

## **The Minutes of the EAJS General Meeting 2021**

**Time:** 28 August 2021, 14:45 – 16:45 UTC+2 (Central European Time)

The General Meeting was conducted digitally via Zoom. The meeting could be accessed through the digital platform Whova, which was used for the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS International Conference held 24-28 August, and via an invitation link to the Zoom meeting that was sent to all EAJS members on 25 August 2021.

***The meeting was moderated by Verena Blechinger-Talcott, EAJS President.***

Newly elected EAJS President Verena Blechinger-Talcott (hereafter VBT) welcomed the EAJS members.

First, EAJS Treasurer Urs Matthias Zachmann (hereafter UMZ) explained briefly the procedure for voting in the General Meeting. Since the meeting was held digitally via Zoom, voting per hand sign was not possible. However, Zoom offers the possibility to cast a vote anonymously. UMZ proposed to use this technical feature for voting in the GM. However, § 6 of the EAJS Constitution stipulates that secret ballots may only be held when requested by one third of the members present in the General Meeting. UMZ asked members to type in “aye” in the chat window of Zoom if they opt for anonymous voting (i.e. secret ballot), “nay” if they disagree and “abstain” if they wish to abstain from voting on this question. A majority of members voted in favour of having anonymous votes in the GM; no one objected and there were no abstentions. Thus, voting anonymously in the GM via Zoom’s built-in function was decided by the members.

**(1) Report by the EAJS President: Report on activities of the association (outgoing EAJS President Andrej Bekeš [hereafter AB] and current EAJS President VBT)**

AB and VBT gave detailed reports on the activities promoted and organized by the EAJS during their respective tenure, i.e. in the years 2018-2020 and 2020-21.

### **1. EAJS Activities in 2018**

AB reported that in 2018 two EAJS workshops were held: the 14<sup>th</sup> EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students took place at the University of Belgrade, Serbia from 8 to 11 October. The 2<sup>nd</sup> EAJS Publication Workshop was held at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 29 September to 2 October 2018. Furthermore, the EAJS awarded five TIFO Fellowships (three of which are funded by the Toshiba International Foundation and two by the EAJS) to PhD candidates selected by

the EAJS Council. Lastly, AB reported that the EAJS further expanded its website dedicated to the EAJS/TIFO Alumni network in 2018.

## **2. EAJS Activities in 2019**

AB reported that a meeting was held in May 2019 to discuss preparations for the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS International Conference in Ghent, Belgium (which had originally been selected as the conference site). The meeting was attended by the members of the EAJS Council, EAJS office staff, the local organizers from Ghent University, and staff from NomadIT, the professional conference organizer contracted by the EAJS.

AB further reported that the 15<sup>th</sup> EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students was held at University College Cork, Ireland, from 20 to 23 August 2019. As additional part of its activities that aim to promote early career scholars, the EAJS once more awarded five TIFO Fellowships to PhD candidates selected by the Council to enable them to spend a short-term research period in Japan.

Finally, the EAJS held its 3<sup>rd</sup> EAJS Conference in Japan at the University of Tsukuba from 14 to 15 September 2019.

## **3. EAJS Activities in 2020**

AB reported about the activities of the EAJS in response to severe travel restrictions imposed by the Japanese government as a reaction to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In May 2020, the EAJS had carried out a survey among its members to learn if, and how severely, colleagues living in Japan were affected by the travel restrictions. 104 colleagues responded that they were affected by the entry ban. 24 stated that they could not return to Japan to see their families again and/or to return to their permanent jobs. In June 2020, EAJS President AB had written a letter to the Japan Foundation, conveying the results of the EAJS survey and expressing grave concern about travel regulations and their impact on non-Japanese colleagues living in Japan and working at Japanese universities. In July 2020, AB wrote an open letter to the Japanese government (MOJ) criticizing the unequal treatment of Japanese nationals and foreigners with permanent work and residence permits.

AB further reported that in the summer of 2020 the election of the new EAJS Council members was conducted via mail-in ballot.

From here on, VBT, the newly elected EAJS President in the EAJS Council election in 2020, continued to report about EAJS activities in the remaining year 2020 and 2021.

VBT reported that the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students was held online from 28-30 October 2020. Originally, the workshop had been scheduled to take place at KU Leuven, just before the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS International Conference. However, Covid-19 forced the EAJS Council to postpone the conference and reschedule the workshop. In spring 2020, the workshop had been rescheduled to take place in autumn at Freie Universität Berlin. However, the worsening Covid situation since September made it necessary to switch to a digital format. Ultimately, the workshop was led by Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Urs Matthias Zachmann from Freie Universität Berlin and held virtually.

Also, in 2020, the EAJS once more awarded five TIFO Fellowships to PhD candidates to enable them to spend a short-term research period in Japan. Unfortunately, the selected TIFO fellows have not been able to conduct their research so far due to Japan's ongoing entry restrictions.

#### **4. EAJS Activities in 2021**

VBT reported that the 17<sup>th</sup> EAJS Workshop for Doctoral Students was again held digitally from 18-20 August 2021. Originally, the workshop had again been scheduled to take place at KU Leuven. However, the volatile Covid-19 situation in the summer made it once more necessary to switch to an online format.

Furthermore, in 2021 three TIFO Fellowships were awarded to selected PhD students.

EAJS activities since 2018 culminated the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS International Conference, which was held digitally from 24 to 28 August 2021. The conference was attended by more than 1200 delegates. More than 800 speakers presented and discussed ca. 750 presentations in the various sections of the conference.

79 delegates could participate in the conference thanks to funding provided by the Toshiba International Foundation.

After the reports by AB and VBT, EAJS members were asked to vote on whether to accept or reject their reports of activities. The vote was carried out using Zoom's integrated voting feature. The question was: "Do you approve of the Council's report of activities over the past four years?" 106 members voted "yes" (98% of the votes cast), no member voted "no", two members voted "abstain" (2%). Thus, the reports on EAJS activities were approved by the members.

## **(2) Report by the EAJS Treasurer: membership development, financial report and budget (Urs Matthias Zachmann, UMZ)**

In his report, UMZ reported about the following points.

### **1. EAJS membership development**

UMZ outlined the development of the EAJS membership in recent years. He explained that the number of members is strongly influenced by holding EAJS conferences, because EAJS rules stipulate that membership is required for giving a presentation at an EAJS conference. In those years an EAJS conference takes place, membership numbers increase, due to aforementioned rule. A membership is valid for three years. The last great increases in membership was in 2017 due to the last EAJS conference which was held in Lisbon in August 2017. Furthermore, the EAJS Japan Conference in Tsukuba in 2018 led also to a relatively high number of new memberships. This, together with more new memberships in 2019, had the result of the EAJS membership reaching its record high in 2019 with more than 1500 members. However, the EAJS did not receive many new membership applications in 2020, and the majority of those members, whose membership had expired in 2019, did not renew their memberships. That was due to the fact that the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS International Conference, which had originally been scheduled for 2020, was postponed by one year. Consequently, this resulted in a strong drop in membership numbers to about 800 in 2020. However, membership numbers increased again in 2021 due to the fact that the postponed conference finally took place. Thus, the number of the EAJS membership rose once more to more than 1100 members.

Concerning the composition of EAJS members, 75% are personal members with a salary and 22% are student members. The remaining 3% are either honorary (2%) or institutional members (1%). While half of EAJS members are Europeans (50%), a closer look reveals that the EAJS still has far more personal members in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe (41% vs. 9%). (However, on this point UMZ added that several universities from Eastern Europe hold an institutional membership, which offers institutions the benefits of an EAJS membership to all its staff members. Thus, in reality, institutional memberships often cover many colleagues of a university in Eastern Europe at the same time, which can thus not be detected as individual members in our statistics.) UMZ further reported that 27% of EAJS members are Japanese, 8% are from the US. The remaining members stem from other parts of Asia (7%), Russia (3%) and Oceania (2%).

UMZ confirmed that it remains the intention of the EAJS Council to work hard on the promotion of Japanese Studies also in Eastern Europe.

## 2. EAJS financial situation

UMZ explained that the EAJS' finances stem from three sources of funding: Japan Foundation (JF, main sponsor of the EAJS), Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO) and membership fees.

The JF provides funds for

- the operation of the EAJS office (main part of salary of Council assistant, IT, office supplies, postage);
- part of EAJS International Conferences (usually the salary for six months for a member of the local organizing team and travel expenses of the keynote speaker from Japan);
- part of EAJS conferences in Japan (usually travel and accommodation for the EAJS President and the keynote speaker, who usually comes from Europe);
- part of the annual PhD Workshop (travel expenses of senior advisors).

TIFO provides funds for

- the annual EAJS PhD Workshops (travel and accommodation, food and drinks, workshop venue);
- three TIFO short-term Fellowships per year;
- alumni networking activities (e.g. Alumni meetings);
- conference grants that enable early career scholars with low-paying or no regular positions to attend the EAJS International Conferences. In 2021, TIFO awarded 110 of conference grants.

The EAJS uses membership fees to pay for

- the remaining share of the salary of the Council assistant which is not covered by the grant from JF;
- the salary of two full-time student assistants (41 hours/month);
- banking and legal fees;
- tax audits (every three years);
- travel and accommodation for Office staff and Council members for the preparatory meeting for the EAJS International Conference);
- conference registration fee waivers, travel and accommodation of the section convenors and EAJS Council members for the EAJS International Conference.

Support from JF has continued to decline slightly in recent years. However, JF is still the most important donor for the EAJS, for which UMZ expressed sincere gratitude on behalf of the EAJS.

In contrast, financial support from TIFO has remained constant over the past four years, although due to recent circumstances, the EAJS could not fully make use of this. Thus, in 2020 and 2021, the funding from TIFO was significantly lower than in previous years. This can be explained by the fact that the EAJS PhD Workshops in 2020 and 2021 were conducted digitally and therefore did not incur any costs. Thus, the EAJS was simply unable to spend the appropriated funds from TIFO.

UMZ expressed sincere gratitude on behalf of the EAJS for the continued support from TIFO.

The EAJS membership account remains in a healthy state. The higher expenses in 2020 are due to the fact that preparatory work for the 16<sup>th</sup> EAJS Conference, which was originally planned for 2020, had to be paid for in 2020. In addition, the EAJS had to settle outstanding payments to the Freie Universitaet Berlin for staff salaries between 2016 and 2020.

The third bank account for membership payments, paid via PayPal, is also looking good. More and more members have been using this payment options to pay membership fees in recent years.

Finally, UMZ provided an overview of the regular tasks and the annual costs of the EAJS office.

After the report by UMZ, the members were asked to vote on whether to accept or reject the Treasurer's report. The question to vote on was: "Do you approve of the Council's report on budget and spending over the past four years?" 108 members voted "yes" (96% of the votes cast), no member voted "no", four members voted "abstain" 4%). Thus, the report on membership development and on budget and spending was approved by the members.

### **(3) Outcome of Council elections, farewell to outgoing Council members and welcoming of new Council members**

VBT expressed the EAJS' gratitude to the outgoing Council members Laura Moretti, Andrea Germer and Gabriele Vogt for their service to the association. She then welcomed the newly elected EAJS Officers, i.e. Secretary David Mervart and Treasurer Urs Matthias Zachmann. She furthermore welcomed the new members of the extended Council David Chiavacci, Barbara Geilhorn, and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt. VBT furthermore welcomed the re-elected Council members Jaqueline Berndt, Andrea De Antoni and Till Weingärtner.

After that, each member of the Council gave a short self-introduction.

VBT thanked the outgoing President AB for his contributions as president between 2017 and 2020. The outgoing President was co-opted by the Council to remain a member of the Council as Immediate Past President.

VBT announced the decision by the EAJS Council to add Andreas Niehaus from Ghent University once more to the Council as Local Conference Organizer as allowed by § 7 of the EAJS Constitution.

#### **(4) EAJS conferences**

VBT announced that the next EAJS International Conference will take place at Ghent University, as had originally been the plan for 2020. VBT furthermore announced that the EAJS will return to the original three-year conference cycle, i.e. that the next conference will already take place in two years, in the summer of 2023. The following conference is then planned for 2026.

Then followed the reports by the following Sections (*convenor who reported*):

- Urban, Regional and Environmental Studies (Susanne Klien & Adrian Favell)
- Language and Linguistics (Yoshiyuki Asahi)
- Modern Literature (Nozomi Uematsu & Filippo Cervelli, excused)
- Pre-modern Literature (Linda Chance)
- Visual Arts (Gunhild Borggreen & Marcos Centeno)
- Performing Arts (Annegret Bergmann & Katherine Mezur)
- Anthropology and Sociology (Fabio Gygi)
- Media Studies (Björn-Ole Kamm & Rachael Hutchinson)
- Economics, Business and Political Economy (Karen Shire & Harald Conrad)
- History (Aaron Moore)
- Religion and Religious Thought (Monika Schrimpf & Mark Teeuwen, excused)
- Intellectual History and Philosophy (Roman Paşca)
- Politics and International Relations (Sebastian Maslow)
- Japanese Language Teaching (Marcella Mariotti)

#### **(5) Resolution on addition to § 6 in the EAJS Constitution**

UMZ explained the Council's intention to amend two paragraphs of the EAJS constitution to allow a) the General Meeting to be held virtually or as hybrid meeting, and b) that the EAJS Council election may also be conducted in digital form.

First, EAJS members were asked to vote on the addition of the following sections proposed by the EAJS Council to § 6 of the EAJS constitution:

“Virtual General Meetings are permissible. Regarding the invitation to a virtual General Meeting, § 6 section 1 shall apply accordingly. In a virtual General Meeting, members exercise their membership rights by means of electronic communication. The specific details of conducting a virtual General Meeting shall be determined by the Council.

The Council may also permit members to participate virtually in a non-virtual meeting without being present in person (hybrid meeting) and to exercise their membership rights by means of electronic communication.”

71 members voted “yes” (99% of the votes cast), no member voted “no”, one members voted “abstain” (1%).

#### **(6) Resolution on addition to § 8 in the EAJS Constitution**

Next, EAJS members were asked to vote on the addition of the following sections proposed by the EAJS Council to § 8 of the EAJS constitution:

“The election of the Council may also be conducted in digital form by using an online voting system. Members exercise their voting rights in a digital election by means of electronic communication. § 8 sections 1-3, 5-6 and 9 of the constitution shall apply mutatis mutandis to the digital election. The EAJS office on behalf of the Council shall send the election documents in text form to all members entitled to vote generally three months before the General Meeting. The Council shall set a deadline by which the votes of the members must be received through the election system. Votes received after this deadline are invalid.

The digital voting procedure must ensure that the election is anonymous, that the entitlement to vote is verified, that eligible voters can cast no more votes than is stipulated in § 8 section 3, that all technical steps and the election results are recorded in the minutes, and that manipulation during the casting and counting of votes is precluded.

Members who do not have the technical requirements to participate in a digital election shall be permitted by the Council to cast their vote by ballot-by-mail.”

72 members voted “yes” (99% of the votes cast), no member voted “no”, one members voted “abstain” (1%).



### **(7) Matters arising from council discussions**

VBT informed members about the Council's intention to take action in response to the ongoing strict Japanese travel regulations, which continue to make it extremely difficult to study and conduct research in Japan. The EAJS Council is concerned that the continuing strict entry regulations will continue to prevent colleagues from completing research projects, including many PhD projects, as well as students of Japanese Studies to study in Japan. Therefore, the Council plans to send another open letter to the Japanese government, similar to the open letter the EAJS had sent in 2020. In this letter, the EAJS Council intends to point out the negative impact of Japan's current immigration regulations on scholars conducting research about Japan and therefore on the field of Japanese Studies.

Moreover, VBT informed members about the Council's plan to thoroughly discuss how to integrate trans- or multidisciplinary topics and papers more effectively into the next EAJS Conference.

Finally, VBT reported on the Council's decision that video recordings of conference sessions will be made available to conference participants online via the conference website until four weeks after the conference, i.e. by the end of September. Exceptions should be made only for the recorded sessions or presentations, whose recorded participants are all in favor of extending the period during which the recordings are made available. Importantly, the recording can only be accessed by registered conference delegates and no one else.

### **(8) Any other business**

Comments and questions were invited from the floor.

A member asked to keep the films from the film section and the photos from the virtual photo exhibition online a little longer. In response to this request, Rohan Jackson from NomadIT confirmed that the films and photos could be made available for a week longer than originally planned.

A convenor proposed to add the technical possibility for speakers to upload their CV / biographical information to the conference website. VBT explained that this could be done with the conference software Whova, which allows participants to upload and share their biographical information etc. Rohan Jackson of NomadIT demonstrated this briefly. VBT promised that the Council would examine if this technical feature could be improved for the next conference.

VBT expressed once more the EAJS' immense gratitude towards the sponsors of the Conference, i.e. the Japan Foundation, the Toshiba International Foundation, the Flemish Research Foundation, Ghent University and the City of Ghent. Furthermore, VBT greatly thanked NomadIT for their wonderful preparatory work and support, the section convenors for all their hard work and the EAJS Office staff. Finally, VBT pronounced the General Meeting and the conference closed.

The General Meeting closed at 17:45 CET/UTC+2.

12 September 2021



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Prof. Dr. David Mervart  
EAJS Secretary