



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

GLEN DUDBRIDGE (2002)

REPORT BY THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT GLEN DUDBRIDGE

Delivered at the EACS General Assembly on 26 August 2002

Colleagues and Friends,

You receive a report from your President every two years, as the elected Board's term of office comes to a close. But today you're taking leave of a group of individuals who have been running the Association's affairs on your behalf for four years. Mercifully there is still some hope of continuity: you will shortly have the chance to re-elect to the Board your present Treasurer, Hans van Ess, and the editor of your Newsletter, Mette Thunø. But the other officers who have served since 1998 - your Secretary Christian Henriot, Webmaster Michel Hockx, myself as President, and several other members of the present Board will all retire from office today. So I'd like to look back on the four years of this administration and share some thoughts with you on what it aimed for and what it achieved.

The first thing to do is to express my admiration for the time, effort and skill that all these colleagues have put at your Association's disposal through those years. Paying thanks may be a matter of convention on occasions like this, but here, for me, it is much more: quite simply it has been stimulating, rewarding and fulfilling to spend many hours with these talented and congenial colleagues, either face-to-face or through hundreds of email messages, exploring the questions and problems that come up in our Association's affairs. We learned together, in real life, what is involved in transacting complex business across the cultural boundaries of Europe. It all gives me a positive feeling about the future.

Our own conscious agenda, four years ago, addressed two main tasks. One was to regularize and consolidate the formal institutions of EACS we had inherited from the past. The other was to develop and promote a more active system of communication within the Association. So what was done, and how well did it work?

Archives

To begin with the past, we started a quest for the Association's archives. No institution has a historical identity unless it has documents to define its existence in time. But it took us months, even years, to discover and lay hands on the documents of our own past history. This was achieved in the end, and we chose a spot close to the physical centre of Europe to be a permanent home for the EACS archive. So it

now lies in the city of Munich, at the Institute for East Asian Studies of Munich University, to which we now express our thanks for generously making the space available (no small matter, in modern library conditions). An important part of the documentation goes back long before the foundation of EACS in 1976. There were once copious papers associated with the annual meetings of our direct ancestor, the Junior Sinologues' Congress, which began back in 1948, and although many of those papers seem to have vanished in Leiden during the intervening years, we do have the late Piet van der Loon's own personal holding, which he entrusted to us last year. They include several group photographs of the very early meetings, showing certain individuals that we know as senior and venerable figures looking startlingly youthful. The photographs repose in the archive as digital files, so can be made available to members for consultation at any time.

The Constitution

Anyone who attended our last General Assembly meetings in Torino will remember the weighty business of voting in a new constitution for the Association. Our meeting here in Moscow is the first to take place under the new rules. The most conspicuous innovation, in a few minutes from now, will be the direct election of a new President, and your election of a new Board will also reflect a changed way of representing the countries of Europe. The constitution will have to prove itself in practice during the years to come, but for me the experience of working on that big change, of seeing the prodigious energies of Christian Henriot deployed in setting up the early drafts, and hearing the hours of serious, detailed analysis carried out by the Board that met in 1999 - all that was a high point in our four-year administration. We must hope that the constitution serves its purpose well.

Communication

Our elaborately redesigned website has been online now for more than three years and should be familiar to everyone here. I don't propose to say more about it, except to point out the statistics which show it receiving an average of 22 hits per day. These hits come in from all round the world, but the countries of origin line up in an interesting order: the United Kingdom has the largest percentage (22%), followed by Germany (12%), United States (9%), France (5%), and Italy (4%). China, Taiwan, Russia, Singapore and Belgium each claim between 2 and 3%. I offer no explanation for these figures, though it does seem that the website offers a service, at its own modest level, to a wide range of users. But our first vision was of a continent whose sinologists would engage in constant and vivid communication together. We hoped to stimulate this culture of communication with our website and newsletter, and we took some steps to help that along. The results have seemed at first sight disappointing. We set up a web discussion page and advertised it in the Newsletter, hoping that spontaneous online debates would break out. But the debates failed to develop, and we ended by dropping that particular experiment. Possibly the whole episode came and went without disturbing the consciousness of many of our members. Or maybe the membership is just not very interested in debate. No matter. My feelings of disappointment have been cleared in recent months by another development which I should like to commend to you as an example. Just over a year ago, at the ICAS2 conference in Berlin attended by many people here (more on that in a moment), some

colleagues had the thought of starting a contact network on Chinese women and gender studies. An inaugural session was set up there in Berlin, and I went to it. There were barely five people in the room, and it was a sensation when one more walked in to join us. By any standard these were modest beginnings. But we publicized the project with a link on the EACS website and a page in our newsletter. And whether or not the EACS media deserve the credit, the results have been satisfying: the network, now with its own website, has more than 90 members, and it has achieved one of its first targets by dramatically increasing the number of participants in this conference who will be involved in the large Women and Gender Studies section, by contrast with the small numbers in Torino 2000. We naturally wish these colleagues good luck. But my point here is a more general one. Any group of enthusiasts can do the same: our newsletter and website are here at your service, and your Board will be delighted, now and in the future, to help you form new networks of contact and cooperation in any branch of Chinese Studies. That must be one of the primary functions our Association exists to perform. Let me turn now to our relations with outside bodies.

And I begin with The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, our stalwart supporter for many years. And this time, at the Moscow conference, far more generous than on any previous occasion. Of course we express our deep thanks for the Foundation's continued confidence in our activities. But there is more to say. Most of our members will surely be aware that the CCK Foundation has lately passed through a period of change in its executive leadership. It has given me pleasure and reassurance to discover that the new leadership (represented here in Moscow by both President Chu Yun-han and Vice-President Wang Ch'iu-kuei) has taken an even closer and more active interest in what we do and how it might be funded. The continued direct support for our conference is one measure of this. Another most important development has been the renewal for a second term of the CCK Sinological Center in Charles University, Prague, under its new director Olga Lomová. And now, even more recently, the founding of a committee to promote Chinese Studies in Eastern Europe, its inaugural meeting taking place here in Moscow on 25 August. But the most long-established item of support for our Association is the Library Travel Fund, which over several years has helped our members from Russia, Eastern and Central Europe to make research visits to certain libraries in Western Europe. The scheme has depended and still depends for its running on the good offices of three senior and public-spirited members - Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, Brunhild Staiger, and Roderick Whitfield - without whom none of this would happen. But ultimately it naturally depends on the CCK Foundation's willingness to fund the scheme. We have had detailed talks with them about it. The most encouraging outcome has been an invitation to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding which would regularize the whole scheme in future years. But it is most important that we make full use of the funds that have already been entrusted to us, and at the moment there is a balance of unspent money which must be dealt with before any new arrangements can come into force. It is the job of the EACS Board to publicize this travel scheme more aggressively, to open it up for wider participation, to stimulate more general movement around the continent for library research. That is the minimum response we owe to the CCK Foundation in return for its willingness to support us so generously. Online information on library holdings and digital resources in European centres has never been so richly available, thanks to the general sites based in Heidelberg and the library links laid out in our own website. So let's use the occasion of this General Assembly to put the message out widely among our membership: the best

sinological libraries of Europe lie within your reach if you choose to make use of this scheme. Its details are set out in every number of the Newsletter. Take advantage of it! Remember too that the CCK Foundation will fund research workshops, and that we in EACS can help you to develop your circle of contacts for such purposes.

The ESF Asia Committee

In October last year I received a sad letter from the Committee's secretary informing us that its activities would be discontinued by the European Science Foundation. But the Committee accompanied this news with a handsome gesture in the shape of FF 10,000 to help with holding our Board meetings. Their regular and most welcome gift has now come our way for the last time, so let us express our thanks for so much help over the years of the Committee's work. But the moment of valediction has also brought news - that the Asia Committee's secretariat in Leiden will continue to service the International Convention for Asia Scholars.

ICAS

Two big meetings of this movement have now taken place, the most recent in Berlin last year. Numbers of EACS members were there, and they joined with AAS members from across the Atlantic and colleagues from other European Associations in a wide-ranging conference. I have already published in the Newsletter my own impressions of that occasion, which was sadly overshadowed by the events on September 11th, and there is no need to say more here. But the future is already calling for our attention: ICAS3 will take place in Singapore next year, now with Asian countries taking part. It is difficult to predict the character of this event, which will have to balance its global aspirations with the quite complex problems of quality control. But I was asked, as your President, to join the International Advisory Committee of ICAS3. With your Board's approval I accepted the invitation, and await developments. Meanwhile an annual meeting has been taking place under the heading "Conference of Presidents of the European Associations for Asian Studies". In the past two years it was attended on your behalf by Christian Henriot, who has witnessed there the wider debate on the ICAS movement. It will be the job of the new Board elected today to decide on the Association's policy towards this whole movement. The issues have been aired in our General Assemblies more than once before: how closely we wish to identify ourselves with larger, more general bodies dealing with pan-Asian studies; what forms of sponsorship we are prepared to extend to projects such as ICAS3 and its likely successors. Our present stance is a balanced one: we have chosen to keep the clarity and relative intimacy of our own identity, but to contribute positively to the actual planning of these big events. For the future all options remain open. To you, the members, let me say this: make your views known to the Board; write about them boldly in the Newsletter; get a real debate started!

AAS

In Berlin last year I had the pleasure of a 20-minute conversation with the Executive Director of AAS. I

wanted to hear his thoughts on a question which has regularly come up in our strategic discussions - whether there was any desire for some close, formal link between our association and theirs. Very little encouragement for this idea has been forthcoming from our own Board: it is felt that our own members can and do quite easily take out membership of AAS already. And I must tell you that I had a very similar response from the Executive Director: he felt that formal arrangements with European associations brought little value in relation to the bureaucratic effort they required, and he was clearly content to leave everything at an informal level. So that appears to be our answer, and we can perhaps let the matter rest.

EASL

A word, sadly only a brief one, about our colleagues the Sinological Librarians. For years we have striven to bring them into play at our own conferences, but this year they are not with us. I had a civil and friendly correspondence with the Chairman of EASL, who politely explained to me the many circumstances which made it impossible for her members to attend this conference in Moscow. We shall have to try again next time.

Envoi

Now almost at the end of these remarks, I want to bring your thoughts back to Europe. We still need to come together more closely as a continent. We must do more to support one another across national (and cultural) boundaries. By meeting in Moscow this year we have made an important gesture in that direction. We have also kept it easier for colleagues from certain former Soviet-bloc countries to join the Association by setting their membership fee at €10, not €20. Those are formal steps which your Board can take on your behalf. But in the end it is you, the members, who must make it all work. You have the power to make the contacts, build the networks, and run the debates that will make this Association succeed in its goals. And here in Moscow you have an excellent chance to move it all forward.

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