

The World's Largest Organization Promoting Scholarship on Japan: The European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS)

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Why has Europe created the largest association of Japanese Studies at a time when Japan is losing its international self-confidence and is increasingly isolating itself academically while China and Korea are aggressively increasing their intellectual outreach to the rest of the world? There appears to be a contradiction between Japanese self-image and how Japan is perceived by the rest of the world. The interest in Japan outside of Japan has never been higher than today. The number of young people taking Japanese language classes is still increasing, and recent years' Japanese language proficiency examination results and the quality of foreign scholarship and publications have never been better or broader. But either Japan does not know of its attractiveness, or it does not want to know. Instead, it is obsessed with contemplating its gentle decline as an economic power. Let me elaborate here on the development of the European Association of Japanese Studies and its prospects.

The European Association of Japanese Studies already has a forty year old tradition, and as a matter of policy promotes academic quality in an international and inclusive manner. The main language at its events is English, but it is also possible to present or discuss issues in Japanese, the language of the country we all study. Its traditional common activity is to organize a major conference every three years moving to a different location in Europe every time. At the last EAJS conference in 2011 in Tallinn (Estonia) over 700 scholars participated; the next conference is scheduled for Lisbon in Portugal in 2017. Ten thematic sections are planned at the conference and the European Association of Japanese Language teachers will also hold its meetings together with the EAJS.

Over the years EAJS has also developed a second line of activity, namely Pan-European support of doctoral students, which it calls EAJS Ph.D. Workshops. These also take place regularly at different locations in Europe, especially prior to the main conferences. In recent years the demand was so high, with about 80 applications for the 15–20 slots for doctoral students, that the frequency was increased to once a year. The professors advising the students are usually from a similar discipline but from another country. In a regular fashion EAJS also conducts the selection process for the TIFO scholarships for students to conduct research in Japan for about three months. Several times the EAJS also honored the best books published during the last three years with the EAJS book prize.

The newest EAJIS activity started in September 2013. For the first time in its history the institutional collaboration with Japanese colleagues took place as an event in Japan itself. The inaugural EAJIS in Japan conference attracted about 300 participants and was held at Kyoto University; it was preceded by a preconference gathering on European-Japanese relations conducted at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken). Over the years two Japanese organizations have funded the conference and workshop activities of EAJIS, namely the Japan Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation.

By all accounts EAJIS is a very successful academic association. Its membership doubled from 700 in the year 2000 to about 1,400 today. The three big academic nations in European Japanese Studies, Germany, Italy and the U.K., make up over half its membership with Germans alone constituting a quarter of EAJIS members. France follows them with less than 10 percent. Scholars from Scandinavian and Eastern European countries together contribute to about a quarter of the membership. What is easily overlooked is the fact the non-Europeans, especially Japanese and Americans, add several hundred members to EAJIS.

The European Association for Japanese Studies could expand its scope. Unlike other academic associations, it does not engage in publishing. In Europe there is room and demand for a high quality and impactful book series in Japanese Studies as well as a peer-reviewed *European Journal of Japanese Studies*. Considering its size and reputation, these publishing activities would soon gain a high recognition in Europe and elsewhere. The key factors impeding these projects are funds for academic labor to organize the scholarly quality review process and for professional managing editors to operate the daily affairs of such publishing activities. Major international publishing companies in Europe or Japan would probably be eager to take on such a book series or a high quality journal.

The response to our inaugural EAJIS in Japan conference in Kyoto has been especially positive from the Japanese side. We had several informal inquiries from universities in Japan to host the next such event. Something we have not yet tried but which has always been one of my personal aims is to export the Ph.D. Workshop format to Japan so as to include a greater mix of European and Japanese doctoral students among the participants.

Moreover it would be nice to find ways to bring over more Japanese scholars not only to be a keynote speaker at an EAJIS conference but stay in Europe for a longer time contributing to graduate or undergraduate training at European universities. Ideas on how to further enhance Japanese Studies in Europe are plentiful and volunteers can also be found. In short, Japanese Studies is a vibrant field of study and Japan can also benefit from it when it engages with this wider world within and outside of academic studies.