

REPORTS FOR 2019–2020 **M**

VICE-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.

Good evening to you all and welcome to this 60th AGM of the RASHK. I speak to you as Vice President in delivering this brief report, but also as Chair of the Activities Committee.

We live in interesting times and this year for the first 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 which is the cause of the recent 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. I am aware that for many on line this evening it may be their first time to use Zoom IT technology in this way. I have to thank our Administrator, Ieuan Harding, for his clear instructions and technical support in setting up the meeting. I and he, along with David McKellar, our Honorary Secretary are seated together for presentation of my Vice President's report by PowerPoint, as well as managing the AGM's Agenda, and also to troubleshoot any technical issues which may arise.

This 2019/2020 year has been a challenging one for Hong Kong and also our Society, as it has for many other societies and institutions here in Hong Kong. This has been a year of significant local civil unrest, which disrupted normal daily life. Early in the new year we then faced the Covid-19 viral pandemic and the unprecedented control measures implemented to reduce morbidity and mortality for our local Hong Kong people. However, during this period, we have managed a major IT upgrade for our Society to better serve our membership, a change of part-time Administrator and a change of office setting. Our sincere thanks to those of our members who have helped support these changes. We also have had the opportunity to say farewell to some of the Society's old friends as well as to congratulate some on their achievements and awards.

Activities are 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, 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 were able to provide a rich 2019/2020 programme of activities for our members, most of which went ahead as planned, although some were regrettably deferred because of civil unrest or infection hazard. Full details of the programme 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.

From June 2019 onwards until the end of the year Hong Kong experienced major civil unrest, commencing with massive peaceful demonstrations, and becoming increasingly confrontational with escalating street violence, which significantly affected transport arrangements and concerns about access to some of our activity venues. This resulted in deferment of some events, having assessed risks to hosts, our guest speakers and members in attendance. The photos shown in my presentation were taken by myself – one of the massive peaceful protest march on 9 June 2019 from an Admiralty pedestrian overpass, and another taken later in the year of a damaged and abandoned double decker bus on a blocked, damaged and empty Pokfulam Road near Hong Kong University, which by that time was closed to all face-to-face teaching. One of our members has faithfully documented and archived most of the English language media material relating to these events from local news sources and reflecting

views from all sectors of Hong Kong society. This archive is already being accessed by local and international users, both individuals and academic institutes.

In January 2020, there was news from the PRC epicentre in Wuhan, Hubei Province of a rapidly developing epidemic, now a global pandemic, caused by Covid-19, a novel coronavirus infection. It soon reached Hong Kong with rapid infection spread followed by an unprecedented health care workers' strike, border shutdowns and a rush to buy masks, rice and toilet rolls. My PowerPoint picture illustrates what has become familiar – a pictorial image of this novel coronavirus, masks and hand gel, as well as one of our local bakery's depiction of a cake in the shape of a toilet roll, fear met with humour.

These events were then rapidly followed by the shutdown of schools and non-essential government services, working from home, travel constraints, the universal acceptance of social distancing, the wearing of masks, use of alcohol-based hand gel and limited social contact. There have been major consequential impacts on social, economic and political wellbeing, locally and now globally. As a result, many of our planned events so far in 2020 have been postponed. Hong Kongers have deep memories of the impact of SARS infection in 2003. With the acceptance and adoption of these measures resulting in a reduction of new cases of Covid-19 in Hong Kong, we now await news of cautious relaxation of some of the controls and hopefully a limited reactivation of our events calendar. This has also presented us with opportunity to experiment in the coming weeks and months with the use of IT to deliver some of our talks. In the meantime, we ask all our members to stay well and stay safe.

Our RASHK IT upgrade has significantly improved the management of our membership database and financial tracking. Our Administrator now has remote access to electronic communications and the members' database. We now have the option of arranging digital and virtual meetings – such as this our AGM, when necessary. There is now the opportunity to enhance our Facebook and social media links, as well as our website's maintenance and utilization profile. We are working on a RASHK Wikipedia entry. With our speakers' consent we now also have audio recordings of talks, to be catalogued and stored at our collection in the Central Library.

In October 2019 after 4 years, we bade farewell to Ivy Ho, our Administrator, and wished her well in her future career path. We welcomed Ieuan Harding as her successor on a short term basis from November 2019 until September 2020. Apart from a change of Administrator, in March 2020 we also changed our office base from Quarry Bay to Kwun Tong. We thank Mike Broom for all his support in arrangements of the Quarry Bay lease and Rocky Dang for the Kwun Tong arrangements. Our GPO mailing address remains the same but we have given up our phone land line and its related number, and have moved into the 21st century with a mobile phone (number 5435 5754) for office queries.

As for financial challenges, our income has been reduced by a lessening of event revenue and share dividends. We have taken a prudent approach to expenditure with a reduction in working hours for our part time Administrator, since with fewer events at present, fewer hours are needed, our funded additional accounting support has been taken in house and we save resources by using a mobile office phone. Our financial situation remains sound.

This year saw farewells to Robert Nield, our former President, and his wife Janet, when they relocated to Canada. We thank him for his wisdom and support to RASHK over many years. As mentioned we also bid farewell to Ivy Ho (administration) and Liu Ying Yin (accounting).

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 thank Stephen Davies for his years of work as Honorary Editor, continuing support as Council Vice President and welcome Tony Banham to Council as Stephen's future successor in the Editor role. Davina Lee has

stepped down from her role in the Activities Committee but we continue to benefit from her expertise in Council. Ian Hasell has supported us as Honorary Auditor and will continue to do so. We must also mention our Friends of RASHK in UK who continue to provide valuable links and advice for our members and guest speakers. We offer sincere congratulations to Brian Shaw whose contributions and expertise on Bhutan have been recently recognized with the award of their Gold Medal by the King of Bhutan.

Looking forwards into the coming year from our Activities perspective, whenever it becomes possible, we will be exploring new venues and new speakers, as well as old friends, to be lined up for RAS events. From the IT perspective we are in a much stronger position than one year ago, with significant improvements for database and financial management, meetings and online events. With sincere thanks to our Honorary Editor we have a Jubilee 60th RASHK *Journal* edition well into preparation and a successor planned. The overall financial position of the Society is sound but we have to work hard this year to generate revenue once activities recommence meanwhile continuing with the savings we have made.

I now thank all members of the RASHK Council and Committee members for their continuing support and look forward to the coming year. Stay well and best wishes to all our members.

Helen Tinsley
Vice-President