Western images of Japan have long focused on the exotic and unique features of the people and its culture. Together with Japanese writings on Zen Buddhism, traditional aesthetics and the folk crafts, specific historical, political and transnational trajectories contributed to the creation of an aestheticized image of Japan, while reflecting Western society back to itself like an image in a mirror. As a universal material cultural practice, Japanese ceramics developed national and regional features, later essentialized as a quintessential part of Japanese culture. However, through the materialization of values and ideals translated as Japanese culture in bodily practices, art and imagination can subvert the ideology of Orientalism and Japanese uniqueness.

Departing from a transnational and cross-border approach to the social sciences and the field of Japanese studies, this doctoral thesis examines the life-stories, lifestyle, technical processes, artworks and worldviews of Westerners artists and potters who have crossed national borders to practice ceramics in countryside areas of Japan. Based on ethnographic research and in-depth qualitative interviews, the main aim is to investigate how images of Japan are embodied, appropriated, negotiated and resignified through the potters’ corporeal, sensorial, affective and emotional experiences in Japan. For that, we will investigate how their personal subjective trajectories and identities intersect with wider cultural narratives, traditions and histories, revealing the role of the body as a place of culture and questioning the limits of cultural
identity.

**Key-words:** images of Japan, crafts, transnational migration, life-story