

Jury Report

KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award 2025 - Behavioural Sciences

Pengchen Dai MSc, University of Groningen

“Imagination” and “Ingenium” in Huarte’s ‘Examen de ingenios para las ciencias’ (1575)

Dear attendees,

We are gathered here to celebrate an extraordinary achievement: the awarding of the Jan Brouwer Thesis Award for Behavioural Sciences 2025. This prestigious honour recognizes a master’s thesis that exemplifies intellectual rigor, originality, and interdisciplinary excellence.

This year’s jury, composed of experts from four universities, faced the challenge of selecting a winner from 16 exceptional theses. Each submission represented the best of the behavioural sciences, making it an achievement in itself to be nominated. Yet, among this impressive group, one thesis stood out. It captivated the jury with its depth, innovative approach, and the evident passion of its author.

The winner began her academic journey with a Bachelor’s in Psychology in Beijing, excelling in psychological and clinical research. She obtained a Master’s in Addiction Studies from King’s College, London. Despite her early successes, she felt an intellectual restlessness - a desire to connect her background in science and psychology with her passion for Early Modern Culture. This pursuit led her to the Master’s program in Theory and History of Psychology at the University of Groningen, where she found the perfect platform to explore her interdisciplinary interests.

The master thesis focuses on the influential Spanish humanist Juan Huarte and his seminal work, ‘Examen de ingenios para las ciencias’ (1575). This text, widely discussed across disciplines, provided the foundation for a study that bridges the boundaries of history, psychology, philosophy, and linguistics. Remarkably, the candidate even taught herself Old Spanish to analyse Huarte’s original text, showcasing not only dedication but also an insatiable intellectual curiosity.

The thesis exceeds the expectations of a master’s level project. Its introduction offers a comprehensive critique of the diverse secondary literature on Huarte, unifying perspectives from the history of medicine, psychology, linguistics, and philosophy. This interdisciplinary synthesis alone makes the work highly valuable.

At its core, the thesis delivers a meticulous conceptual analysis of Huarte’s terminology. The author redefined ingenium - traditionally understood as intelligence - by linking it to imagination as a generative human capacity. This innovative interpretation explains the historical evolution of the concept of intelligence from medieval thought to contemporary understandings. It also highlights imagination as a driving force behind human innovation, a theme that resonates across the behavioural and social sciences.

The candidate’s work did not go unnoticed. Beyond achieving the highest grade in her cohort, she presented her findings to an international audience at the Spanish Society for the History

of Psychology conference in Salamanca. The organizers were so impressed that she was selected to open the entire conference with her talk - a rare honour that speaks to the impact of her research.

This individual is not only a brilliant researcher but also a wonderful person. Former supervisors and mentors describe her as ambitious, hardworking, and deeply curious. Her exceptional talent, coupled with her dedication, suggests a promising academic career ahead.

The thesis illuminates the past and offers insights into the foundations of the behavioural and social sciences. By exploring Huarte's ideas about ingenuity and imagination, the author reminds us of a unifying thread in our disciplines: the power of imagination to shape knowledge and innovation.

Dear attendees, we hope you now share our admiration for the achievements of this candidate. It is with great pleasure that we reveal the winner of the Jan Brouwer Thesis Award for Behavioural Sciences 2025 ... Pengchen Dai!

Let us congratulate her on this extraordinary accomplishment!

Prof. dr. B. (Belle) Derks, hoogleraar sociale en organisatiepsychologie Universiteit Utrecht, oud-voorzitter De Jonge Akademie

Prof. dr. A.W.M. (Andrea) Evers, hoogleraar gezondheidspsychologie Universiteit Leiden

Prof. dr C. (Corine) de Ruiter, hoogleraar forensische psychologie Universiteit Maastricht

Prof. dr. P.M. (Patti) Valkenburg, universiteitshoogleraar Jeugd, Media en Samenleving Universiteit van Amsterdam

The meeting of the jury, chaired by KHMW social member drs. B.R. (Bart) Combee, took place on December 5th, 2024 via Zoom. Also present at the meeting was prof. W.B. (Wim) Drees, academic secretary for the social sciences and humanities of the KHMW.