



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

GLEN DUDBRIDGE (2000)

Report by the President

Colleagues and Friends,

Here we are in the fine city of Torino, some of us for the second time, since last year the members of our Board met here. We enjoyed generous hospitality from our hosts here then, and now we are back to take part in the huge event they have organized for our Association. We are enormously grateful to Stefania Stafutti and her colleagues for the energy, hard work, good humour and style they have put into their task, and we're looking forward to a lively and successful occasion as our conference unfolds.

In the two years since we all met in Edinburgh the Board too has plunged into the task of developing the Association in a variety of ways, and I want to thank all its members for the serious and positive way they have done this. We owe great thanks to our Secretary Christian Henriot and our Treasurer Hans van Ess for their efforts and skill in handling many aspects of our work; to Torbjörn Lodén and Mette Thunø for their labours as editors of the Newsletter; and to Michel Hockx for his creative dexterity in setting up our new website. For me it has been a pleasure to work with these committed colleagues, and very little that follows in this report would have come to pass without them. Three stalwarts from former years, Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, Brunhild Staiger and Roderick Whitfield, have continued to serve the Association by refereeing the applications for Library Travel Grants. The Association heartily thanks these colleagues one and all.

At the Edinburgh conference in 1998 my predecessor Rudolf Wagner presented a vigorous Presidential Report which looked boldly towards the future over a wide range of the Association's interests. Reading it again now, I find that our Board has taken forward many of his ideas, often in a more radical fashion than he sought. It appears to me that several of the concrete topics raised on that occasion have now moved ahead within the context of bigger themes. Certainly the largest task handled by this Board, the drafting of a new constitution for the Association, takes up many issues raised by members during recent years. That piece of business, broad-ranging and fundamental as it is, must be dealt with at a separate session of our General Assembly. But let me point out certain other current themes in the life of our Association.

Access and contact

Our membership remains at a stable level (as the Treasurer's statistics will reveal), but it is clear that many or most of us wish it to grow. In the view of this Board the doors of EACS should be opened more

widely to younger members, particularly to graduate students. So among the changes proposed in our new draft constitution comes a redefining of membership categories and requirements that makes the Association far more accessible than before. Together with that come decisions on membership dues which offer discounts for students. (As the Treasurer will explain, the new rates of EURO 20 for ordinary members and EURO10 for students come into effect after this General Assembly.) This Board has also begun to discuss ways to use its considerable financial reserve for supporting student participation - a topic to which the new Board may wish to return.

The financial complexities of paying dues across many currencies have been simplified by our introduction of credit-card facilities, already in effect for some time now, and should have been smoothed for many members by the institution of the Euro in 1999. It seems that the banking system of Europe has yet to open the sluice gates that will let the currency flow sweetly and easily between accounts in different countries, but members of our Association will certainly be among the first eager customers when it does so. In any case, our finances will now be computed in Euros. The Treasurer will explain the impact of the multiple-year membership dues scheme he has introduced.

Beyond these strategic and executive measures we have been concerned to put our members much more fully in touch with one another. We inherited a well-established newsletter tradition and have aimed not simply to maintain it, but to present it in an even more clear and attractive format. The results, which first came before you last April with No. 22, have drawn positive comments from members who have written to me. We thank Mette Thunø for this creative input. I hope, too, that you have admired the Association's new logo on the front cover, handsomely designed for us by Federico Greselin. The newsletter, appearing three times a year, remains the Association's major organ of communication, and we regard it still as an ideal medium for announcements and reports of academic and professional activities in Chinese studies throughout Europe. But the newsletter is now much more fully complemented by the EACS website, which has been redesigned and strongly developed within the lifetime of the present Board. In many ways the website can duplicate the function of the newsletter with conference announcements, membership documentation, the text of past newsletters, and so on, but there are certain functions which it performs more effectively. Among them I would include the announcement of job advertisements. Since these usually appear without much warning and with limited time for applications they clearly require the web's facility for constant updating and immediate access. I'm sure too that members will have valued the steady supply of information on this Torino Conference through its own website, mediated by the EACS site, finally building up to abstracts of all the papers. But websites really come into their own through providing links, and we have aimed to build up a comprehensive service for our members through which, with a few clicks, they can find their way to any sinological institution or library in Europe that maintains a site or online facility on the web. I have no very clear idea of how widely the website is used by our membership: I have certainly met members who have never visited it, and have heard from others who didn't know the site had moved to SOAS in London. There may even be members who are not aware that we have a website. But I have great confidence in the future of this engine of communication: we Europeans are slowly but surely getting accustomed to the web and what it has to offer. Speaking for myself, I use the EACS site constantly as the first resort to gather data

about institutions, colleagues, library catalogues and books around Europe, including my own country. Starting from this point the whole of sinological Europe lies waiting behind your screen! And if you have information to broadcast about Chinese studies, our site gives you access to the world.

Although time and effort go into building these facilities they are of course imperfect and incomplete. Errors creep in; information falls out of date; old links go dead and need replacing with current links; new institutions come into being, new sites appear around the continent. To keep pace with this, and to improve the level of service we provide, we need lively and constant input from our members and users. Communicate with us, and everyone will be better off! As part of the newly restyled website we now have an online discussion forum which has already drawn a contribution from the distant shores of California. Hits on our site from around the world have been rising to levels of 30 to 60 a day. Do please join in!

Relations with other institutions

A big topic in the air at our last conference was the interest of the IAS and the European Science Foundation's Asia Committee in setting up a European Association of Asian Studies. It was the subject of a serious discussion by the Board here in Torino last year, and I was given clear guidance on how to respond on behalf of EACS when the proposal was put. It went like this. The China field is already large enough to engage the full attention of EACS members, and the Association has already grown to a size which makes our biennial conferences unwieldy affairs lacking the intimacy of earlier generations; but it is a community of individual members electing their officers and boards from among people they know professionally and pursuing goals they adopt communally. So EACS should preserve its identity, not lose it in a larger federation. We should look at other ways to enhance communication and contacts with the ESF and its Asia Committee. When I attended a meeting of the Committee in November I found that most of the European Asian associations represented there had similar feelings. What emerged from that meeting was not an all-enveloping Association of Asian Studies, but a much more compact body to be called the Conference of Presidents. It will meet once a year to bring together the officers heading six European associations and representatives of the Asia Committee: they will exchange information and ideas and work towards shared goals.

One of these is coming up quite fast -- the second International Convention of Asia Scholars to be held in Berlin next year. When the first such event took place in the Netherlands in 1998 there was a feeling among our membership that two huge conferences coming so close together in the same year detracted from the participation in our EACS conference in Edinburgh. That problem will at least be avoided next time, since the ICAS conference falls in our in-between year. We have, at our own request, two places on the Programme Committee. You will be represented there by Rudolf Wagner and by me. You can watch the progress of this event on its website, which has a link on our own home page.

Our relations with the sinological librarians' group EASL have now happily been restored to the point that their representatives will attend this Torino conference to report on library developments. We shall hear about new plans for online union catalogue access to materials in sinological libraries, plans that began with EACS support for the periodicals catalogue SSELP and are now branching out in various directions.

Through the EACS website you can already find your way quickly to online catalogues of Chinese books around Europe, but soon you may be able to do this even more quickly through a central point of access.

Funding

The ESF Asia Committee has been generous enough, both last year and this year, to give us FF10,000 to help with general expenses. But our most generous benefactor has of course been the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. Alongside all the grants it gives each year to institutions, conferences and individuals around Europe, the Foundation has maintained its funding for Library Travel Grants, which is entrusted to our Association for administration. And once again it has supported workshops recommended directly by EACS: in the last session there have been workshops on "Text and commentary" in Heidelberg, and "Field-work practice" in Oxford; in the current session one on "Literary periodicals of the 1910s" in Marburg; together, of course, with the CCK's support for the present conference. Not every Asian association in Europe has a patron as munificent as this.

Unfinished business

One topic on which the new board will need to form a policy is national surveys of Chinese Studies. The printed series that began with France in 1988 and led on to the United Kingdom in 1998 has tended to become out of date and unobtainable almost as soon as the numbers appear. Previous boards decided that the printed series would end with one last number (Benelux, Switzerland and Austria) before migrating into digital form. That number has been in its editor's hands for some two years now, and we still hope to see it appear soon. But meanwhile the UK survey is already online on our website. It may be that the website will provide the solution that we need to sustain this series and keep it up to date in future. The new board may also want to come back to the question of relations with the AAS. So far we have not followed other European associations in setting up arrangements for mutual membership with AAS. The question needs looking at more carefully in future.

Envoi

In general we are conscious of handing over responsibility for an association which is growing in self-confidence, learning to communicate more effectively, and ready to expand. It has support from generous patrons and is developing contact with parallel bodies. Its talents and achievements will be on display at this conference. As we set out on it now and look forward to more to come, I hope we will aim at setting new standards in our field.

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