



Belgium

Ellen Van Goethem

Associate Professor and Co-chair, International MA Program and International Doctorate in Japanese Humanities, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University

Assistant Professor, Department of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies, Hosei University, Japan
Japan Foundation Japanese Studies Fellow, Ritsumeikan University, Japan
Canon Foundation in Europe Fellow, Ritsumeikan University, Japan
Full-time Assisting Academic Staff, Department of Languages and Cultures of South and East Asia, Ghent University, Belgium
Ph.D., Oriental Languages and Cultures, Ghent University, Belgium

My Research Interests

I specialize in Japanese history and the history of ideas, with a primary focus on developments between the seventh and early ninth centuries, a period of radical changes within the Japanese archipelago. I am especially interested in ancient city planning, which I approach from two different angles. At the physical level, I examine how and why the layout of Japan's capital cities and palaces changed over time. In addition to official histories, inscribed wooden tablets (*mokkan*) that have been excavated in recent decades are an important source of information for this type of research. At the religious-philosophical level, I conduct research on site divination to determine which principles and beliefs were important when a site for a new residence, palace, or capital was chosen. Site divination practices are part of what is popularly known as *fengshui*, which originated in ancient China and spread via Korea to Japan.

My current research project, supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (KAKEN) and Kyushu University grants, focuses on the *shijin* (literally "four gods"). The *shijin* are the guardian deities of the four directions: the Azure Dragon which protects the east or left of a site, the White Tiger which protects the west or right, the Vermillion Sparrow which protects the south or front, and the Black Turtle-Snake which protects the north or back. In addition to the role these *shijin* played in ancient times, I also investigate when, how, and why these four deities of Chinese origin became an integral part of the rituals, art, and architecture of a number of prominent Shinto shrines.



A conference presentation slide (Berlin, 2012)

My Career and Vision

I have been working in academia since 1999 when I was hired by the department from which I had just graduated. This position offered me the opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. degree while teaching a variety of courses related to Japan. From 2006, I spent two years as a visiting scholar at Ritsumeikan University, supported by grants from the Canon Foundation in Europe and the Japan Foundation. In 2008, I took up a position at Hosei University, and three years later I moved to Kyushu University.

In addition to teaching undergraduate students, I am responsible for the International Master's Program (IMAP) in Japanese Humanities together with Professor Cynthea Bogel. This program, established in 2011, is conducted in English and focuses on premodern Japan. Students from around the globe, both Japanese and non-Japanese, work side by side to achieve their goals with closely-guided study. One of the annual highlights is the weeklong study excursion to the Kansai area. We try to add something new and special each time

we go and are often able to arrange special access to the storehouses and back areas of shrines and temples. I believe that this hands-on approach with *in situ* study is essential to a proper understanding of the course material. Finally, I am excited at the prospect of offering a Ph.D. degree in October 2017.



Study excursion to Nara (2015)

Message for Students

As a foreign scholar specializing in ancient Japanese history and the history of ideas, I had never imagined that I would be teaching topics closely related to my field of expertise at a Japanese university. I think this shows that if you find a field that fascinates you and you are willing to put in some hard work, you can do almost anything. You should not be afraid to set your goals high and to pursue your dreams. As a single mother of two, I would also like to stress that it is possible to combine family life with a career in academia.



Advising my M.A. students (2014)