

## BONNIE JIN - EUROPEAN HORIZONS' ALUMNI OF THE MONTH MAY 2021

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*The following interview conducted by Louisa Vofrei on behalf of the Public Relations Portfolio aims to shed light on our community of engaged young professionals. Views expressed in this article are personal and do not represent the official position of European Horizons as an organization.*

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**Bonnie Jin previously served as the Executive Director of European Horizons in 2019. Today, she took the time to sit down with Louisa Vofrei to reflect on her vast experiences. From US-Asia relations to breaking the silos between domestic and international politics, Bonnie embodies a new generation of self-aware and clear-sighted young leaders. Learn more about her fascinating background and vision for young people below.**

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### European Horizons' alumni of the month – May 2021

#### Breaking the silos between domestic and international politics

*You're currently studying International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. What triggered your interest in this field of study?*

**Bonnie Jin:** My grandparents were refugees from the Chinese Civil War. Though I never lived through that time, that identity as immigrants -- first to Taiwan, then to the United States -- has always been a strong narrative passed down in my family. Because of this, I was always aware of the ways in which powerful countries can deeply influence geopolitical conflicts on the other side of the world.

**I always grew up hoping that I could someday be a bridge between the US and Asia. I hope to contribute my experience and identity towards that cause.**

Ever since I was a kid, I'd always see these headlines about things going on in the US, or even around the world, that I felt like didn't really make much sense. You'd get one article in the paper about the richest man in the world building the most expensive home in the world, and on the next page is a story about a family who couldn't afford to pay for the cost of healthcare, or children who don't have enough to eat. Seeing headline after headline, day after day, triggered an emotional response in me - that I had to do something about it. And that's how I got into politics.

I actually entered college studying creative writing and political science. But I soon realized that in order to make change back home, I needed to understand more about the world. And so my personal identity, as well as my need to make change, led me to studying International Studies. This coming year will be my final year at Johns Hopkins as an undergraduate, where I am currently pursuing a direct BA/MA in International Studies.

*In 2018, you went to Waseda University and helped found a chapter of European Horizons. How has this international perspective influenced you?*

**Bonnie Jin:** I think founding anything is really about building relationships. You really have to maintain long term, genuine relationships with people, and hold yourself accountable to investing in those connections.

The core group of people that helped found European Horizons at Waseda, I had met through being a speaker at TEDxWaseda, or who I'd met as a fellow student studying at Waseda's School of International Liberal Studies (SILS). I'd invited one of the Waseda students, Suzanne Baden, to attend ESC. Conferences really build relationships between students and European Horizons, and I'd like to think that that conference was what really inspired Suzanne to establish her own chapter.

(laughed) I must confess that I probably put in 1% of the effort to establish the chapter at Waseda University. Suzanne, who I believe is Norwegian, but was studying at Waseda - she was phenomenal. Her network, her experience, her skills, and her efforts were really what made a European Horizons chapter at Waseda possible.

As far as how my time there influenced me, it's hard to be political in such an apolitical society as Japan. Young people there generally aren't really interested in politics or social change, and so it was a difficult time for me, as someone who likes politics so much, to truly be myself there. I found myself not talking about politics to fit in. But the experience has made me stronger than before; I know myself a lot better now, and I'm glad I was able to have that kind of culture shock and experience.

*What's been the most rewarding part of your experience so far, or your greatest accomplishment?*

**Bonnie Jin:** It's probably unexpected, but this past year has been my greatest accomplishment. I've actually been on a gap year from Hopkins just to take time for myself, to practice self-care, and to think deeply about my experiences - including my time at European Horizons.

It's not like I haven't done anything career-wise this past year: I've been working as a Campaign Fellow for [Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu's mayoral election](#), I've been a Research Assistant at [Democracy Moves](#), and I've also just completed a certificate program at Harvard.

But this year is a big personal achievement because I always feel like I'm not enough, and that I have to constantly keep doing more just to be on track with everyone else, you know? I'm always scared of missing out, or worried about what others think. But this year - I just did the things I wanted to do, without really thinking too deeply about what my peers think. And that decision has made it possible for me to now have built connections with wonderful people who affirm the difficult decisions I make, and the activities I love.

And so even if someone else may think a local campaign is small and insignificant, for me, this experience has been the most rewarding thing I've ever been a part of. It's been so rewarding to be back home, helping local community members, after having spent so much time away - whether that be in Europe, in Asia, or even at Johns Hopkins.

**My aim is to bring all these international experiences back to local politics, specifically in my city of Boston.**

*Do you have a specific experience or memory at European Horizons that had the biggest impact on you?*

**Bonnie Jin:** The biggest impact European Horizons had on me was the wonderful people I met.

Let's walk back to how I got involved in European Horizons in the first place. September 2017. I was a first-year student walking around my schools' Student Activities Fair, feeling very lost in the crowd of all these different student groups. That's when I saw a small trifold board with European Horizons scrawled across the top.

I decided to join because I wanted to keep up my German and my fledgling interest in European politics and didn't really take it seriously at first. But the President of my chapter, Alex Marksteiner, believed in me and really encouraged me to keep contributing. Lucas Feuser, who would later become Executive Director of European Horizons that year, trusted me too -- even when I didn't really trust myself. And so, they invested their time in me: I became the only first-year officer at that chapter, and they even invited me to the Fall Leadership Summit despite having only joined a few weeks ago. After meeting even more new friends, I couldn't help but feel so committed to this organization.

Alex would later become Director of US Chapters, and she is literally such an icon. She completed the master's program I'm trying to finish, and I believe she's working as a researcher now in Sweden. When I had a super tough time last year, she actively reached out to me and made sure I was okay. We don't talk often, but I will forever be indebted to her, and the faith she's put into me all those years ago. She's the best!

To wrap up, I would say - it's gotta be the people; the people are the best. **I am really just forever indebted to the kindness of so many people in European Horizons.**

*Do you have any advice for the youth in 2021?*

**Bonnie Jin:** For people who have gone to college, it's very easy to fall into the mindset that the more prestigious degrees one has, the more valued they are as a person. But the truth is that experiences, especially deeply personal ones, are much more valuable than any PhD. Having worked with hyperlocal communities across the world this past year, I know for a fact that a PhD isn't a prerequisite for one to understand the structures and systems that guide our world, or the

oppressions that one faces. Experiences can inform decision-making, inform the actions folks take, and inform the organizations and solutions people create.

European Horizons is very much about engaging students and using research as a means to inform policy. But for young people especially, more than anything else, I hope that they step outside of the university bubble and engage with their local communities. Build those relationships now. Show kindness to your neighbors and try to use research to help solve the problems facing them. Because those relationships, and those experiences -- that's something that no one else can take from you. And that's very, very powerful.

**So build communities and build relationships. Always try to find ways to be helpful and use your unique skill set, identity, or experiences to serve your community.**

*How would you translate that to your following projects, and where we will see you in the upcoming next years?*

In the short term, I'll try my best to finish my master's degree. In the long, long term, I want to continue bridging the divide between domestic and international politics.

Especially in the US, there's this huge gap between domestic politics and international politics. A good example of that is human rights: instead of calling domestic human rights violations "human rights issues", we call them "civil rights issues." And that naming, even if small, speaks to the fact that we just don't see problems that are happening overseas as being vaguely similar or connected to the ones here.

And many of the issues Europe faces today are the same issues that are happening in the US, Asia, Africa, and all over the world. The rise in economic inequality and authoritarianism - these are issues that affect and will continue to affect people around the globe.

**There's strength in building coalitions, solidarity, and relationships that way, and seeing parallels between what's going on back home and what's going on overseas.**

For now, I'll keep trying to bridge that gap: whether it be as a writer, as an academic, in an organization or in government. I still don't know what I'll do specifically. But I know that **I want to continue breaking down those silos and bridging that gap between domestic policy and international relations.**

*Can you speak more to that gap between domestic and international politics?*

**Bonnie Jin:** To bridge that gap between local politics and international politics, it's important to understand that, just because you're working in international affairs, doesn't mean that you're inherently better than anyone else. There is a serious prestige, elitist culture where people who work on national or transnational issues feel like they're better than all the folks working on local issues. No, it's just another job.

And if you want to affect actual political change, you've really got to start local, because that's where you can see things happening. If you want to change how something operates in your local community, your local government can make that happen, sometimes overnight. You get to build those long term relationships and see the people whose lives your policies will affect. When you're working on the international level, it's difficult to build long term relationships with any particular community, and it's hard to see the same kind of impact as when you're working locally.

This isn't to say, don't work in international affairs! But neither domestic policy nor international policy exist fully separate from each other; they influence each other and to pretend otherwise can be harmful.

*Where do you really see European Horizons going and what would you like to see in the future?*

**Bonnie Jin:**

I hope that European Horizons will continue to build their relationship network and community, but also expand to work locally and really try to affect change.

Think deeply about the ways the EU and EU policies affect your community.

I hope more European Horizons members build relationships and engage with their local communities. Making friends and helping others isn't easy; but it's one of the most important things any of us can do.