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EACS AT FIFTY: SPEECH

Why the 'European Association of Chinese Studies' Matters

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In this celebratory speech, the history of the 'European Association of Chinese Studies' is sketched against the background of the developments of world history since 1975, the year the Association was established. It is outlined how these developments have also impacted the nature of Sinology and Chinese Studies, the way these study domains have been organized at European universities, and the way scholars have, throughout these developments organized themselves in academic associations. The speech also outlines how the 'European Association of Chinese Studies' has defined and redefined itself in the course of its history.

本賀詞以 1975 年學會創立以來的世界歷史演變為宏觀背景，系統勾勒了歐洲漢學學會的發展脈絡。文章闡釋了歷史變遷如何深刻影響漢學與中國研究的學科本質、歐洲大學相關學科的組織建制，以及學者如何依託學術組織凝聚力量。同時，本文亦概述了歐洲漢學學會在發展歷程中，不斷界定與重塑自身學術定位的演進軌跡。

Keywords: global changes, academic profession, neoliberalism, tradition

關鍵詞： 全球變化、學術專業、新自由主義、傳統

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When the 'Association européene d'études chinoises' was founded in 1975, the world looked different from how it looks now. The following overview—a societal picture—of some major events of that year should serve to bring back to memory that year for those among us whose memories of that year have faded, and illuminate the backdrop for those of us who were not yet at the age of memory back then.

January 1, 1975: the Swedish monarch is stripped of all political power bestowed on him in the 1809 Constitution, and the country becomes a full parliamentary democracy. January 2: the United States Department of Interior designates the grizzly bear a threatened species. January 15: Portugal signs an accord for Angola's independence. January 31: John Lennon releases his single '#9 Dream". February 18: Italy broadens its abortion law. February 21: Watergate figures John Mitchell, US Minister of Justice, Harry R. Haldeman, Nixon's White House Chief of Staff, and John D. Ehrlichman, White House Counsel and Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs, are sentenced to 2½ to 8 years in prison for conspiracy and obstruction of justice. March 11: a rightist military coup in Portugal under General António de Spínola fails. March 26: the Biological Weapons Convention enters into force. April 4: Microsoft is founded. April 16: the Cambodian Red Khmer occupies Phnom Penh and the next day, April 17, captures it, marking the end of the Cambodian civil war. April 18: John Lennon gives what would be his final public performance at the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton Hotel, New York City. April 19: the British rock band Queen begins a concert tour of Japan. April 21: Nguyen Van Thieu, the last President of South Vietnam, resigns after ten years in power. April 23: Harold Pinter's play 'No Man's Land' premieres in London. April 25: Mário Soares wins Portugal's first free election since 1925 following the Carnation Revolution of 1974. April 30: North Vietnamese troops capture Saigon, ending the Vietnam War. May 21: Lowell W. Perry is confirmed as chairman of the 'US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission'. May 28: the 'Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) is established by the Treaty of Lagos. June 5: the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat reopens the Suez Canal that had been closed since 1967. June 5: the United Kingdom electorate votes 67% to 33% in a referendum to remain part of the European Common Market. June 11: Greece adopts a Constitution. June 14: Janis Ian releases "At Seventeen". June 25: Mozambique becomes independent as People's Republic of Mozambique. July 5: Pink Floyd debuts their album "Wish You Were Here" at the Knebworth Festival in England. On the same day, the Cape Verde Islands gain independence after 500 years of Portuguese rule. July 6: Dmitri Shostakovich completes his "Sonate for alto", opus 147. July 8: Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin visits West Germany. July 12: Sao Tomé e Príncipe gains independence from Portugal. July 17: NASA's Apollo 18 and the Soviet Soyuz 19 make the first US/USSR linkup in space. July 24: the fashion house Giorgio Armani is founded in Milan. July 29: Gerald Ford becomes the first US President to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp. August 14: King Olav V of Norway opens Svalbard Airport near Longyearbyen, the northernmost airport in the world with scheduled public flights.

September 4: Egypt and Israel sign the 'Sinai Interim Agreement' (also known as the Sinai II Agreement). September 16: Papua New Guinea gains independence from Australia. October 9: Andrei Sakharov wins the Nobel Peace Prize. October 23: 90% of women in Iceland go on strike to protest the gender pay gap and the unequal distribution of unpaid labour, shutting down the country for a day. October 26: Anwar Sadat becomes the first Egyptian President to visit the United States. November 11: Angola gains independence from Portugal. November 22: Juan Carlos I is proclaimed King of Spain as the monarchy is restored after 36 years of dictatorship. November 25: the Netherlands grants Suriname independence. November 28: the Democratic Republic of East Timor is proclaimed. November 29: US President Gerald Ford signs the 'Education for All Handicapped Children Act' requiring states to provide free education for children with a disability. December 1: President Gerald Ford visits the People's Republic of China. December 3: the Lao People's Democratic Republic is proclaimed, and on the same day, an Order of the Minister of the Interior of the French Republic is issued concerning the establishment of the 'Association européenne d'études chinoises'. December 9: authorization for the establishment of the 'Association européenne d'études chinoises' is registered at the police headquarters of Paris. December 21: finally, Madagascar adopts a Constitution (see "Historical Events in 1975").

To avoid portraying a too optimistic picture, 1975 was also the year in which, on April 13, General Noël Milarew Odingar staged a military coup in Chad; members of the 'Rote Armee Fraktion' blew up the West German embassy in Sweden on April 25; and army officers in Bangladesh staged a military coup d'état, assassinating elected President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and installing Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad as President on August 15. Also on August 15, Miki Takeo made the first official pilgrimage to the Yasukuni Shrine by an incumbent prime minister on the anniversary of the end of World War II. On September 1, all political parties were forbidden in Bangladesh. On October 20, the US Supreme Court ruled teachers could legally spank their pupils following a warning (see "Historical Events in 1975").

This is a long and, admittedly, a very subjective list of events, but it should provide some counterweight to the currently dominant narrative that the changes on the global scene we are witnessing now are of a magnitude that is unprecedented in world history. What is different, however, is the general tendency of the changes we are now witnessing. The optimistic mood of decolonization, growing constitutionalism, democratization, equal rights, and hopefulness for the future, has given way to a gloomy mood characterized by renewed conservatism, an attitude of looking inwardly, democratic backsliding, and the questioning of equal rights. I will come back to this further on, but first let me elaborate on two important events from the year 1975 mentioned in the list above: the Order of the Minister of the Interior of the French Republic, issued on December 3, and the authorization for the establishment of the 'Association européenne d'études chinoises' on December 9.

Loyal to my erstwhile function as President of the 'Association européene d'études chinoises', I have delved into some primary sources relating to the foundation of the Association. On its page 223 of its 22 January 1976 issue, the *Journal offficiel de la République Française* states the following, under the heading 'Associations Étrangères':

> "3 décembre 1975. Arrêté du ministre de l'intérieur. (Autorisation enregistrée à la préfecture de police le 9 décembre 1975.) *Association européenne d'études chinoises.* Objet: promouvoir et favoriser, par tous moyens, toutes activités scientifiques relevant des études chinoises. Siège social: 22, avenue du Président-Wilson, 75116 Paris".

From this document, we also learn that the Association was established under the "Décret-loi du 12 avril 1939 et décret du 1er juin 1939". The related document of the Ministère de l'Intérieur further stipulates the list of persons who are charged with the administration of the Association. The latter, so we read, is in accordance with the "Loi du 1er juillet 1901, article 5" and the "décret du 16 août 1901, article 2".

That I refer to the founding documents of our Association in French and to the French name of the association is not without reason. I will come back to the contemporary significance of this name towards the end of this address. Moreover, until further notice, French is an official language of the Association.

That the tendency of the changes on the world scene we are now witnessing is fundamentally different from the changes back in 1975 is clear from some further reading in the *Journal officiel de la République Française* of 22 January 1976. Apart from the 'Association européenne d'études chinoises', under the rubric of 'Associations Étrangères' we also find the establishment of the 'International American College' in Aix-en-Provence, the 'Club de football de la Banque de Bilbao' in Paris, the 'Association portugaise pour la culture, la récréation et les sports' in Le Thillot, the 'Association des amis de la langue polonaise' in Aulnay-sous-Bois, the 'Institut des hautes études talmudiques "Yad Mordekhai" in Paris, and the 'Union sportive et culturelle des Portugais, Pontoise-Cergy' in Pontoise.[1] This list shows how in the mid-1970s—along with the unification process of the then European Economic Community—the European mindset was open to the outside world.

The establishment of our Association was thus in line with a statement made by Joseph Needham (1900–1995), the famous historian of Chinese science and civilization, in the presidential address entitled "The Dialogue of East and West" he delivered in 1955 to the 'Britain-China Friendship Association'. The opening lines of this presidential address run as follows:

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[1] *Journal officiel de la République Française*, 22 January 1976, p. 223.

> "For three thousand years, a dialogue has been going on between the two ends of the Old World. Greatly have they influenced each other, and very different are the cultures they have produced. We have now good reason to think that the problems of the world will never be solved so long as they are considered only from a European point of view. It is necessary to see Europe from the outside, to see European history, and European failure, no less than European achievement, through the eyes of that larger part of humanity, the peoples of Asia (and indeed also of Africa)" Needham (1969).

This statement testifies to how modern sinology had overcome the nineteenth-century paradigm that determined how the non-European 'other' was perceived. The endeavour to understand China from within was shared by many then young sinologists, and the 'European Association of Chinese Studies' (EACS) was, in 1975, founded as an Association of Friends, with exactly this purpose. Or, why the EACS matters.

The vicissitudes of world history since the founding of our Association have fundamentally changed the scope and approaches of China-related research. Philological research on the Confucian, Legalist, and Daoist classics, at the outset often confined to university departments of 'classical studies', was broadened into literary, historical, and linguistic studies. This domain of research that has become referred to as 'classical sinology', has further expanded into 'area studies', including such domains as economy, politics, social developments, and international relations. The growing importance of China on the world scene has further enlarged the scope of 'China Studies', with scholars from within the fields of economic, political, and social sciences. These developments have also impacted the way Chinese studies are organized in Europe, and these developments have been shaped differently in different European countries by the specific historical backgrounds of these individual countries. Throughout this period of specialization and fragmentation, the 'European Association of Chinese Studies' has continued to act as the overarching academic association for sinology and Chinese studies, and has incorporated the many voices in this academic field. Also in the contemporary period, characterized by, on the one hand, an increasingly assertive and vocal China on the world scene, and, on the other hand, a concomitant hesitance to engage with China on the part of European political leadership, the EACS has an important role to play. Or, why the EACS matters.

Moreover, the Association's biennial conferences that have always been generously sponsored by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, have been an excellent venue to bring researchers from all these different backgrounds and engaging in all these different domains together. The Association's conferences allow all of us an overview of what is going on—what remains and what is changing—in the field of Chinese Studies, and allow for cross-disciplinary fruition. The EACS keeps us all together. Or, why the EACS matters.

In light of increasing specialization in different sub-disciplines of Chinese studies and financial constraints, our university libraries can, generally speaking, no longer offer a comprehensive collection of all that is going on in the field of Chinese studies. The specialization of our faculty and department libraries has, at times, made visits to different libraries necessary—despite the digitalization of lots of primary materials. Also here, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation has, for many years, been our financial supporter for the Library Travel Grants. Or, why the EACS matters.

One of the results of the professionalization of the academy in general has been that, also in the humanities and social sciences, specialized journals saw the light of day. Along with this process came the ranking of academic journals. Also in this regard, the EACS has been a trustworthy partner during the incipient days of this ranking system. Or, why the EACS matters.

Specialization has also resulted in the creation of more focused academic associations in our fields of study. Here, I can, among others, mention the 'European Association for Chinese Linguistics', or the 'European Association for Chinese Philosophy'. These associations have complemented the pre-existing national and regional associations for Chinese studies in Europe—such as the 'Association française d'études chinoises', the 'Deutsche Vereinigung für Chinastudien', the 'Nordic Association for Chinese Studies', or the 'British Association for Chinese Studies'. The EACS, however, remains the only overarching European association. Or, why the EACS matters.

Chinese Studies—seeing China from within—has shown that the globalization that has characterized the end of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century has not ruled out that there is no single, universal context for all of humanity. That is to say that literature, economics or politics might be universal, but that texts, economies and polities are not. Academic research in the humanities and social sciences is also confined by national and regional experiences, traditions, and conditions. It is with these observations in mind that the *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies* was launched in 2020, with one of its aims being to make studies on China in other languages than English known to the broader sinological world. Or, why the EACS matters.

I promised to return to the French name of our Association. In my foreword to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies*, titled 'The Dodgy Realm of Conventionality: On the Occasion of the Founding of the *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies*' I stated the following:

> "For academia, it is important to add that whereas classical liberalism saw the individual as characterised by having an autonomous human nature and being able to practise (in) freedom, in neoliberalism, the state 'seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur' (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315). In

> neoliberalism, further, the market has become a useful technology for use by the state, a 'mechanism for the institutional regulation of public sector organizational contexts, [...] a technique of government's 'positive' power, acting deliberately through the vehicle of the state to engineer the conditions for efficient economic production' (Olssen and Peters 2005, 317–318). That is to say that what David Reisman called the 'productive state' (that simultaneously is active as participant in and as controller of the economic process), as opposed to the 'protective state' (that limits its 'interference' to the protection of citizens within a constitutional and legal framework) increasingly determines economic and academic life (Reisman 1990, 81). In the 21st-century global neoliberal world order, the 'productive state' extracts compliance from individuals in order to engineer a market order. In this sense, the 'productive state' threatens to restrict the rights of privacy and personal freedom, as well as of professional autonomy. And, indeed, 'entrepreneurship' and 'the market' have encroached on the academic 'profession' as well. Also academic teaching and research are increasingly coping with the logic of 'the market', with the introduction of concepts such as demand and supply, relevance to labour market conditions and prospects, targets and objectives, contract-based employment, and results orientation, all to the detriment of values such as 'professional autonomy' for the individual academic, and such as the 'common good' and 'public interest' for the society for whose edification (apart from the value of 'knowledge for the sake of knowledge' itself) the academic is supposed to work (Olssen and Peters 2005, 324–326)" (Dessein 2020, 5–6).

Five years have passed since I wrote this text. As many of you may have, or are experiencing, despite the increasing importance of China on the global scene, the raison d'être of sinology or Chinese studies is increasingly put to the question in many countries. It is here that I want to come back to the French name of our 'Association européenne d'études chinoises', that has as goal to: "promouvoir et favoriser, par tous moyens, toutes activités scientifiques relevant des études chinoises". For some reason—although to all grammatical rules of English, the correct English version of 'Association européenne d'études chinoises' should be 'European Association of Chinese Studies'—which remains obscure to me and to most of us, at some point some 10 to 15 years ago, we started to refer to our Association with the name 'European Association for Chinese Studies'. I will not develop on the administrative and legal issues this has caused when we also started to use the latter name in writing. In hindsight, however, stumbling into the 'for' instead of the 'of' may have been *prevoyant* (sorry for the French again). I admit that when, under my presidency of our Association, the *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies* was, after many years of debate, founded, our journal was indeed called 'for', not 'of' Chinese studies. The then Board of the Association merely used the name of the Association that had, by then, become current. It is, in the current timeframe maybe indeed time to advocate 'for' Chinese studies. Or, why the EACS continues to matter.

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