

# Media Work: Science and the Public

Report >  
Japan

In an era of budget-cuts at universities and prolonged discussion about the usefulness of non-career-oriented studies, it has become increasingly important for scholars to inform the public about their work and thus legitimate their own existence. Thus, presenting understandable research results to the general public has become a matter of survival. However, up until the present day, young scholars (at least in the German-speaking world) have commonly run the risk of damaging their reputation by publishing in a simple, understandable way in popular media rather than in highly sophisticated academic journals with merely a handful of readers. At best, presentation and publication in popular media is considered a private matter, which should be done in one's free time. University education reflects that attitude. As a result, students hardly ever learn how to make their knowledge accessible to a broader audience.

By Judith Brandner & Brigitte Steger

In this context, the Institute of East Asian Studies/Japanese Studies, University of Vienna began a summer course on 'Media Work for Students of Japanese Studies' as a pilot project. For practical reasons we only accepted advanced Japanese Studies students. During the course the students learned how to 'sell' their scientific results to the media without making major concessions in the scholarly content. One aspect of this involved learning how the media world functions and how to deal with it in a critical way. Moreover, the participants were expected to do their

own journalist work. This meant that they had to learn the basics of journalist research and acquire the technical know-how and new methods of presentation.

Our approach was a mixture of theoretical and practical work, focusing on the latter. Theory included an introduction to the media world in both Japan and Austria, analysing radio programmes on Japan and participating in a discussion with a historian and a radio programme- and filmmaker. This discussion clearly showed the ambiguous role of the interviewed scholar who later had no influence on the published result.

During exercises, the students had to present themselves either as scholars or as journalists, not only improving their presentation skills and experiencing how to respond to the demands of journalism, but also learning firsthand about the journalist's difficulty in evoking interesting stories from scholars.

For the symposium on daily life and free time in Tokyo and Vienna at the turn of the nineteenth century, the students produced multi-media documentation, which has been published on [www.aaj.at](http://www.aaj.at). Their work included research on the topics, reading abstracts, choosing persons to be

interviewed, conducting the interviews, editing on the computer, and writing the story. The most challenging task was the creation of a radio programme on the topic of 'Vienna through Japanese Eyes', which were produced at a newly-established campus media centre with the generous technical support of the director and under the direction of the students and broadcast on Austrian public radio on 12 September 2002.

## Obstacles and rewards

Though we would have liked to go even deeper into the differences between scholarly and journalistic work, we purposely built up time pressure to simulate a real work situation. Most importantly, the group – eight very competent and motivated young people – seems to have enjoyed the course. They liked the idea of actually producing something to be shown to other people and enjoyed collaborating with each other. Several students 'discovered' radio as a fascinating medium and subsequently listen more carefully to feature stories and documentaries.

Some found special delight in cutting interviews with the editing software. 'Finally we learned something useable and developed new abilities', they remarked. Still others found it interesting and challenging to experience the cultural differences between academia and journalism, particularly in the ways that they approach their topics and their specific methodologies for investigation. <

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# The Vedas:

## Texts, Language, and Ritual

Report >  
South Asia

30 May – 2 June 2002  
Leiden,  
the Netherlands

The Vedas form the oldest elaborate corpus of texts (from c. 1500 BC) in an Indo-European language. They are the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, and are connected with a ritual system that has partly survived to the present day. In the almost one-and-a-half century of its history, the study of the Vedas has stimulated major developments in disciplines such as linguistics, the comparative study of religions, and cultural anthropology. The workshop 'The Vedas: Texts, Language, and Ritual' enabled leading scholars and young researchers to take stock of recent developments and explore new directions of research.

By Jan E.M. Houben

The Internet report mentioned below makes an overview of sections and papers superfluous, whereas space does not allow for an elaborate discussion of all major contributions. Hence I will make only a general observation on Vedic studies as presented at the workshop. The workshop again made manifest that three major developments are currently transforming Vedic studies. In the first place the availability of computers allows scholars to work with large corpuses of texts and to search, combine, and link data in novel ways for the sake of linguistic and cultural studies. Jost Gippert (Frankfurt) demonstrated the latest developments in the Titus-project, which aims at establishing a comprehensive electronic thesaurus of Sanskrit and Indo-European text and language materials. Alexander Lubotsky demonstrated how the classical tool of the etymological dictionary is greatly enhanced when dictionaries are computerized and linked for the sake of Sanskrit and Indo-European linguistic studies.

In the second place, major new findings of manuscripts in India make important ancient texts accessible, which were so far only very imperfectly known. They promise to change the picture of the early developments considerably. Families conserving manuscripts of a now discontinued ritual tradition of the *Yajurveda*, viz. the Vaadhuula, have in recent years been found by Yasuke Ikari (Kyoto) after preparatory work by, among others, W. Caland in the early decades of the twentieth century, and later on Michael Witzel and Max Spar-

reboom. While the *Rigveda* is the oldest Vedic text, the songs of praise in this collection presuppose an elaborate ritual system, which is the main subject of the *Yajurveda*. The Vaadhuula is an ancient school of the important branch of the Taittiriyaikas, one of the few branches that are still relatively widely in practice in modern India. Yasuke Ikari's contribution presented important new texts that have become available with the Vaadhuula manuscripts. The other discovery concerns the second oldest Vedic text, the *Atharvaveda*, especially the Oriyan manuscripts of the Paippalaada tradition (Durgamohan Bhattacharyya in the 1950s, and recently Arlo Griffiths). The papers of Dipak Bhattacharya, Arlo Griffiths, and Mieko Kajihara were directly based on the newly available textual data.

In the third place, modern technology allows direct recording of performances of Vedic rituals that are, with all the transformations they have undergone in the course of centuries, still in practice in often quite remote corners of the Indian subcontinent. Apart from the direct anthropological value of their recording they often greatly contribute to the interpretation of ancient ritual texts. A film by Cezary Galewicz (Krakow) made in Kerala showed parts of the tradition of competitive Veda-recitation by Brahmins of Nambudiri and transmitted some of the aesthetic rapture engendered by the rhythmic and melodious patterns of the ancient texts, which the printed editions will always fail to instil.

The workshop was generally experienced as successful and inspiring, and participating scholars are already looking forward to a sequel, which is to take place at the University of Texas in a few years. The proceedings with the elaborated papers and discussions (to be edited by A. Griffiths and J. Houben) are expected to appear towards the end of 2003 or the beginning of 2004. <

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# ESCAS VIII

The Eighth Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS VIII) attracted a large regional and international audience. Most notable was the large presence of scholars from Central Asia, above all from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Report >  
Central Asia

25-28 September  
2002  
Bordeaux, France

By Touraj Atabaki

Referring to the general theme of the conference 'Central Asia in transition: models, disruptions, centrality', five panels running in parallel sessions and covering numerous topics from different disciplines took place throughout the duration of the conference.

Topics such as the role of history and historiography in Central Asia today, the mythologization of the region's history as a whole, and with specific historic periods were treated in 'Questions of periodization: the centrality of Central Asia and the rewriting of history'.

The next session, 'Economic and social models in the history of Central Asia', concerned topics ranging from political movements and ideologies prevailing in the region during the last centuries, to questions of identity formation and (socio)economic problems.

'Cultural and religious models' presented the role of music and literature in today's Central Asian societies, the shaping of multiple identities, reflections on the cultural heritage, and the role of religion in the region.

Various aspects of colonization were addressed in 'Colonial and Soviet disruptions'. The effects that the first 'sedentarization' efforts had on the Kazakhs were tackled among other things such as the impact of the collectivization programme of 1928-1934 upon the nomads and peasants in Kazakhstan, the change of the political power structure due to Tsarist and Soviet rule in Central Asia, and the views of the Central Asians on the Russian conquest in the late nineteenth century.

Details on current political, economic, and ecological problems of the region were presented in the final panel 'Post-Soviet transformations'. Among others, the situation of small- and medium-sized enterprises in Uzbekistan, the question of rebuilding the Afghan state, changes in the priorities of the economic reform process in Kazakhstan, the 'Aral Sea problem', and aspects of international policies in the region were discussed. <

Note >

ESCAS VIII was organized by Prof. Vincent Fourniau, Prof. Cathrine Poujol, M. Pasquet, and Dr Françoise Rollan, and was hosted by the University of Bordeaux.

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