

RASHK AGM Tuesday 18 April 2023

RASHK Honorary Activities Coordinator's Report 2022/23

I am about to complete my seventh year in this role. I again include a record of events in the calendar year of 2022 as well as YTD in 2023, and enclose a full list of events in the Appendix of this report.

I take this opportunity to thank all relevant RAS Council members and Activities Committee members for their support in providing suggestions and ideas for events of interest to our members and then helping these proposals to become realised. Thanks to all those who contributed their networks, commitment and organizational skills to a long list of talks and the occasional local visit whenever possible, during the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic period, when rigid local community and unprecedented international constraints were in place to control the risk of infection. These constraints had a significant impact on our lives and lifestyles over the past year, as well as the Society's capacity to organize events of interest for our members. Thankfully such constraints on travel and local social gatherings have now eased over the past few months/

Fortunately our members have generally embraced the use of Zoom link ups for meetings along with the solid support/IT skills of our part time Administrators, Sally Lui and Jace Au, who succeeded Ieuan Harding in October 2021. Jace was responsible for events organization up until March 2023 and we benefited tremendously from her networking and organizational skills. Her role has now been taken up by Vonnie Fung PS whom we welcome. Some local speakers prefer a face to face experience and such deferred events were rearranged now that on site facilities have again become available for group activities, but many of our speakers have relished this chance to talk to a wider audience. Familiarity with Zoom technology strengthened our contacts in FRASHK, RAS Beijing, RASShanghai and overseas based RASHK members have logged in to enjoy the wide range of presentations. We have also been able to capture details and access some zoom talks 'Of General Interest' organized by other Societies, both local and overseas, which were welcomed by many of our members.

Despite all the obvious challenges of arranging activities, our attendance numbers have increased and our audience broadened significantly. We were also able to invite expert speakers/ academics/authors based overseas in many different time zones to talk to our members. Reciprocal arrangements are in place for our members to enjoy Zoom events organized by other RAS communities elsewhere and these opportunities have been welcomed and taken up with appreciation by many. Up until now local and international Zoom link ups have come at no cost for our members and guests. We continue to provide reports with photographs as a record of our local on-site visits in our bimonthly RASHK Newsletter, and I thank all those who have contributed in this way. For Zoom talks we retain a digital audio records on request for a limited period, for those interested members

You will note in the enclosed appendix that some of the face to face talks and visits, though well planned in advance, were regretfully deferred or cancelled, in compliance with local regulations – some to be rescheduled using Zoom, or reorganized so that we could look forward to them later when conditions allowed. We have also experimented with hosting hybrid zoom /on site events, sometimes with unexpected results when our members preferred to access a local event via Zoom rather than attend an event in-person. Local Covid-19 risks have significantly receded 2022 following energetic local public health measures, tough travel limitations and the easy availability of population-wide vaccination and effective antiviral drug treatment.

In 2022 we arranged the following:

- 24 Lectures (+ 6YTD 2023) – with 1 deferred as a result of local Covid-19 constraints/ work pressures
- 13 Local visits (+ 4YTD 2023) –with 1 cancelled as a result of Covid-19 constraints
- 0 Trips to PRC/ SE Asia
- 1 Social/ Other event

Please take a look at the enclosed appendix for more details of our wide ranging events over the past year. Early on in the year, several visit events were deferred because of Covid 19 constraints on group gatherings but most of these we successfully rescheduled. Again we have depended on a combination of Zoom, hybrid and in-person events to maintain our event programme with more in-person events becoming possible as the year progressed. Many activities during the year required us to cap numbers of attendees, depending on local on-site rules at that time. We hope to reactivate and arrange planned overseas trips later this year if conditions allow.

Talks and lectures

Our lectures and talks in the past year have drawn on local and international experts over a wide and interesting range of topics. Many lectures were linked to book publications. It is a pleasure to note that many of the books which formed the basis for our recent talks have been kindly donated to the RASHK Library. Some of our regular speakers continue to delight and entertain us with their talks linked to recent publications, such as Mark O'Neill's history of 'Dr Hu Shih' and Chloe Lai's 'History of Central Market'. The beginning and end of the Year of the Tiger were bookmarked by talks of 'Tiger Tails' with Roz Hammers and 'The Last Tigers of Hong Kong' by author John Saeki. Tales from Shanghai produced some notable books recently and we were fortunate in having the relevant authors to introduce us via zoom talks to their publications, Professor Joseph Sassoon for 'The Global Merchants: Sassoon Dynasty' and Jonathan Kaufman for 'The Last Kings of Shanghai'. We were reminded of past strong links with UK when Gary Wong gave us the history of Hong Kong's contribution to the great 1920's British Empire Exhibition and Penny West's story of 'London Letters Home' from a young Victorian trainee tea merchant. We heard from Patrick Chiu on the history of one of our major colonial pharmacies and the history of nursing in Hong Kong over the past 80 years with Patricia O'Sullivan.

Our local senior academics brought us news of former public health challenges here in Hong Kong, tourism as an important feature of Hong Kong's development and the early history of banking development in China. Member John Wilson tracked the development of amateur music making in Hong Kong and we look forward to Leanne Nicholls' companion talk on the history of professional music making here. Other talks included Gillian Bickley on 'Looking for a Golden Needle', and Ian Ruxton's tales from a British envoy to China in the early 1900's. WW2 stories included the carefully researched story with Yvonne Foley of 'Repatriation of Chinese Merchant Seamen from UK post WW2' and the fascinating history of 'Project Avenger' with Craig Mitchell. Dr Kwong CM also shared his insights into our military history from his recent book 'Hong Kongers in the British Armed Forces 1860-1997'.

Two recent talks on some aspects of Anglo Indian history, Uther Charlton Steven's book on 'Anglo Indians' and Rob Baxter on 'Johan Zoffany in Lucknow; Artist Adventurer in 18th Century India' reminded us of British colonial life and its history in another setting- with some resonance for our own Hong Kong colonial experience.

Visits – both face to face and virtual

There were generous hostings by directors of local exhibitions at Xiqu Museum, HKU UMAG, CUHKAM, City University Museum, the newly opened Hong Kong Palace Museum, Jonathan Wattis showcased historical local maps and we were treated to a virtual visit to Ed Stokes' recent Photographic Exhibition.

Memorable in- person visits included TeaTasting at Hong Kong Park Teahouse, a walking tour of several historic sites in Shamshuipo on a very hot day with 'Walk Hong Kong', a tour of Chung King Mansion and Africa Centre, and a visit to the Sikh Temple in Wanchai – after all of which we had the chance to refresh and share views over lunch/ tea. Following our last year's delightful virtual zoom visit to the Fan Museum in Greenwich, UK, our member Chris Hall opened up his own remarkable local collection of beautifully crafted and intricately decorated fans for us to view, under his expert guidance. Council members Roy Delbyck continues to open up parts of his wonderful collection of Hong Kong memorabilia to small groups of interested members.

For those who climbed many steps up the hillside, a tour of the recently rediscovered Bishop's Hill Reservoir site was well worth the effort, as was attendance on a very rainy day at the newly refurbished Pokfulam Farm site. Military history was again brought into sharp focus when we paid a timely visit on a very chilly December day to Sai Wan Memorial and War Cemetery, with the expert guidance of Martin Heyes.

I close this report of our activities following another fruitful year, with sincere thanks to members of the Council and particularly Activities Committee members for their support over the past year, namely Peter Stuckey, Bob Bunker, Roy Delbyck, Vicky Lee, Anna Kwong, Don Gasper, Pamela Ball and Chris Bailey. Also thanks to Ieuan Harding for IT on-site support when needed and successors Jace Au (now Vonnie Fung) and Sally Lui, our part time Administrators, whose IT expertise and role in helping to arrange and publicise our activities and events have been ably managed.

As always, fellow RASHK members' ideas, suggestions and commitment to support activities in future programmes are most welcome. Succession planning is important, so if any of our members are keen to get involved in RASHK activities planning please let me know- we'd be delighted to welcome you to support the work of our Activities Committee.

Prepared by Helen Tinsley, RASHK Honorary Activities Coordinator

April 2023