

President's Annual Report (2008) for 7th AGM held on 24 April 2009 at the Confucius Institute, 11 Slim Barracks Rise, Singapore.

1.1 Opening Remarks

Our Society has had a particularly busy year in the course of its sixth term. This has been helped by our very strong team of committee members with the addition of several seasoned and very able individuals. We have been operating out of the premises of 6 Pioneer Place Utraco Building over the past year which houses an excellent collection of books related to Zheng He.

1.2 Changes in Our Society

Our membership has increased over the past term from 53 members and 15 Associate Members totally 68 members as at end March 2008 to 55 Members and 17 Associate Members making a total of 72 as of today. Many of our Associate Members reside outside of Singapore. We have been able to communicate with them by e-mail. We continued to maintain free membership to all who wish to join our Society preferring to depend entirely on contributions made by generous members of our Committee.

1.3 Committee Meetings

We held four committee meetings in the course of the past term on 30 April, 18 July, 19 November 2008 and 27 March 2009. Most members were able to attend the four meetings. We wish to record our thanks to Prof. Koh Hock Kiat, the Confucius Institute, for allowing us to hold our meetings in their premises.

1.4 Activities During the Year

1.4.1 Review of Earlier Objectives

We were unable to pursue our intended objectives of establishing the Zheng He Dialysis Centre due to lack of resources. Our objective of organizing an essay competition also was not realized for reasons including the lack of human resources at our disposal. We were also not able to make any progress in reaching out to the maritime community as much as we would like to. Instead we decided to channel our limited energies and resources to organizing a major conference scheduled for May 2010 (see item 1.5.2 below).

1.4.2 Formation of Sub-committees

From the outset of the new term, we decided to set up several sub-committees as follows:

Membership & Publicity - Mr Freddie Tay Kit Poh
Education & Seminars - Dr Chua Soo Pong
Research & Publications - Mr C.C. Chin
Finance - Mr Ong Chu Meng
Social and welfare - Mr Ng Foo Weng Kitson

Each sub-committee would formulate plans and undertake activities for the Society.

1.4.3 Our Society's Website and e-Newsletter

We were able to make some changes and additions to our website although more could be done. We kept to our intention to make our website a trilingual one with the basic information available in English, Chinese and Bahasa, and for selected items in two languages. A new feature and service to our members was our e-newsletter sent at the beginning of each month to members via e-mail starting from January 2009. The newsletter is an extension of our website www.chengho.org and we encourage all members to view current and all previously sent newsletters to members and those who signed up to receive it. The newsletter is the responsibility of our able Committee member, Mr Freddie Tay Kit Poh and assisted by Dr Chia, our honorary secretary. The e-newsletter has been instrumental in attracting interested persons, a few of whom have become our members. We encourage and welcome contributions that you can bring to the e-newsletter.

1.4.4 Research and Publications

Efforts to undertake research on the legacy and influence of Zheng He in Southeast Asia and around the Indian Ocean continued. I am happy to report that several visits to the birthplace of Zheng in Yunnan as well as locations where Zheng He's fleet made stops.

I am pleased to inform you that my book on *Zheng He and Islamization of Southeast Asia* was accepted for publication by the Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS) and is expected to be out before the end of this year. The Chinese version has already been published by Haiyang Chubanshe in Beijing. A Bahasa version will also be published in due course.

1.4.5 Joint Exhibition on the History of Chinese-Medium School

Our Society participated in the Joint Exhibition on the History of Chinese-Medium Schools held from 29 Nov-6 Dec 2008 at the Chinese High School. The event was organized by the alumni of 24 Chinese medium schools in Singapore and Malaysia. We put up a Zheng He exhibit in a separate room and it was well attended. Several of our Committee members came to help set up and man the exhibition.

1.4.6 The Cheng Ho Cultural Museum

During the course of the year, work was carried out to upgrade further the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum in Melaka. New exhibits were added to the Museum in part to replace the less attractive exhibits to further enrich the Museum for the benefit of visitors.

1.4.7 Hundred-Metre Scroll Painting

Progress has been made to create such a brush painting depicting Zheng He's life and voyages. I participated in a meeting in Kunming attended by many artists and interested parties. Groups of artists will be making trips to various destinations visited by Zheng He's fleet in order to paint realistic images of events and places. A number of copies of the scroll would be produced and a copy will be deposited and displayed in the Melaka Cheng Ho Cultural Museum.

1.5 Future Activities

1.5.1 Cheng Ho Treasure Ship in Melaka.

We continue to work with the Malacca State Government to construct a Cheng Ho Treasure Ship by the side of the Melaka River as reported in our last AGM. In conjunction with the building of the Treasure Ship, it has been proposed that the site be named the Cheng Ho Square as one of three squares; the others being the Parameswara Square and the Dutch Square on the other side of the Melaka River. These developments, if and when completed, will add much to the attraction to Melaka as a tourist destination.

1.5.2 605th Anniversary of Zheng He and the Afro-Asian World Conference

Under the able leadership of our Committee Member, Mr C.C. Chin, four meetings have been held thus far to organize this Conference targeted for 11&12 May 2010 to be held in Malacca. It will be a joint effort with the Melaka Cheng Ho Cultural Museum and several other organizations. Good progress has already been made to set objectives, selection of advisors and committee members (some from Malaysia), adopting themes and subthemes, putting together a list of potential participants and speakers at the Conference as well as the framework of the conference which will be conducted in three languages – English, Bahasa and Chinese. The budget of the conference is estimated to be around \$300,000/- although every effort will be made to economize and yet be able to achieve worthy targets. The conference will also yield a volume of selected papers to commemorate Zheng He's 605th Anniversary of the start of his voyages.

In all our endeavours, our still young Society will persevere to promote the spirit of Zheng He through our activities, research and publications for peace and mutual understanding and respect.