



European Research Day 2017

4 December | Delegation of the European Union to Japan, Tokyo

T9 - Dr. Lyle DE SOUZA, Postdoc, British Kyoto University, Institute for Research in Humanities

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My research project:

My current project is titled 'The Literature of the Japanese Diaspora: Identity Beyond Japan'. I examine cultural identity in novels by people of Japanese descent (*Nikkei*) in countries around the world from the 1980s to present. I argue that these novels question racial representation in dominant historical narratives and minority power relations in contemporary society. I perform close readings using a lens of cultural studies inflected by literary theory in order to examine the construction of cultural identity of a modern diaspora. My preliminary conclusion is that cultural identities constructed by Nikkei writers, rather than offering narratives expressing Nikkei diversity, are political and contingent on the historical or social circumstances they seek to address. I would like to conduct short periods of fieldwork in European countries with Nikkei writers. I plan to publish a book and several articles on this topic over the next three years.

My career path:

My position as a JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow at Kyoto University has shown me that the humanities are taken as seriously in Japan as they are in Europe, albeit by a smaller and more tightly-knit academic network. This is encouraging in the face of the Japanese government's recent attempt to cull the majority of humanities departments. JSPS provides ideal working conditions: a generous kakenhi, minimal service or teaching, excellent support both personal and professional. European fellowships could benefit by adopting this approach. I intend to continue my academic career in Japan, although my research requires maintaining close collaborations with European universities which is where EURAXESS is so valuable. Even with fluency in Japanese it can be difficult to identify opportunities for international collaboration. Attending conferences helps, but the individualised attention coupled with the ever-improving resources offered by EURAXESS Japan are key.

My relation to Europe:

I need to maintain a strong relationship with Europe even if I continue to work in Japan, not only for conducting fieldwork for my current project but for my next project which will take a comparative approach to understanding multiculturalism in Japan. Over the next three years, I would like to conduct my research during the summer period based at European institutions most likely in the UK, France, and Germany which each have the largest Nikkei populations. There are numerous small grants available from Japanese universities, companies, and other organisations. There is some funding too from the European side. The difficulty is not so much the availability of funding rather obtaining permission from one's university to spend a significant period every year away. The benefits of collaborating with European colleagues are huge since Europe is seen as a leader in fields such as cultural identity and multiculturalism and Japan as a country which has much to learn.