

President's Annual Report for 9th AGM held on Saturday, 21 May 2011

Opening Remarks

I am very happy to say that the year in review had been an exciting one due to our Society's having jointly hosted the First International Conference on Zheng He with the theme of *Zheng He and the Afro-Asian World* on 5-8 July 2010 in the World Heritage City of Melaka and held at the city's Equatorial Hotel. Our joint organizers were the Perbadanan Muzium Melaka (PERZIM) and the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum. The response to the Conference was tremendous and we continue to receive accolades and interested enquiries from around the world well after the conference.

As a result of the conference, we are pleased that our membership has more than doubled over the past term from 80 members comprising 57 Ordinary Members and 23 Associate Members as at April 2010 to a total of 192 members comprising 86 Ordinary Members and 106 Associate Members as at mid January 2011. We continue our practice of maintaining free membership to all who wish to join our Society.

I am pleased to announce also that an entire floor of the Annex building to the Greentech-Utraco Building has been renovated to provide space for Zheng He exhibits, our Library and space for meetings and other activities. Members are welcomed to use the premises and the place also serves as a venue for interaction for members and friends.

Organizational Matters

We held three committee meetings in the course of the past term on 3 May 2010, 11 November 2010 and 25 February 2011. During the year, two Council Members resigned from our Council, Mr Steven Lim and Mr C.C. Chin (on 11 November 2010). Mr Lim cited frequent overseas travel as his reason for his decision to resign and his wish to see younger members to take his place on the Council. We are grateful to them for their many contributions to the Society. I wish both of them the very best in their endeavours and trust that they will continue to give strong support to the activities of our Society. At the first committee meeting, the Council decided to invite Mr Kua Bak Lim to join us as a Council Member to fill one position.

There had been some changes in the line-up of the chairmanship of our Society's sub-committees. The current sub-committees are as follows:

Membership	- Ms Chia Wen Syn
Education & Seminars	- Dr Chua Soo Pong
International Relations	- Vacant
Research & Publications	- Mr Kua Bak Lim
Social & welfare	- Mr Kitson Ng
Publicity & website	- Mr Tay Kit Poh

Amending our Constitution

After a great deal of effort and with the very able help of our Assistant Secretary, Mr Patrick

Chow, who is a lawyer by profession, we managed to make some necessary changes to our Constitution. Members are encouraged to view the amended Constitution on our website.

Research and Publications

I am happy to inform you that my book *Zheng He and Islamization of Southeast Asia* has been published in Bahasa Melayu. Attempts will be made to have it published also in Arabic.

Conference on Zheng He and the Afro-Asian World

As mentioned, our jointly organized first International Conference on Zheng He with the above theme was successfully organized in July 2010 in the historic city of Melaka. The response to the Conference was heartening attracting 40 papers in Hanyu and 23 in English. There were 345 participants at the conference together with 32 from Singapore. The Governor of the State of Melaka, Tun Datuk Seri Utama Mohd Khalil Bin Yaakob, and Datuk Seri Hj. Mohd Ali Bin Mohd Rustam, Chief Minister of Melaka both spoke at the opening ceremony together with Tan Sri Datuk Tiong Hew Khing, President of World Chinese Media Association. Our Vice President, Prof. Leo Suryadinata gave the keynote address while Mr C.C. Chin, Chairman of our Working Committee delivered the closing speech at the end of the conference. My heartfelt thanks go especially to the staff of PERZIM and the following – Mr C.C. Chin, Mr Kua Bak Lim, Mr Lim How Seng, Mr Tay Kit Poh, and other members of the organizing committee. I wish also to record my thanks to Ms Irene Huang and her team at the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum for working closely with the PERZIM counterparts giving their huge effort in making all the arrangements to render the Conference a success.

Requests and Assistance given to Zheng He Exhibits

On the invitation of the Kelantan Government, we helped to organize a month-long (22 Nov- 21 Dec 2010) Cheng Ho Exhibition in Kota Bahru, the State capital of Kelantan. The response was tremendous especially from among Malay visitors. We were heartened by hundreds of thousands of visitors flooding the exhibition premises. My book on *Zheng He and Islamization of Southeast Asia* in Chinese, English and Malay were all sold out in the first few days of the exhibition.

Our Cheng Ho exhibitions are getting well known now. We have been invited to put up another exhibition in Sutera Mall, Johor Bahru from 18 June to 17 July 2011. Several cities in East Malaysia are also in discussions with us to put up Cheng Ho exhibitions there, e.g. Kuching, Sibul, Kota Kinabalu as well as in Brunei Darussalam. We have now received invitations to put up exhibitions in as far away as South Africa, Croatia and Abu Dhabi. We can say with humility that people are beginning to appreciate our efforts to propagate the spirit and good deeds of Admiral Zheng He in order to achieve a more tolerant and peaceful world, a non-aggressive and collaborative attitude among peoples of the world irrespective of their ethnicity, belief, religion or country of origin.

Editing Conference Papers for Publication

There remains the arduous task of editing the conference papers presented at the Conference for publication. The following forming the Editorial Committee have taken responsibility for the following tasks:

Chairman - Dr Tan Ta Sen

- Coordinating Editor - Prof. Leo Suryadinata
Editors (English volume) - Dr Chia Lin Sien and Dr Sally K. Church
(Chinese volume) - Prof. Leo Suryadinata, Mr Kua Bak Lim and Assoc. Prof. Koh Hock Kiat

The target is to have the two volumes ready for publication by the end of the year.

Our Society's Website

Our attempt to use a local web designer to help maintain our website has not been satisfactory in spite of attempts by our Website Manager, Mr Tay Kit Poh. We will find an alternative after his contract comes to an end in July 2011. However, our amended Constitution has been uploaded onto our website.

Financial matters

As in previous years, the Society has been operating on a very small budget. Most expenses have been met by contributions by committee members.

New Initiatives for the New Term

The successful Conference has attracted the attention of the World and we look forward to the next Conference to be held in 2012 in China with support from the Chinese Central Government. There is also interest from Jakarta to host the following biennial event in 2014 in Indonesia.

I am delighted that in order to realize the spirit of Cheng Ho, we have in collaboration with Prof. Hum Sin Hoon, Vice Dean of the NUS Business School, been putting together a book on *Zheng He's Art of Collaboration* with the objective of providing an alternative to the *Sun Zi's Art of War* as a new approach to modern business management. Prof. Hum gave a seminar hosted by NUS Extension Services at their premises in Parkmall along Penang Road. The seminar attracted more than a hundred corporate business leaders, academicians and students.

Just at the end of April, through our Secretary, Dr Chia Lin Sien, we received a visitor, Mr Paul Keeler, Director of Golden Web Foundation from the Cambridge University for discussion on possible avenues of collaboration to further the ideal of East-West cultural connections focusing on building stronger relations between the Middle Eastern Islamic world with the East including Southeast Asia.

We look forward to expanding our horizon and more activities in an exciting year ahead.