

Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY, 2003-2004

Introduction

In both the last two years I started my Annual Report to the Society by stating that the outcome of the Society's work over the previous year had been, taking the year as a whole, broadly satisfactory. I am very glad to be able to start this, my third Annual Report, by reporting that the work of the Society over this last year has also been, on the whole, broadly satisfactory. While always wishing to avoid complacency, I find few areas where the work of the Society seems to me to give cause for serious concern.

Membership and Finances

Over the year, our Membership has held up well. The Society has grown by about 4½% since this time last year, to a total membership of 650. As of today, the Society consists of 474 Annual Members (an increase of just under 3%) and 176 Life Members (an increase of 9%). Of these 650 Members, 511 are resident in Hong Kong, and 139 are resident abroad: both categories of Membership have shown significant increases. We also have 28 Institutional Members (6 Institutional Members and 22 Honorary Institutional Members), an increase of 40% over last year, a most welcome development arising predominantly from our new policy of offering Honorary Institutional Membership to institutions with which the Society wishes to improve its relations. There are also 25 Student Members, another most welcome increase, in this case of over a third over the year: the Society would wish to see many more Student Members over the next few years. We are, clearly, at the moment more than merely able to replace those who leave us during the year with new Members. Over the year we welcomed 117 new Members. This means that some 18% of the total Membership are new this year. If we can keep this level of replacement going, the future of the Society is good. The overall size of the Society is, I believe, about right at the present.

We have asked all our new Members where they heard about the Society, and it would seem that they came to us through many different ways. Several joined after checking out our Website. Others came to a Lecture after reading about us in an article in a local newspaper or magazine. Quite a number were inspired by the recent very successful exhibition of our photographs at the Hong Kong University Library. Yet others heard about us by word-of-mouth from existing Members, or from our regular advertisement in "Dollarsaver", or dropped in on one of Lectures having seen our poster at the City Hall or in one of the Universities. Since all these ways of attracting new Members are working well, we will continue using all these methods of attracting potential new Members during this year.

Our Honorary Treasurer and Vice-President will shortly be reporting on the state of our finances, and I do not want to steal his thunder here, and wish only to say that, as of today, the Society's finances are in a generally satisfactory state, and disclose no cause for undue alarm. We did, however, make a loss over the year.

Last year I warned that, since our routine expenses were not covering our routine expenditure, an increase in the Subscription Fee was inevitable. It is, to repeat what I said last year, the Subscription Fee income on which we depend to provide for the routine expenditure of the Society. This year the Subscription Fee income level was well below the routine expenditure figure. Council has not agreed to any increase in the Subscription Fee to take effect from 1st April 2005. I feel, however, that I must warn you that there will, almost certainly, be a recommendation to increase the Subscription Fee at next year's Annual General Meeting, to take effect from 1st April 2006, since, clearly, we cannot allow this constant drain on our reserves because of weak levels of routine income.

Another point I would like to make was that, at the last Annual General Meeting a Resolution was passed which stated that those Annual Members not paying by Autopay would be charged an additional \$50 a year handling charge to take account of the much higher costs these Members cause to the Society in the handling of their annual subscriptions. I must now say that only 130 Annual Members are paying by Autopay as of today (27%). With great regret, therefore, I must inform you that, over the next few weeks those Annual Members who have not yet converted their subscription payment method to Autopay will receive notice that their Membership Subscription Fee will be surcharged as agreed, unless they change immediately to the Autopay system. Please take urgent steps to change your payment method if you have still not done so!

The Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride Memorial Fund

I am extremely glad to be able to inform you that the three years of work to set up the Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride Memorial Fund has at long last been finalised. Jason Wordie and Robert Nield will be saying a good deal more about this. In brief, in December of last year the Fund was formally established, and it now has in it over half a million dollars. The first book for consideration for publication under the Fund is currently being given a careful read-over by Hong Kong University Press to see if it is suitable. It is my very real hope that, by this time next year, the first book in our "Hong Kong Studies" series will have been published. In the near future I shall be writing to all the local Universities and others to urge people with suitable books to submit them to us for consideration for publication. Any book written in English, on Hong Kong, its history or society, or on South China generally, which has not been able to be published because of financial constraints, will be considered. The Hong Kong University Press will publish any such book on our behalf, so long as it considers it to be academically of a sufficiently high quality. Members, if they have books which might be suitable, should consider sending them to us for consideration. I must, however, warn that, in practice, it is unlikely that the Society will be able to process more than two, or at the very best three, books a year, and, if we get very large numbers of books submitted, some of them may have to wait for some years before we can process them!

Lecture and Visit Programme

This year we have enjoyed another wide-ranging and interesting programme of lectures and visits. During the year we had 16 lectures, 4 visits to places within Hong Kong and 4 to places outside Hong Kong. Three of the lectures were associated with visits which took place shortly afterwards. Nonetheless, despite the range and interest of the programme, the number of this year's events show a slight falling off from last year and the year before. The SARS outbreak was to blame for some of this, since, in the early part of last year we were a little careful about putting events into the programme. Recently, we thought we were going to have to give up our lecture venue at the City Hall for some months, and so slowed the programme down, only to find that the long-awaited renovation and refitting of the Extension Activities Room was put off, perhaps to the Autumn, perhaps indefinitely, because of financial restraints. To put this into perspective, last year we had 17 lectures (1 more than this year), 9 local visits (5 more than this year), and 3 visits to places outside Hong Kong as against 4 this year. Last year the programme thus had 29 items on it, and this year only 24. In 2001-2002 there were 24. We will endeavour to do better during this upcoming year! The Council would welcome Members suggesting items for inclusion in the programme. Members willing to lead visits are particularly urged to put themselves forward!

Improved Relationships with other Branches, and Extended Availability of the Journal in Libraries around the World

Council has continued to take action to improve relations with our sister societies around the world, and has also taken action to ensure that full sets of the *Journal* are to be found in more Libraries, both academic and public. I am glad to repeat what I said last year, that full sets of the *Journal* are now to be found in all five of the Regional Libraries of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (in the City Hall, and in the Kowloon, Shatin, Tuen Mun and Tsuen Wan Regional Libraries), with three sets in the Causeway Bay Central Library. Sets are also available in the Public Library Service in Macau, and in Shenzhen, as well as in Shanghai. Negotiations are in hand to get sets into the library services at Canton and Peking as well.

All the tertiary academic libraries in Hong Kong also now have full sets (two sets at Hong Kong University), as do the libraries of the Museums of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. We are in process of ensuring that the other Museum libraries in Hong Kong also get sets.

During this upcoming year, Council will continue to try to increase the number of libraries around the world which have the *Journal*.

During the last year, Council had the opportunity of meeting with the current President of the parent Society in London. I hope that this can be taken further during the year.

The Library of the Society

Our Honorary Librarian, Miss Julia Chan, will be reporting separately on the present position with regard to the library. In general, the state of our Library is excellent, and the number of users is rising.

Our Website, which has proved to be of the greatest value in advertising the Society, is currently being up-dated and improved. I urge all Members to check the new format out! I would like to repeat what I have said before, and to thank Moody Tang for all her help in maintaining and up-dating the Website. This is a heavy job, which Moody does extremely well. Thank you, Moody!

Friends of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong, in the United Kingdom

I have, in each of the last few years, reminded Members of the existence of our sister Society in the United Kingdom. This useful body allows Members moving from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom to continue their interests in the culture and history of the Hong Kong area, as well as providing a social venue where they can continue to meet up with old friends who, like them, have moved from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom. As to what the Friends do, I will shortly read an Annual Report on their activities sent to us by the Chairman of the Friends, Mr David Gilkes.

Honorary Fellows of the Society

During the year, Council agreed to change the title of Honorary Member of the Society to Honorary Fellow of the Society, since it was felt that this title more accurately indicated to the general public what the Society intends by the grant of the position. Council grants Honorary status to people it considers have deserved recognition by the Society, either because of their outstanding contribution to the development of the study of Hong Kong, and its history and society, or for their outstanding support and dedication to the work of the Society, or both.

Existing Honorary Members have all welcomed this change, and are happy with the change in title. It is Council's aim to extend the status of Honorary Fellow to two or three people every year, and I hope that an announcement of additional Honorary Fellows will be made to you within the next month or two.

Council

Our Programme Co-ordinator, Dr Janet Scott, is retiring shortly from Hong Kong, and has indicated that she will have to give up her position as Co-ordinator as from the middle of the year. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking her for all the huge amount of time and effort she has put into arranging the Programme over the last few years, and wish her the very best in her retirement. Council is actively considering who might take

over the arduous post of Co-ordinator after Janet leaves, and will inform Members in due course when someone suitable has been found.

During the year, Council co-opted a significant number of members, to broaden the base of Council's Membership, and to ensure that Council continues to have access to a wide range of experience and advice. Among those co-opted is Chan Kwok-shing, who represents on the Council our sister Society, the Chinese-language South China Research Circle. It is my very real hope that this will lead to continuing deep and close relations between the two Societies. I hope that soon there will be announcements in the *Newsletter* of joint events to be held with the Circle.

Of those thus co-opted, Mr David McKellar has agreed to take over the role and position of Honorary Secretary of the Society, and I would recommend this to you all. I am glad to say, however, Mr Peter Stuckey has agreed to remain on Council as a Member, subject to your agreement. Mr Robert Nield, our Vice-President and Honorary Treasurer, has asked to step down from his position as Honorary Treasurer, and to hand this over to Mr Philip Stockton, another of the newly co-opted Members, retaining his position as Vice-President, so that he can devote more time to the position of Vice-President. I recommend this change to you as well. All the others co-opted during the year Council proposes to co-opt again for this next year. I will shortly ask you to indicate your agreement with this proposal.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this Report by thanking all Members for their support of the Society during this past year, and for their friendliness and helpfulness to me personally at all times. I would also like to thank our friends at the Antiquities and Monuments Office, the Public Records Office, and elsewhere for their support and assistance.

Dr. Patrick H. Hase
President

19th March, 2004

APPENDIX

Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch

Activities for 2003/2004

Lectures

Date	Lecture
2003	
Friday 25 April	Mr Paul Fonoroff: <i>A General History and Overview of Hong Kong Cinema</i>
Friday 9 May	Mr Tony Banham: <i>The 1941 Hong Kong Garrison – Unabridged</i>
Friday 30 May	Dr Vicky Lee: <i>Memoirs on Eurasianness</i>
Friday 13 June	Mr David Morgan: <i>Through Spanish Eyes: Two Sixteenth Century Spanish Accounts of the China of the Period</i>
Friday 27 June	Dr Graeme Lang: <i>The Return of the Refugee God – Wong Tai Sin in China</i>
Friday 8 th August	Dr. Peter Halliday: <i>The Birth of the Lunatic Asylums in Hong Kong</i>
Friday 29 August	Mr Stephen Selby: <i>Chinese Archery – An Unbroken Tradition</i>
Friday 5 September	Mr Philip Snow: <i>The Fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China, and the Japanese Occupation</i>
Friday 24 October	Mr Joop B. M. Litmaath: <i>Forty Years in Hong Kong – Far East of Amsterdam</i>
Friday 14 November	Dr Louis Ng: <i>Sun Yat-Sen, Hong Kong and the Sam Chau Tin Rebellion</i>
Friday 21 November	Dr Patrick H. Hase: <i>Sha Tau Kok Market and its Market District</i>
Friday 12 December	Mr Andrew Tse: <i>Ho Kom-Tong: A Man For All Seasons</i>
2004	
Friday 16 January	Dr Elizabeth Sinn: <i>Power and Charity: The Rise of the Chinese Merchant Elite in 19th Century Hong Kong</i>
Friday 30 January	M. Alain Le Pichon: <i>The Jardine Matheson Correspondence, 1827-1843</i>
Friday 13 February	Dr Peter Halliday: <i>A History of Suicides in Hong Kong</i>
Friday 27 February	Dr Greg Thomas: <i>From Model to Museum: Yuanming Yuan through European Eyes</i>

Local Visits

Date	Visit
2003	
Saturday 30 August	Mr Stephen Selby, Leader: <i>Guided Tour of Asian Traditional Archery Exhibition: Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence</i>
Saturday 20 September	Mr Chang Shing-wai, Leader: <i>Behind the Scenes: A Conservation Tour at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum</i>
Saturday 7 November	Dr Patrick H. Hase & Mr Tim Ko, Leaders: <i>Visit to the Zoroastrian Temple and the Parsee, Jewish, and Colonial Cemeteries</i>
2004	
Saturday 10 January	Dr Patrick H. Hase, Leader: <i>Visit to Buddhist Religious Institutions</i>

Visits Outside Hong Kong

Date	Visit
2003	
9-12 October	Dr Joseph Ting, Dr Patrick H. Hase, Dr Guo Deyan, Leaders: <i>Visit to Canton and Whampoa, including the Whampoa Parsee Cemetery and Muslim Institutions</i>
26 October	Mr Jason Wordie, Leader: <i>George Smirnoff's Watercolours of Macau</i>
22-23 November	Dr Patrick H. Hase, Dr Louis Ng, Dr Anthony Siu Leaders: <i>Visit to Sha Tau Kok and its District</i>
2004	
14-26 January	Dr Brian Shaw, Dr Felicity Shaw, Leaders: <i>Visit to Arunachal Pradesh</i>