year.

Come think of it, this little orange book that I read during the JSPS Summer Programme opened new (research) worlds for me and, with the help of colleagues from the UK and Japan, led to a fusion of horizons, as the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer would have called it, that I could never have imagined.



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