

Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY 2004-2005

Dr Patrick H. Hase, President

Introduction

In all three of the Annual Reports I have given you I started 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 fourth and final 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

As of today, the Membership of the Society stands on our books at 680, comprising 502 Annual Members and 178 Life Members. This compares with 650 (474 Annual and 176 Life) this time last year, and 621 (460 Annual and 161 Life) two years ago. Both this year over last, and last year over 2002, the Membership has grown by about 4½% each year. The number of Members resident in Hong Kong is, as of today, 546, against 511 last year and 494 the year before that. This is a very satisfactory position to be in, and discloses no grounds for serious concern.

However, I have to stress that the Membership figures I have just given are those of Members on our books. Each year we eventually discover some Members who choose to leave the Society, but do not bother to tell us: we find out when, despite reminders, they do not send us the annual Membership Fee. Some of the Members on our books as of today, therefore, are sure to disappear sometime during the year, when their Membership Fee is found unsettled. However, this unfortunate problem is not a new one, and it seems likely that the Membership, and especially the Membership resident in Hong Kong, is indeed growing slowly. However, I must urge all Members who wish to leave the Society, for whatever reason, to let us know, so that we can keep our books in better order!

The number of Student Members, however, remains low, and this is a distress to me. We have only 24 Student Members, no more than 4% of our total Membership. The number of Student Members has remained at this very low figure for many years. The Membership Fee for Student Members is deliberately kept at a very low level to encourage Students to join the Society, but, clearly, this low fee is not enough to capture their interest. To some degree the problem is that Students tend to view the Society as a body comprising only the elderly and the expatriate, and that it is stuffy and unwelcoming as a result. I feel that this is a problem which should be addressed in the

future. We should be able to get very many more Students, especially Graduate Students, into the Society, and work to improve our image in this area is needed.

The number of Institutional Members and Honorary Institutional Members has also not risen significantly since last year. When I became President, four years ago, I set myself a goal of increasing the number of libraries which carry the *Journal*. I set myself, indeed, a target of having the *Journal* in 100 overseas libraries. The Council succeeded in ensuring that full sets of the *Journal* are now to be found in the libraries of all Hong Kong's Tertiary Educational Institutions, as well as in all the main Public Libraries in Hong Kong, but we have had less success outside Hong Kong. We believe that some 23 University Libraries in North America hold the *Journal*, and a few in the United Kingdom and Europe, but far fewer than I would like to see. I have thus not succeeded in the target I set myself: probably because the work involved is very great and I never found the time to do it. I hope that my successor will be more successful in this regard.

Finances

Our Hon. Treasurer will shortly be speaking to you about our funds, and I do not want to steal his thunder here. I must, however, sketch the position out. We have made a loss in three of the past four years in our current account. In other words, our income has not quite matched our expenditure. The shortfall has not been great, but it is there, and will have to be addressed. We have looked at our expenditure, but the opportunities for cutting back are limited. I do not want to see the *Newsletter*, for instance, reduced or made less interesting. We are looking at ways of cutting the costs of the *Journal*, but I am opposed to going very far down that road, as I personally feel that the *Journal* is generally very good as it is, and would be sorry to see any major change to it.

The major area where cuts in costs are feasible is in our office expenses. A high percentage of our office expenses are due to the Assistant Secretary having to chase laggard Members into paying their annual subscriptions, and in ensuring that payments received are correct and up to date, and not in accordance with subscription rates dating from the 1980s. Some years ago I raised this problem in the Annual General Meeting, where it was agreed that we would charge those Members who continue to pay other than by way of Autopay an additional \$50, to represent the much higher expenses involved in handling their Membership. Having got this increase agreed, we took no action to implement it for a time, hoping that more Members would switch to Autopay. Now, however, as I anticipated in my last year's Report, we will have to ask you to agree to implement it as from the earliest date possible, i.e. 1st January 2006. We will, therefore, shortly be suggesting to you that the Annual Membership Fee be increased by \$50 a year with immediate effect, but this increase will not be taken from Members who have put their annual payments onto Autopay. As of today, only 190 of our 502 Annual Members (38%) pay by Autopay, despite many years of urging on you all the virtues and values of this payment system. This time last year the number was 130. Almost all the increase in Members paying by Autopay is from new Members: very few existing Members switched to Autopay during the year.

Hopefully, our cost-cutting endeavours, and this slight increase in the fee charged to non-Autopay Members will bring us back into financial balance again. I feel I must say, however, that it is unlikely to be possible to avoid a general Membership Fee increase at some date in the not-too-distant future.

Activities Programme

During the year we had a total of 22 Lectures, 8 Local Visits, and one Visit outside Hong Kong, making a total Activities Programme of 31 Activities (details are at Appendix I). This is up from last year, when the total Programme reached only 23 Activities, mainly because of SARS. It will be seen that, taking into account our long-standing policy of not mounting any Activities during July, we mounted an Activity of some sort once every ten days or thereabouts. This is a solid and substantial programme, particularly since we were not able to use our normal City Hall Venue for eight months of the year, and have had to use other venues, not all of which were as easy to reach as the normal one. It is Council's hope that a Programme at about this level of Activities will be able to be achieved again this year, especially since we are now, at last, able to use our normal venue again for our lectures.

For many, perhaps most, of the Society's Members, it is the Activities Programme which is the core of what they want from the Society, and Council and I are very much aware of the vital need to continue to provide a varied and interesting programme for our Members. We are well aware that not all our Activities are of equal interest to all our Members. Our aim is to provide a balanced programme, containing both fully academic lectures and lectures aimed more at entertainment, as we are very conscious that both types of lecture are welcomed by Members. Similarly with visits: we are very much aware of the need to provide both for the more academically inclined and the less academic of our Members. We are also aware of the need to ensure that lecturers can be heard, and any illustrations they may have can be seen: it is our earnest hope that the refurbishment of our normal City Hall venue will allow us to achieve these aims more easily than in the past.

During the last few months we have had the misfortune of having no less than three Activities cancelled at the last minute. Two of these cancellations were due to factors entirely outside the Society's control, and were unfortunate, but unavoidable. The third, however, was due to internal factors. As you know, we had arranged a trip to Sabah, for the last ten days in April of this year. This would have been an absolutely superb trip, visiting places off the usual tourist route, and enabling Members to see the real Sabah in some depth. The Society, however, cannot arrange a tour of this size and substance without some assurance that we would not make a loss on it. We had calculated costs on the basis that we would break even if 16 Members and guests went on it. We asked for firm commitments in advance to ensure we got our 16. Only 12 Members committed themselves within the deadline set, and so we were forced to cancel the trip, much to my very real distress. But, with only 12 Members and guests, the Society would have lost a good deal of money on the trip. Since the cancellation, we have heard from a number of Members that they were intending to go on the trip, but had not been willing to commit themselves in advance, "in case something came up": they had expected to book themselves onto the trip

at the last minute. I have little doubt that we would have had 16, perhaps even 20, if we had left the trip open until the last minute.

I am sure you will understand that the Society cannot operate on this basis. If we are to arrange interesting overseas tours costing considerable sums, we must have commitments to the trip up front. The Society cannot risk its funds to make life comfortable to Members who want to hold all their options open until the last moment. If Members want the Society to organise overseas trips of interest and substance in the future, they must be willing to commit themselves sufficiently early for the trip to be reasonably financially safe, and not at risk of ending up as a loss to the Society's funds. I must, therefore, urge you very strongly, if you see a trip which looks interesting, to commit yourself to it, to avoid the risk that it is cancelled suddenly because the minimum viable numbers have not been reached within the deadline set.

As I have said before, Council always welcomes suggestions from Members as to lectures and visits. Many of our most successful Activities have originated in suggestions of this sort, and I greatly hope that more such suggestions will be made in the future.

Other Functions of the Society

Attached to this report are Reports from the Hon. Librarian and the Convenor of the Volunteers for you to read and consider. The Hon. Librarian and the Convenor of the Volunteers would be happy to answer questions on their Reports later.

The Hon. Librarian notes in her Report that the Library continues to grow, with 438 new volumes added during the year, mostly by donations, and especially by a very important donation of 260 volumes from Dr Betty Wei. Our Library is a very suitable location for any books of local interest which Members may wish to donate: donations are always extremely welcome!

The Hon. Librarian also notes in her Report that digitisation of the *Journal* in the Hong Kong Journals Online is now complete as far as can be done at this point in time, and that access by scholars is growing. The Index to our Library is also under preparation. Further checking is required, but, hopefully, the Index will be completed soon.

I would like to repeat here the final comment of the Hon. Librarian, that our sincere thanks are due to the staff of the Central Library for their assistance and professional services during the year.

The Volunteers are a group of Members of the Society who have offered their services to assist the Antiquities and Monuments Office in its work. The group has been in existence for a decade. Previously, the group was able to do a great deal of work in the preservation of our cultural and historical heritage. During this year the group has been able to undertake some work, but, unfortunately, nothing like as much as we would like to see. Over recent months "political problems" have continually been alleged which have

reduced the usage made of the Volunteers to a low level. Our concerns over these “political problems”, which have not, to be frank, seemed to be substantial or even discernible to any outsider, have been raised several times with the Antiquities and Monuments Office, but usage of the Volunteers is still, as of today, completely inadequate. The problem does not seem to be in the Antiquities and Monuments Office, but within the Central Government, and may well be a reflection of the low priority placed on preservation of our heritage at the highest levels of Government. It is my earnest hope that my successor as President will be able to get the Volunteers back on track, with the Antiquities and Monuments Office once again permitted to make full use of this resource.

Also attached to this report is the Annual Report of the Chairman of the Friends of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, in London. This is an independent Society, predominantly formed of Members of this Society who have left Hong Kong and settled in the United Kingdom, under the Chairmanship of David Gilkes, who was President of this Society until he left Hong Kong eight years ago. It meets some four to six times a year, with visits and lectures related to Hong Kong and its history and society, often with a meal together before or after the activity. The Friends are doing well: they have some 70-80 Members, and a substantial proportion of their Membership attend their meetings, Any Member of this Society who happens to be in England when the Friends are having a function are welcome to attend it. I would strongly recommend any Member of this Society leaving Hong Kong for the United Kingdom to consider joining the Friends, and keeping open their interests in Hong Kong and its history.

The Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride Fund

I spent the very first day after I was first elected as President of the Society four years ago writing a Paper for Council in which I urged Council to take half of our accumulated funds and set them aside as a Trust Fund for the support of scholarship on Hong Kong. At my very first Council Meeting this Paper was discussed for a long time, and eventually agreed, although not without some initial doubts as to the viability of the scheme. It was agreed that the substantial sum of \$400,000 should be set aside from the accumulated funds, and that the Trust Fund should be used primarily for the support of publications in English on Hong Kong and its history and society.

The successful achievement of a Trust Fund was my dearest wish, my dream. To see the first book to be published under the Trust Fund within my time as President was what I most wanted to achieve. If I am to be remembered for anything within the Society, I hope it will be for this.

Now at last, after four years of work, we have a book ready for publication, and several others moving through the procedures. My dream has thus been achieved: I can only give thanks for this. The books will be published as a series, *The Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series*, with an easily recognizable format. I have no doubt that the series will very soon become a vital part of the local academic scene.

To get the Trust Fund up, running, and to see results from it has been a long job, and has involved many people. In the first place, the Society had to be recognized as a Charity before it could operate a Trust Fund, and, to be recognized as a Charity, the Constitution of the Society had to be re-written, and our bankers satisfied as to the legal and procedural arrangements for handling the Trust Fund. The complex negotiations with the Inland Revenue Department and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank which were required were handled by Robert Nield, to whom the thanks of the Society are very definitely due. The discussions with the lawyer who drafted the new Constitution were handled by myself. This phase of the process was completed two years ago, but needs to be recorded now, for nothing would have come of the Trust Fund idea if it had not been successful.

Once the Trust Fund was thus legally set up and the necessary procedural arrangements put in place, the second phase of the process began. We needed a publisher, and we needed additional funds, which could only come through donations from well-wishers. Jason Wordie has handled most of the work of this phase, and our very real thanks are due to him for its successful conclusion. He negotiated with the Hong Kong University Press, which agreed in due course to be our publisher. Arrangements between the Press and the Society to ensure high academic standards were met had to be discussed and agreed: this was also mostly handled by Jason. Jason also handled negotiations with the Trustees of the Clague Trust, by which that Trust agreed to donate no less than £30,000 in three equal annual instalments, of which the first two have been received already. When the whole of this princely donation is received, the Trust Fund will receive a little over \$400,000 from it, thus doubling the amount put into the Trust Fund from our own funds.

Jason has also agreed to act as Convenor of the Trustees, to ensure that the Trustees meet regularly, and keep the Fund on a straight course.

I would like to record here my very real appreciation for all the work that Jason has done for the Trust Fund ever since the idea was first mooted, and especially over the last two to three years. Without his input I doubt if the Trust Fund would have been a success.

As of today, no money has been spent from the Trust Fund, although the first significant outlay is expected soon. The current accounts of the Trust Fund, therefore, show nothing but cash received. It is expected that each book published will require subsidy from the Trust Fund of about \$30,000 - \$40,000. As such, even if we receive no further donations, we should have enough cash in hand to support the publication of perhaps 20 books, which is likely to keep us busy for at least the next decade. However, we hope very much to get further donations: ideally, enough for the Trust Fund to be able to produce at least one book a year indefinitely. I would like to appeal to you to come to us if you, or your companies, have cash which might be donated to this very valuable and useful charitable end. Small donations from individuals or large donations from corporations or institutions would be equally welcome! Support for this Trust Fund would be the very best and simplest way of supporting continuing research into Hong Kong and its history and society in English. It is among the most worthwhile of all possible uses for money, for anyone with a love of Hong Kong and its heritage. I appeal to you all to be generous!

Personalities

One of the duties of the Society is to recognize outstanding services to the study of Hong Kong and its history and society by the award of Honorary Fellowships of the Society to scholars and others who, in the opinion of the Council, should be given such public recognition. Dr Anthony Siu Kwok-kin is one such outstanding scholar. A student of Luo Hsiang-lin, he took over from him the deep study of the Chinese sources for the history of this area, and has made himself the master of them. No-one alive has a greater, more encyclopedic knowledge of these sources, indeed. He has researched the pre-British and traditional history of Hong Kong and its region for thirty years, and is, without any question the foremost scholar of the area writing in Chinese today. I know that I personally am greatly indebted to Anthony, and use his work continuously. Anthony sat on Council for some years, but felt he had to resign eventually because Council always met on days when he had to teach in the evenings, so making it difficult for him to attend. He has, however, whether sitting on Council or not, always been a supporter of the Society and its work. Perhaps, now he is approaching retirement, he can be persuaded to sit on Council again! It gives me the very greatest pleasure to announce Council's unanimous decision to offer Dr Siu an Honorary Fellowship of the Society, and Dr Siu's acceptance of this offer. I look forward to many years of further co-operation between the Society and Dr Siu.

This year sees a large number of changes on Council. Dr Joseph Ting joined Council in 1990, and, in his fifteen years on Council has given a huge amount to the Society, especially in the many tours he has led, and the many visits he has arranged to exhibitions in the Museum of History and the Museum of Art. His presence on Council has enabled the Society to keep the closest possible contacts with the Museum of History, which has been a factor of the greatest importance to us. Joseph is now extremely busy with the establishment of the Sun Yat-Sen Museum, and feels he cannot give as much time to the Society as he would wish, and thus is stepping down, to our very great loss. I am glad to say, however, that we will be keeping our contacts with the Museum of History, since Josephine Wong of the Museum will continue to serve as a Councillor. I would like to take this opportunity of wishing Joseph and his new Museum every possible success.

Tim Ko joined Council in 1998, and has given us seven years of his time. His presence has been invaluable. His assistance with the Society's Photograph Library has been massive, and the tours he has led or assisted in have been of major importance to us as well. Above all, perhaps, he has allowed the Council to hear the voice of a young local scholar. Unfortunately, and despite all attempts to induce him to change his mind, he feels he has to step down as he has found the Society taking up too much of his time. His departure will be another very great loss.

Dr Janet Scott joined Council in 1999. She acted as Hon. Activities Co-ordinator for several years, to our very great advantage. Unfortunately, she is retiring from the Baptist University, and returning to Boston, and so has been forced to retire from Council. Her presence will be missed: we wish her the greatest happiness in her retirement.

As for me, I joined the Society in 1973, and came onto Council in 1982 at the insistence of Dr James Hayes. I have been on Council ever since, for a total of 23 years, sitting under four Presidents, Dr Marjorie Topley, Dr James Hayes, Mr David Gilkes, and Dr Dan Waters. I acted as Hon. Editor of the *Journal* for a number of years, not entirely satisfactorily, and then sat as an ordinary Member of Council until you elected me President four years ago. Now I believe the time is right to hand the leadership of the Society over to new hands. I am no longer able to guarantee being in Hong Kong on a full-time basis, although I hope to be here for at least a good part of each year. I have no doubt that Robert Nield will be an exemplary President, and I recommend him whole-heartedly to you.

The Society has been a very important part of my life in Hong Kong. All I know of the history of Hong Kong I learnt in the Society, in its lectures and visits, and in conversations with its leaders, and other scholars met through the activities of the Society. My debt to Dr James Hayes cannot possibly ever be repaid, but my debts to Carl Smith, Dr David Faure and many, many others are equally substantial. I first determined to research into Hong Kong's history and society when I was inspired by a lecture given to the Society by the late Dr Barbara Ward, another scholar to whom I acknowledge a great debt. Above all, in the years when my life in Hong Kong seemed more and more valueless, the Society kept me sane and gave me more happiness than anything else, other than my family. I would, therefore, like to end this, my last Report to you, with a whole-hearted and sincere expression of thanks to you all for all you have given me over so many years. I wish you all well, the Society above all, and my successor every success, and as much joy and happiness as I have had, which is not a little!

Appendix I
RAS Activities 2004

Friday, 23rd April	City Hall Lecture	Messengers from God and Mammon: Jesuit Missionaries and Lord McCartney – Dr. Betty Wei
Saturday, 24 th April	Local Visit	Treasures of the Chengde Summer Palace
Tuesday, 27 th April	City Hall Lecture	Expat and Export - the relationship between George Chinnery and Lamqua – Dr. Patrick Conner
Friday, 14 th May	City Hall Lecture	Bhutan: a “just-in-time” polity – Dr Brian Shaw and Prof. Anthony Hedley
Friday, 21 st May	Museum of History Lecture	Hong Kong’s Popular Religion in Action – Dr. Tik-sang Liu
Saturday, 5 th June	Local Visit and lunch	An Architectural Tour – led by Raymond Fung Wing-kee
Friday, 25 th June	City Hall Lecture	We Were Soldiers Once, and Young – Dr. Dan Waters
Saturday, 26 th June	Local Visit	Ships in the South China Seas, 1570-1890 - at Wattis Fine Art
Friday, 6 th August	City Hall Lecture	From Macao and “Matto Moro” to Kowloon and Beyond – Jason Wordie
Saturday, 28 th August	Local Visit	Chinese Jade and Gold: Gems of Antiquities Collections in Hong Kong – At Hong Kong Museum of Art led by Rose Lee Wing-chong and Valery Garrett
Saturday 11 th September	Local Visit	Innovations and Creations: A Retrospect of 20th Century Porcelain from Jingdezhen – At the Chinese University Art Museum, led by Ms. Suk Yee Lai
Friday, 24 th September	Lecture	Life of a First Rank Official in Imperial China – Mr. Humphrey K.F. Hui
Friday, 15 th October	Lecture	Indians in Hong Kong – Prof. Kirti Narain

Friday, 29 th October	Lecture	Women at Work: Women Brothel Keepers in 19th Century Hong Kong – Dr. Elizabeth Sinn
Saturday, 6 th November	Local Visit	Guided tour of Central Police Station – Subsequently cancelled
Friday, 12 th November	Lecture	Reminiscences of a Volunteer Medical Officer in Sham Shui Po Prisoner-of-War Camp – Dr. Solomon Bard
26 th – 28 th November	South China Visit	Warlord-Era Kwangtung
Friday, 3 rd December	Lecture	All the way with Ray: Fifty years of Uncle Ray Cordeiro's music – Subsequently cancelled
Saturday, 4 th December	Local Visit	Hong Kong Memories: Selected Historical Pictures of the 19th Century
Friday, 10 th December	Lecture/drinks	The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith – Dr. Susan Whitfield
Friday, 7 th January	Lecture	The Rise and Fall of Social, Economic and Political Reforms in Hong Kong, 1930-1955 – by Prof. Leo Goodstadt
Friday, 14 th January	Lecture	Walking in Japan – by Dr. Tom Stanley
Friday,	Lecture	Hidden Treasures Found in the Shadows of Lion Rock: James Legge's Startling Discoveries About History, Religions and Philosophies – by Dr. Lauren Pfister
Saturday, 29 th January	Local Visit	Visit to Sai Kung and Yim Tin Tsai – led by Dr. Patrick Hase
Friday, 25 th February	Lecture	Who are the Thais? – by Dr. Laurent Sagart
Friday, 4 th March	Lecture	The Fictions of "Customary Law": Ancestral Property and the Hong Kong Legal Courts – by Dr. Kentaro Matsubara