

# ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

HONG KONG BRANCH

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NEWSLETTER

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20<sup>th</sup> August, 2003

## Council members 2003-2004

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Mr. Jason Wordie, Member	Mr. Robert Horsnell, Co-opted Member
Dr. Dan Waters, Immediate Past President	Dr. Betty Wei, Co-opted Member

We have great pleasure in welcoming Dr. Betty Wei Peh T'i as a newly co-opted member of the Council. Betty is Head of Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. She is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College, New York University, and the University of Hong Kong. She also holds honorary appointments at the Institute of Qing History at the People's University in Beijing, and the Centre of Asian Studies and the Department of History at the University of Hong Kong. She is the author of many scholarly and journalist articles in English and in Chinese. Her best known full-length publications are *Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China* (Oxford University Press) and *Cultural Shock: Hong Kong* (Times Books).

Regarding Vicky Lee's interesting talk on 30<sup>th</sup> May on the subject of Eurasianness, Vicky has written to us concerning two factual errors in our write up of her talk in our June newsletter. In the last paragraph of our write up, it says "two 'pure British' women were said to have pointed out those who were Eurasian, including Joyce Symons". Vicky did in fact mention in her talk that Joyce Symons herself had been denied evacuation, so she was not one of those to be weeded out in Manila. But, being part of the war-time Eurasian community, she recalls what she knew about the incident at that time. Vicky also points out that Joyce Symons is not "the Rev. Joyce Symons" but Dr. Joyce Symons. Please accept our apologies for these errors, Vicky.

On Friday 13<sup>th</sup> June, Professor Gregory James, Director of the Language Center at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, gave a lively account to members of the discovery of a rare manuscript - an unpublished report of missionary activity in China. Together with his colleague Mr. David Morgan, (a member of the RASHKB), the manuscript was translated from Spanish into English. New knowledge came to light in translation, and certain events and fallacies were made clear.









Visit to Canton and Whampoa

Due to unforeseen circumstances, we have unfortunately had to change our plans for the talk and one of the visits we had planned to coincide with the seminar, details of which are given above. The talk and cemetery visit scheduled for Friday 10<sup>th</sup> October will not now take place but we have planned a two-day visit to Canton and Whampoa. The tour will be led by Dr. Joseph Ting, RAS Council Member and Chief Curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History and Dr. Guo Deyan of the Guangzhou Cultural Bureau, who has a doctorate on the Parsees in China.

On Saturday October 11<sup>th</sup> the tour will meet at the Hung Hom Railway Station at 7.00 a.m. prompt to take the first through-train to Canton. On arrival at Canton, the party will go straight to the Muslim Cemetery, to visit in particular the Tomb of the Prophet's Nephew, Abu Wangus, who died in Canton in AD 629, and other interesting graves. The party will then go to lunch, possibly at a Muslim Restaurant. After lunch, the tour will visit the ancient Huaisheng Mosque (one of the oldest mosques in the world, founded within the Prophet's lifetime in AD 626, although the present structure is mostly Ming). After this, the party will do a walking tour of Shamian, the European residential area of Canton from the late 1840s to the 1930s. Dinner will be in the VIP room of a lakeside restaurant near the garden villa of Puan Khe Qua, one of the leading Hong merchants in Canton. We will spend the night at the White Swan Hotel.

On Sunday October 12<sup>th</sup>, we will leave after breakfast for Whampoa by river cruise, enjoying the picturesque scenery along the banks of the Canton river, passing by some historical landmarks. In the morning we will visit Whampoa Village. This village has a very fine and well-restored area, which we will walk around, which includes a number of fine Ancestral Halls, of which we shall visit two, belonging to two of the great Hong Merchants of the nineteenth century, namely Kinqa and Mr. Whampoa of Singapore and some residences. Lunch will be in the village. We will then take a sampan across the river to visit the Foreigners' Cemetery and the Parsee Cemetery. We will return to Hong Kong by coach, arriving in the evening.

The price of this tour is \$1,500 for Members (including Members of the Zoroastrian Association), and \$1,750 for Non-Members, plus \$260 Single Supplement (price includes rail, bus, ferry fees, breakfast, lunches, and hotel costs). This tour will be extremely fascinating and interesting, and Members are urged to apply for it. This visit will be limited to 40 and priority will be given to members.

**Please note:** all persons going on this tour must ensure that they have a valid Visa for China.

**Meeting Place:** Hung Hom Railway Station, the entrance to the Through Train section, before the Immigration Office.

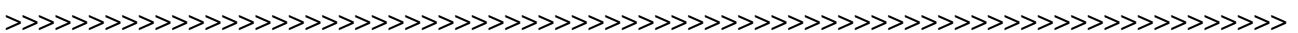
**Meeting Time: 7:00 prompt.** (Train leaves at 7:30 a.m.)

**Cost:** HK\$1,500 for Members, \$1,750 for non-Members, which will include hotel accommodation, transportation and all meals and admission charges (including western breakfast at the hotel). Surcharge for single occupancy: HK\$260.

**Booking:** There is a booking form at the end of this newsletter. Please return it no later than 15<sup>th</sup> September.

**Questions:** Dr. Joseph Ting, Hong Kong Museum of History. Tel: 2724 9010

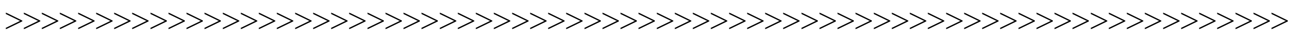
We strongly recommend that members going on this visit read RAS Council member Valery Garrett's excellent book *Heaven is High, the Emperor Far Away*, which recounts how Canton became, in its heyday, the centre of the China trade and the wonder of the Far East. The book is published by Oxford University Press, ISBN 0195927443. Valery will hopefully be joining us on this visit.



**Forty Years in Hong Kong – Far East of Amsterdam**

**Speaker:** Mr. Joop B. M. Litmaath  
**Time:** 6:15 p.m.  
**Venue:** Extension Activities Room, 8/F, City Hall High Block, Central  
**Cost:** The lecture is free and open to the public.  
**Booking:** No booking is required.

In his 40 years as an importer-exporter in Hong Kong, this perceptive Dutch trader has steadily stored away a container-full of fascinating memories and observations on a multitude of events. Mr Litmaath is not only a successful businessman, but has worn many hats during his life in Hong Kong. An acclaimed amateur pianist, he set up his own very popular jazz band, Hong Kong City Jazz Band, which played for Governor Chris Patten at Government House in 1995, and he has been associated with many well-known Hong Kong organizations such as the Hong Kong Sea School, the Hong Kong Country Club and the Dutch Association, to mention but a few. In April 2003, he published his memoirs in a book entitled “*Far East of Amsterdam*”.



**George Smirnoff’s Watercolours of Macao**

**This visit is open to Members only**

On this visit we will enjoy the George Smirnoff watercolours of Macao, painted in 1944-45, which are not normally on public display. This year marks the centenary of this White Russian painter’s birth, and in his honour a major retrospective of Smirnoff’s work has been mounted by the Macao Museum of Art. Smirnoff lived for much of his life as a refugee in Harbin and Tsingtao before escaping to the British colony in the late 1930s. Eventually he took his family to live in Macao during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. Smirnoff’s peaceful, light-filled paintings are a magnificent visual record of the languid Portuguese territory as it then was.

After visiting the Smirnoff exhibition we will adjourn for a light Portuguese buffet lunch at the Club Militar, followed by a 2-3 hour afternoon walk around central Macao led by Jason Wordie, to see some of the locations painted by George Smirnoff. Despite considerable change in Macao in recent decades, several corners – perhaps surprisingly to some - still look much as they did when George Smirnoff painted them almost sixty years ago. We will be privileged to have Smirnoff’s younger daughter Nina, who retains vivid recollections of life in Macao during that period, accompany us on this trip.

This is a Members Only trip limited to 30 people. Participants will make their own way to and from Macao at their own expense (some may wish to go across for the entire weekend.) Cost includes lunch at Club Militar, but excludes drinks at the club or transportation costs within Macao.

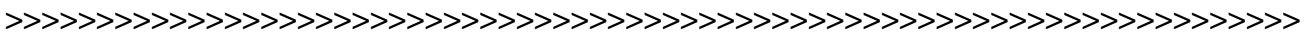
**Meeting Place:** Macao Museum of Art, Avenida Xian Xing Hai. This is a short taxi ride from the ferry terminal.

**Meeting Time:** 10:30 a.m. prompt.

**Cost:** HK\$190 per Member includes buffet lunch (drinks extra). Limited to 30 Members only.

**Booking:** There is a booking form at the end of this newsletter. Please return it by 17<sup>th</sup> October, at the latest.

**Questions:** Jason Wordie on 2476 3504.







this trip should contact Rosemary Lee on 01491 873276 or Email to rosemary.lee@talk21.com. On 15<sup>th</sup> November, Martin Palmer will give a talk to the Friends on the Nestorians. This will take place at SOAS in London, with a Chinese lunch beforehand. Further details will be given in our October newsletter. Anyone interested in attending the talk, please contact Rosemary Lee or Paul Bolding.

### **Carl Smith: in Search of History Across the Pearl River Estuary**

*“Where is Carl?” “What is Carl doing now?” and “Is it true that Carl is now living in Macau?”* These are questions often heard recently in Hong Kong. Carl, of course, being none less than the Reverend Carl Thurman Smith, Honorary Vice President of the RASHKB, *doyen* of Hong Kong social historians, author of *A Sense of History*<sup>1</sup> and *Chinese Christians*<sup>2</sup>. He is also creator of the Carl Smith Collection in the Hong Kong Public Records Office and Good Samaritan to many a fellow traveler on the history research trail. Note, please, that I have refrained from describing Carl as *the Grand Old Man of Hong Kong History*, for Carl, despite his eighty-five years, is far too young in both spirit and intention, to fit such a title.

The facts are that Carl is now putting his many years of painstaking research amongst the Historical Archives of Macau<sup>3</sup> to good use as a contract officer with the Cultural Institute of the Macau S.A.R., the parent department for the Archives. He is applying his magic touch to topics such as monopolies and urban development. Some of this is in the form of articles<sup>4</sup> but the Institute is also making videos telling the history of local landmarks. To assist him in his endeavours Carl has succumbed to the attractions of a computer, but the help of his personal assistant is still required, for she is the only person who can read his handwriting. This employment does require him to spend much of his time in Macau with only infrequent visits to Hong Kong.

It may sometimes seem that in his youth Carl heard the call *“Go West young man!”* but was never told when to stop. In fact the history of Macau and the Pearl River Estuary are not some fashionably new *“Delta”* subject for Carl. He is best known for his work on Hong Kong, but from his earliest days in the East he has seen Hong Kong history as very much part of that of the South China Coast.

His first post in Hong Kong, in 1961, was as a lecturer in theology at the Church of Christ in China training institution in Tuen Mun. This required him to visit Macau occasionally with his students. An outcome of this was his first written work outside the USA, a study of Americans buried at the Protestant Cemetery in Macau. (This was written in 1963 but not published until fifteen years later by the National Genealogical Society of America when it was found in an editor’s pile of papers). This subject was to engender a life long interest in the Maritime trade between China and the U.S.A, and also provide a place of worship, for Carl is now a member of the Cemetery Chapel congregation.

*“I have led a happy and meaningful life,”* says Carl, and clearly he has every intention to continue to do so. But what is it that causes this fresh burst of activity? Could it be that Macau, with its unique cultural heritage and tradition of hosting missionary scholars that began with Matteo Ricci in 1582, offers a more welcoming environment than Hong Kong?

Perhaps Macau, also long in years, understands better than most places that scholars of modern history improve with age as they have an increasing number of their own years of historical experience to draw upon. A bottle of vintage port matures with each passing year in much the same way. Perhaps Carl, who abstains from alcohol, would prefer the Chinese analogy with ginger, which is also said to gain in strength with age? Macau itself being a spicy blend of both port and ginger.

However, even Carl is subject to the lesser pleasant side of aging and in late July was back in Hong Kong receiving medical treatment.

Geoffrey Roper 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2003

## Notes

1. Smith, Carl T., *A Sense of History: Studies in the Social and Urban History of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co., 1995. Many of Carl's essays were also published in the HKBRAS Journal.
2. Smith, Carl T. *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen, and The Church in Hong Kong*. O.U.P. H.K. 1985. ISBN: 0198539730.
3. To be found at Nos. 91-93 Av. Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida.
4. Smith, Carl T. *An Eighteenth-Century Macao Armenian Merchant Prince*. An example of Carl's current work as published in International Edition 6, RC [Revista de Cultura], a publication of the Macao Cultural Institute.
5. Ride, Lindsay, *The Old Protestant Cemetery in Macao*, a lecture delivered on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1962; privately published.

## Illustrations

1. Carl on the Avenida da Amizade.
2. Carl on the Internet.

## **Plaque from the Queensland Maritime Museum in Brisbane**

RAS Member David McKellar has sent in the following photograph with background notes, for members' interest:

Photo of a plaque on a low plinth from the Queensland Maritime Museum in Brisbane (<http://www.qmma.ecn.net.au/>). The plaque reads:

### **Allied Chinese Ships**

HMAS Poyang  
HMAS Ping Wo  
HMAS Yunnan  
HMAS Whang Pu  
VSIS Tai Ping  
VSIS Changte

### **In Memory Of Those Who Served Lest We Forget**

The background: Early in WWII merchant ships owned by British companies operating in China were requisitioned or commandeered by both Japanese and Allied Authorities for wartime naval service. The ships mentioned were Chinese river steamers or ocean-going vessels on the Japan-China-Australia run which were requisitioned and manned by Royal Australian Navy members, serving from December 1941 to 1946. The first four ships mentioned on the plaque (HMAS Ping Wo, Poyang, Whang Pu and Yunnan) were commissioned into the RAN for service as supply, repair and support ships in the Pacific and East Indies. The VSIS (Victualling Supply Issue Ships) Changte and Taiping were requisitioned for service as victualling supply ships to support the British Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. The majority of the ships seem to have started and/or ended their lives in Hong Kong shipyards, and at least one of the ships was involved in the evacuation of citizens from Hong Kong via Manila, reminiscent of Dr. Vicky Lee's recent talk. In Australia there is an Allied Chinese Ships Association comprised of ex-Royal Australian Navy



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