

## **JSPS Short Report: Dominic A. Martin, Chuo University (March 2014-2015)**

My year as a short-term JSPS postdoctoral fellow at Chuo University in Tokyo, under the generous auspices of my host Naho Igaue, enabled me to participate in an enriching and focused encounter with Japanese academic life. I had the rare opportunity to encompass in my experience the whole of an academic community and discipline: Russian studies in Japan. I arrived in Tokyo as a social anthropologist who specializes in Orthodox religion and wanting to develop my interest in the Cossack and Old Believer diasporas in the Pacific Far East in concert with Japanese scholars. While my first conference was anthropological, namely the joint meeting of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (JASCA) and International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Science Congress 2014, thereafter my sphere of interaction was not confined to anthropology, but ranged widely across Russian Studies. I was welcomed very warmly into this community of scholarship, an encounter that generated a spirited exchange of knowledge across contrasting perspectives. I also found myself teaching Japanese undergraduates across a much wider curriculum than I had anticipated. I was surprised and relieved to find that not only was my generalist knowledge and cultural competence up to the task, but also that my Russian language skills were robust and credible in the Japanese context. I was enthused by the very lively undergraduate, post-graduate, and post-doctoral climate of Russian Studies in general, but I would also foreground the refreshing interest and development of scholarship focused on Ancient Russia (Muscovite Rus), traditional Russian Culture and Orthodox religion.

One of the undoubted highlights of my fellowships was when I gave a paper to the 'Japanese scholars of Old Belief' at Tenri University, which, as the home of one of Japan's most interesting religions, provided a very appropriate backdrop to debate the dynamic of Russia's own homegrown religious movements. I don't know of another country in the world that has its own association of Old Belief studies outside of the former USSR (not even Germany or Poland). I also attended the Summer Symposium at the Slavic-Eurasian Research Centre at Hokkaido University, Sapporo, the 'Mecca of Slavonic and Eurasian Studies' in Japan, as my friend and mentor, Emeritus Professor Yoshikazu Nakamura aptly described it. This conference was on the very pertinent theme of "Thirty Years of Crisis: Empire, Violence, and Ideology in Eurasia from the First to the Second World War". It provided many insights into the historical background of the current crisis in Ukraine, Don Bass and Crimea.

Perhaps my most interesting opportunity in this regard was to attend the 30th Anniversary of the Japan-Russian Scholars Association, which has met yearly since perestroika, and this year was in Osaka: one year the Russians come to Japan; the next the Japanese go to Russia. It was fascinating to attend it this year, as a non-aligned participant, at a time when, following annexation, interventions and sanctions, Japan-Russia relations are at somewhat of a nadir. I was fortunate to participate in the frank but friendly exchanges on such topics as the Kuril Islands, Ukraine, Cossack activities and other geopolitical issues at the time when these issues were of urgent world-wide interest.

Throughout all of this I was received with really quite humbling hospitality, sometimes bold but always refreshing curiosity, and genuine respect for British scholastic tradition. Word of Warning: many Japanese academic occasions conclude with banquets, and sometimes

excursions continue later to karaoke bars. I speak as the veteran of a number of saké and Suntory hangovers who wishes he had made polite excuses and gone back to my hostel earlier.



(D.Martin with host, Assoc. Prof. Naho Igaue)

