



The European Association of Chinese Studies (EACS) and its history: **Reports by EACS Presidents**

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The President's Report

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Dear Colleagues,

a series of mishaps led to my office booking a flight for me to Edinburgh on Thursday morning while I was in Tokyo. When I discovered the mistake, the total cost of penalty and a new ticket would have been over DM 2000. I therefore have to apologize for not being able to attend this Board meeting. Following the suggestion of our General Secretary I will therefore begin what may become a new routine, a written report by the President.

We are meeting here in the beautiful city of Edinburgh for the second time. Bonnie McDougall has shouldered the burden of organizing this year's biannual conference, and we all owe her our gratitude for her work and for the fine hospitality she has shown to us last year and this.

A number of us will be leaving the board after serving here for many years. I think the Board has done much to instil more life and vigour into the EACS, and in the name of this Association I would like you for this important service to the profession. My special thanks go to Harald Boeckman, the General Secretary, to Brunhild Staiger, the Treasurer, and to Marja Kaikkonen for her editing the Newsletter. Marianne Bastid-Bruguere and Roderick Whitfield have been friendly enough to serve as referees for the Library Travel Grant.

1. Membership

After a rapid growth and a very visible and sizeable rejuvenation in the membership during the last five years, membership has now reached 675. The simplified procedures for membership application, the availability of the forms in the Newsletters and on our website have both helped. I think a further simplification would be in place. I suggest the Board may decide to waive the two references altogether and decide to have the President and Secretary General as the collective signatories so as to avoid a change in the constitution.

A further obstacle of membership development is payment of dues across currency borders. With the coming of the Euro in January 1999 as a non-cash payment unit, things should become much easier, and sizeably cheaper.

I suggest the Board may decide to define the annual fee at €20. This would be an increase in fees, but the activity of the EACS has greatly increased and it will be necessary to provide some modest assistance to those of the board with heavy administrative duties such as the Treasurer so that some of the work may be done by paid students. Otherwise it will be difficult to find scholars willing to assume these duties.

I suggest furthermore that the Board may decide to establish a ten-year membership fee option at €200. A lifelong membership option with a one-time payment might seem an alternative, but inflation problems and long-term planning in an Association such as ours do not seem to make this optimal.

I would furthermore suggest that the next board explore together with the transition to the Euro the option of an automatic membership fee payment through a credit card. This would dramatically reduce the annual troubles of both members and officers with the payment of dues.

The membership of the EACS represents a very sizeable part of all active sinologists in Europe. The percentages of active sinologists who are members of the EACS varies greatly from country to country. Perhaps the Treasurer can provide the statistics for the different countries. A comparison with the membership numbers of the national organizations for example in France and Britain will show that the EACS has by far not tapped its full potential.

Perhaps the most effective way of broadening the membership base would be a segmental approach, depending on membership distribution in the different countries. There might be a focus on more senior scholars in one country where this group is not well represented, a focus on junior, generally post-doc scholars in countries where they have their own organization which would facilitate contact, and a focus on having at least one or two members in each institution of a country where membership is concentrated in a few places. The main responsibility for this work would be with the members of the Board from the respective countries. The next Board might want to continue work in this direction by providing Board members with the numbers and name lists, and making membership development a regular topic of the Board meetings.

I would suggest that the Board may decide to directly address the sinological Institutions and collections in Europe to become non-voting members. This would ensure that they have the Newsletter in their libraries which itself has become an important information resource on conferences, data bases, new publications, jobs, and the like.

The relationship between EACS and the European Association of Sinological Librarians should be improved. I have written a letter [appended in this issue of the Newsletter, ed.] to EASL asking them to consider holding their meetings in conjunction with the EACS conferences, and to consider co-sponsoring

the Sinological Serials in European Libraries Project. I think the next EACS Conference should make such an effort more attractive by offering to insert EASL panels into the general programme or, if EASL should decide for another venue, to offer segments on items such as resource development, digitalization, interactive cataloguing which would offer occasion for an exchange between EASL and EACS members. Technically, EASL members are still collectively member of the EACS but this collective and modest fee has never been paid and perhaps a new arrangement might be found.

2. Cooperation with other Organizations

EACS is a member of a number of international scholarly bodies, but there is little actual contact. Prof. Stokhof, the Director of IIAS in Leiden, has informally suggested to move towards the formation of a European Association of Asian Studies along the North American model. The International Conference of Asian Scholars (ICAS) in Leiden was, among other things, an attempt to test the viability of such a concept. The Asia Committee of the European Science Foundation also seems to have been inspired by such a concept.

Having talked with many scholars attending the ICAS conference, and having been directly involved as a referee, participant, and speaker, I have the feeling that most European scholars were very happy about the chance to meet colleagues from their own fields in North America. There were a number of cross-over "Asian" panels, but it seems that, much as in the AAS meetings, most scholars in Chinese or Indian Studies would find more in common with Sinologists and Indologists even in other specialties than their own than with each with scholars working on another Asian culture. In terms of methodology scholars tend to rather read studies in European or American fields akin to theirs than about a country adjacent to their area of interest.

Asia is, of course, a cultural and geographical construct with no reality of its own. In strictly scholarly terms I personally would not see a good justification for such an overarching association.

On the other hand all of the different fields in Asian studies have some common problems. Many of them are situated in small institutions with less than three professors, with small budgets and libraries, and relatively low numbers of students. While the general research activity in these fields might be above average, they have a hard stand in the competition for attention and resources with large fields such as sociology, political science, history, or the modern European languages. This is true on the regional, national, and European level as well, where they are often regarded as fragrant little orchids with not practical value and no competence to deal with the Asian turmoil of the day. I could therefore imagine that a case could be made for the need of such an Association if it could be proven that it would be able to change something in this regard, namely to be a collective lobbying body.

The bulk of the applications for the ICAS meeting was in the field of Chinese Studies. While this attests to the liveliness of our field, it also meant that a disproportionately large part of the proposals (over 60% if I recall) had to be rejected to make it a meeting that could still be legitimately called one of "Asian scholars." At the same time there was a certain competition between the ICAS and the EACS

conferences. Many scholars will not want to attend two meetings in a short time, and many also do not have a desk overflowing with so much first class research that they have two original contributions ready within three months. While this has certainly reduced the number of submissions of papers for Edinburgh, I do hope this will not be to the detriment of this conference. From the applications for the EACS conference that I have seen, the general professional level has continued to improve over previous years. If another meeting of the ICAS type should be planned in Europe at a time of an EACS conference, I would suggest that negotiations should be made with the organizer so that the time span between the two conferences is large enough.

3. Projects

The EACS runs two CCK funded projects, the Library Travel Grant, and SSELP. The application for an extension of the Library Travel Grant has not been successful, but enough funds are left for a quite a few more travels. SSELP has been extended for another year. We owe much gratitude to the Foundation for its generous and continuous support of European Chinese Studies. I insert here the Report on the SSELP project.

Source: <http://www.soas.ac.uk/eacs/news/nl19.htm>