

REPORTS FOR 2020–2021 **M**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT **M**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong including some Overseas Members who have logged in from UK and elsewhere.

Good evening to you all and welcome to this 61st AGM of the RASHK. I speak to you not only as President in delivering this brief report, but also as Chair of the Activities Committee.

We live in interesting times and again this year for the second time our AGM is being held with remote IT access via Zoom for our Council and Members. This is in response to the limits placed by our Hong Kong Government on the size of group gatherings, their objective being to reduce the risk of Covid -19 infection, the novel coronavirus and its variants which have caused the ongoing worldwide pandemic, from which Hong Kong has not been spared. Many thanks to all those who have shown their support by logging in to this virtual meeting. Over the past year we have all become very used to going on line in order to attend meetings. I have to thank our Administrator, Ieuan Harding, for his clear instructions and technical support in setting up the meeting. He and I, along with David McKellar, our Honorary Secretary, are seated together for presentation of this President's report by PowerPoint, as well as managing the AGM's Agenda, and troubleshooting any technical issues which may arise.

This 2020/2021 year continued to be a challenging one for Hong Kong and also our Society, as it has for many other societies and institutions here in Hong Kong. The previous year's demonstrations of civil unrest petered out in the face of the rapidly introduced National Security Law and also all the control measures put in place by Hong Kong Government to limit the risk of Covid-19 infection in order to reduce morbidity and mortality for our local Hong Kong people. These have both had significant impacts on our daily lives. We watched with trepidation and sorrow the impact of the pandemic on countries and societies around the world, cultures responding in different ways to the huge challenges presented, illustrated in my presentation by a couple of heart-wrenching images - from compassion for patients when relatives could not visit and lines of freshly dug graves.

In Hong Kong we have now sustained 1st 2nd , 3rd and 4th waves of Covid-19 infection with just over 11,000 infections and 209 deaths (by mid-April 2021). We are fortunate that our health care and logistic systems here have coped well with the challenges faced. We have become accustomed to daily briefings on updated statistics by familiar faces from the Department of Health, the routine screen checking on updated data, the necessity for mask wearing, social distancing and usage of hand sanitisers. We understand and largely accept the need for test, track and trace systems, as well as short term lockdowns, with quarantine of known patients, their contacts and inbound travelers. We all very much miss the freedom to travel – on business or to visit friends and loved ones. There is hope now in the form of local, widely available and free vaccines, with a choice of two. This will significantly affect future choices in planning measures to protect communities from infection.

Inevitably there has been an impact on our usual calendar of RASHK activities- there have been limits on the numbers permitted at group meetings and in certain venues. Some of our usual venues have closed down for significant periods. Zoom technology has become the norm for talks and meetings, but also has delighted us by opening up access to international authors, discussants and attendees, resulting in significantly increased attendance rates, though reduced revenue. Our Zoom talks continue to be free for members and non-member registrants. Our reciprocal links and access to events hosted by FRASHK, RAS Beijing, RASUK, and soon to be RAS Shanghai, are much improved and our audience broadened, as we open up our digital

events to international friends. Virtual visits to local and overseas museum exhibitions became possible. We did manage a few much appreciated actual local visits and talks in between infection waves, but of course no overseas trips this year, because of strict travel restrictions. Our local political landscape has changed significantly with the introduction of the National Security Law last summer- we await to see its full impact. Certainly street protests have diminished and there is reflection involved in our choice of speaker/topics.

Activities remain a big part of RASHK's function, as is the production of our annual scholarly *Journal*. I will not dwell in detail on the programme of activities delivered over the past year, put together with great support from members of our Activities Committee, which I have the pleasure to chair. Through sharing of expertise and important links with guest speakers, we continued to provide a rich 2020/2021 programme of activities for our members, most of which went ahead as planned, although some were regretfully deferred, either because of infection risk at that time, or our guest speaker's preference for face to face talks. Whenever possible these will be rescheduled. Full details of the programme, with the enclosed appendix list of events, are available on our RASHK website in my annual report to the AGM as Activities Committee Chair, and also in the RASHK bi-monthly Newsletters.

During this period, our major IT upgrade has served our membership well. We have become accustomed to Ieuan Harding, our part-time Administrator, who has helped to expertly host all our Zoom related talks, visits and meetings. Our sincere thanks also to those of our members who have helped support these changes, including management of our RASHK website, Facebook account and preparation of our Wikipedia entry.

As for financial challenges, our income has been reduced by a lessening of event revenue and share dividends. We continue to take a prudent approach to expenditure, with a limit on working hours for our part time Administrator. Much administrative work is now done on line with only limited physical attendance required at our office in Ngau Tau Kok. Our financial situation remains sound- for full details please take a look at the report prepared by our Honorary Treasurer, Connie Carmichael. We are still checking membership status for some of our members, but numbers remain stable. Following the HK Government's 2020 cash handouts to residents and also in memory of Mike Broom, our former RASHK President (see below) we have had two calls for donations from members for the work of the Ride Fund. This resulted in welcome donations of > \$50,000.

This year saw farewells to Stephen Davies and his partner Elaine Morgan as they relocated their residence to UK. An enjoyable lunch for Council and AC members was held to mark this change and Stephen has been awarded a RASHK Honorary Fellowship in recognition of his contributions. He has stepped down from the role of Honorary Editor, at the end of 2020 handing over to Tony Banham, who is warmly welcomed. Stephen however retains strong links with Hong Kong and we are happy that he has agreed to remain as Vice President on RASHK Council, where his expert knowledge and advice will continue to be much appreciated. Other changes were noted at the Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride memorial Fund, with the stepping down of John Strickland (Chair) and John Budge (Member) following significant contributions over many years. Both were sincerely thanked. In recognition of his support from the Fund's inception, John Strickland has been awarded a RASHK Honorary Fellowship. Nominations for their replacements as Trustees of the Ride Fund were received and have been subsequently confirmed later on in the AGM Agenda. They and the rest of the Ride Fund Trustees will continue with their work of supporting local publications of important historical value.

It is with sadness and a heavy heart that I have to report on the passing in the last year of three significant contributors to the recent and long term wellbeing of RASHK. The passings of Mike Broom and Alain Le Pichon were both sudden and unexpected. Ian Hasell, our Honorary Auditor, passed away after a period of illness. Mike Broom held the post of RASHK President from 2012-2018, Activities Committee Chair 2009-2016 and RASHK Council member 2009-2020. Alain Le Pichon was RASHK Vice President 2010-2013, and Honorary Editor 2012-2013. They will be sadly missed by Council Members, members, friends and colleagues. Obituaries are in preparation and will appear in our RASHK Journal Vol 61, to be published later this year.

It has been a busy and occasionally turbulent year. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all RASHK Council and Committee members for their support over the past year. We must also mention our Friends of RASHK in UK and other RAS Branches who continue to provide valuable links, support and enjoyment for our members. We hope they enjoy our reciprocal benefits. All members are welcome to contribute their ideas and suggestions regarding future activities.

Looking forward into the coming year from our Activities and overall perspective, whenever it becomes possible, we will be exploring new venues and new speakers, as well as old friends, to contribute to RASHK events. From the IT perspective we are in stronger position than one year ago, with significant improvements for database, meetings and online events. It is hoped to progress soon with plans for a system of on line payment when registering a booking for events. With sincere thanks to our Honorary Editor we have a Volume 61 RASHK *Journal* edition well into preparation. The overall financial position of the Society is sound but we again have to work hard this year to generate revenue, once activities reactivate.

Stay well and best wishes to all our members.

Helen Tinsley
President

April 2021