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12 The French Society of Japanese Studies

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The “Société Française des Études Japonaises” (SFEJ) (French Society of Japanese Studies) is one of, if not the largest, academic associations of Japanese Studies in France. Its role is to offer information and to organize scholarly activities related to Japanese Studies in France.

SFEJ, in its present form, was founded in 1990 by a committee of about fifteen scholars¹ who are all well known today for their contributions to Japanese Studies in France, such as Yves-Marie Allieux, the translator of several novels by Mishima Yukio; Jean-François Sabouret, an eminent researcher on Japanese sociology; and Cécile Sakai, a notable specialist on Japanese literature.

Just one year after its creation, SFEJ membership quickly rose to about 130 people. Since then, membership numbers have increased in tandem with the development of Japanese Studies in France. The association is currently comprised of about 180 members, from graduate students to researchers and university professors, all of whom are involved in Japanese Studies.

In 1992, hot on the heels of its founding, SFEJ organized a symposium dedicated to the Japanese language, or more specifically to Japanese language education. It was the first large-scale event coordinated by the association. Today SFEJ is best known for the “Colloque de la SFEJ,” a biennial symposium established in 1994, that usually takes place in December. For each symposium, a general topic is chosen with the aim of gathering scholars not only from the field of Japanese language and literature, but also from economics, sociology, arts, or any other topics related to Japan.

For example, the theme of the 12th symposium, scheduled to run December 15-17, 2016, in the city of Lyon, is “graphic arts and visual culture in Japan.” As this symposium is the biggest event of its kind in France for scholars of Japanese studies, it has become the pivotal gathering place for the majority of scholars from Japanese Studies departments at French universities to share research information and discuss their latest work.

1 The complete list of the committee members is as follow: Yves-Marie Allieux, Patrick Beillevaire, Augustin Berque, Jean-Pierre Berthon, Laurence Caillet, Guy Gagnon, Hélène Haon, Annick Horiuchi, Patrick Le Nestour, François Macé, Jean-Jacques Origas, Jean-François Sabouret, Cécile Sakai, Marion Saucier, Kazuhiko Yatabe, and André Włodarczyk.

It also provides a valuable opportunity for researchers who may not work in Japanese Studies departments, but study Japan-related topics, to meet with specialists. Needless to say that advanced doctorate students and young researchers are given the opportunity to present their work, and to garner advice from established researchers and professors from various universities and institutes.

This symposium is also open to foreign Francophone researchers. To that end, the conditions to submit a proposal are the ability to speak French, to research a Japan-related subject by employing Japanese sources, and to register with the association if the proposal is selected. At the last symposium in 2014, more than 50 speakers presented their research, most of them French scholars, but some from other European countries, the United States, and Japan. Since 1994, the papers presented have been published in a series of collections titled *Japan Pluriel* by Editions Philippe Picquier in the city of Arles. This publication is an informative resource guide to the latest trends in Japanese Studies in France.

As the number of students in Japanese Studies departments increases, the desire for information exchange among fellow students has also increased. In 2009, SFEJ started a national workshop for doctorate students, known as “Atelier Doctoral des Études Japonaises” (ADEJ), which means “Doctoral workshop of Japanese Studies.” It takes place in December, in odd years, to avoid overlapping with the above-mentioned biennial symposium, which takes place in even years. This workshop is mainly attended by Francophone Ph.D. students, and unlike the symposium, these workshops do not focus on a specific theme each time. Based on the submitted proposals, the selection committee organizes the students into topic groups. At the workshop, students give a short presentation in front of the group, and then discuss their topics and methodology among themselves while being supervised by a professor.

SFEJ also has its own website, accessible at the address: <http://sfej.asso.fr>. The site was revamped in 2014, and is accessed by about fifty visitors per day. The purpose of this website is to be the most comprehensive information source on Japanese Studies in France. It collects information on Japanese Studies from undergraduate to master and doctorate levels at university departments, while also providing information on research networks, job opportunities, fellowships, publications, and specialized blogs. The information posted on the website is sent to association members through a mailing list on which new members are automatically registered. The mailing list also offers supplementary information on calls for papers by other workshops, seminars or symposium panels.

In addition, since 1990, SFEJ has published an annual *Bulletin* for members, which was originally distributed in paper format before the switch to digital format in 2006. This *Bulle-*

tin summarizes Japanese Studies activities in France for the year, and brings news of annual awards dedicated to Francophone Japanese Studies, such as the “Prix Shibusawa-Claudiel,” created in 1984, for high achievement in studies of French and Japanese culture each year, the “Prix Konishi de la traduction littéraire,” established in 1993, for an excellent translation of Japanese or French literature, and the “Prix Zoom Japon,” inaugurated in 2003, for an outstanding French translation of a Japanese novel and a Japanese manga each year.

The *Bulletin* publicizes those who have received awards not for Japanese studies itself, but rather academic achievement that happens to be Japan-related research. The *Bulletin* also lists those who have been awarded masters and doctorate degrees, as well as “habilitation à diriger des recherches”² in France. The *Bulletin* supplies information on books on Japanese studies and translations of Japanese literature published in France, as well as information on major exhibitions on Japan, and recipients of collaborative research projects in France and Europe. In other words, the *Bulletin* is a comprehensive guide to everything related to Japanese Studies in France.

In addition, the *Bulletin* compiles an informative yearbook, which includes all the member names, their positions, research interests, contact details, and their pages on the site of their institution or “academia.edu.” From 2016, there is also a link to members’ Internet profiles. Thus, the latest yearbook will greatly contribute to information exchange among scholars of Japanese studies.

2 The “Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches,” translated as “authorization to supervise research,” is the highest diploma that can be awarded in France, for those with doctoral degrees who aim for tenure positions as university professors.