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# Asian Studies in the Humanities: Visions for the Future

Young Researchers Forum

'New Perspectives for Asian Studies in the Humanities'

ESF – CCKF Humanities Spring 2009

27-30 May 2009, Prague, Czech Republic

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## Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (CCKF)

The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (CCKF) is a nonprofit organisation headquartered in Taipei, the capital of the Republic of China on Taiwan, to support and promote the understanding of Chinese culture and society overseas.

[www.cckf.org](http://www.cckf.org)

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### Organiser

International Sinological Centre, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

The Centre is supported by CCKF.

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### Editors

Roel Sterckx and Dinu Luca with contributions from participants.

This report has been prepared under the responsibility of Dr Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman, Head of the ESF Humanities and Social Sciences Unit.

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**Figure 1.**  
Plenary session, Humanities  
Spring 2009

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## Foreword

# Humanities Spring – Young Researchers Fora of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities



In 2007 the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) held its first Humanities Spring event. The ESF SCH plays a central role in giving advice on European-level coordination and foresight regarding research activities in the Humanities. Stakeholders are national and international research funding bodies seeking new contributions to their discussions on strategic choices. SCH is convinced of the importance of the voice of early career researchers in these discussions and wishes to continuously mobilise the creative potential of the next generation of leading humanities scholars to inform them. The Humanities Spring concept and format stem from the conviction that the earlier contact is made with young researchers, the better their cooperation and their contribution to policy discussions is in the long term.

In the first of the series of Humanities Spring a group of 21 young scholars, selected through an open call for proposals, was invited to debate possible and/or desired futures for humanities research in Europe and challenges and opportunities it faces in the globalised context of research. The discussions were led by six senior scholars from different fields of the humanities. The meeting resulted in a manifesto for the humanities in Europe, identifying among others a number of major topics that illustrate the potential of humanities research<sup>1</sup>. This list

includes issues such as Europe's Islamic past and its future, the north/south divide, the consequences and developments of new media and technologies, as well as the constant change and complexity of cultures, politics, education and social structures. It further identified the conditions for success of humanities research, requiring among others a dialogue between disciplines and cooperation with the natural, technological and social sciences as critical and equal partners.

It has been assumed from the beginning that the Humanities Spring event will be repeated every two years. In 2009 two Humanities Spring events took place. The meeting "From Learned Societies to Knowledge-Based Society: Towards a European Young Academy?" was a preparatory event to explore the ESF-ALLEA (All European Academies) joint initiative of creating a European Young Academy (EYA). The concept of the EYA was developed during 2008 from Humanities Spring 2007 by SCH and ALLEA<sup>2</sup>.

This report is an outcome of the second Humanities Spring meeting of 2009, 'Young Researchers Forum: New Perspectives for Asian Studies in the Humanities'. SCH, together with the Taiwan Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (CCKF), identi-

interdisciplinarity", 2007.

2. More information on the European Young Academy initiative can be found at [www.allea.org/Pages/ALL/24/505.bGFuZz1FTkc.html](http://www.allea.org/Pages/ALL/24/505.bGFuZz1FTkc.html)

1. ESF Humanities Spring 2007; Young Researchers Forum "Disciplines and Borders: Humanities research in an age of



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**Figure 2.**  
Break-out session, Humanities  
Spring 2009

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fied this specific field of humanities research as requiring special attention. The Introduction below by Professor Alain Peyraube and Professor Ayling Wang explains the rationale behind this decision.

The following document expresses an independent position of the young scholars who met in Prague in May 2009. It is a synthesis of many, often different, positions resulting in a common vision for the future of Asian studies. The different views do not reflect only specific problems within specific disciplines that come under the heading of Asian studies but should be seen as pointers to directions in which Asian studies could and should develop in future European research contexts, particularly with regard to the rapidly changing global context within which Europe is repositioning itself.

**Professor Milena Žic-Fuchs,**  
*Chair of the Standing Committee for the Humanities*



# Introduction

## New Perspectives for Asian Studies in the Humanities



Interdisciplinary area (or areal) studies, defined as heterogeneous and interdisciplinary fields of research and scholarship pertaining to a particular geographical or cultural region, after having become increasingly popular in the US and in Western scholarship in the wake of World War II, have been subject to much criticism, including by area specialists themselves, which explains their decline during the period 1980-2000. When the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies in the US, or the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in France, which had long served as the national nexus for raising and administering funds for area studies, closed down their area committees, scholars interpreted this as a massive signal for the drastic changing of the research environment. It should be noted that the rejection of area studies programmes was strongest in the social sciences domain, mainly political science and economics. The various disciplines in the humanities have continued to accord a decisive importance to area studies, and are doubtlessly at the origin of the spectacular rejuvenation in this domain of studies in the first decade of the new millennium, aided in this, it is certain, by world globalisation trends (the whole world becoming a global village, with national destinies more closely intertwined) and the new consciousness that the American or European continents are after all only provincial<sup>1</sup>.

This revival of areal studies has above all benefited Asian studies, which are undoubtedly one of their main branches, the other ones being African

studies (frequently including Egyptology), American and Latin American studies and European studies. The Asian studies domain is divided itself into different geographical components: Central Asian studies, Middle Eastern studies or Near Eastern studies (Assyriology, Iranian studies, Islamic studies, Judaic studies, etc.), East Asian studies (Sinology, Japanology, Korean studies, etc.), South Asian studies (Indian studies, etc.), Southeast Asian studies (Austronesian, Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai, Tibeto-Burman, etc.).

The term 'Asian studies' is today typically used in Europe and the US for Oriental studies, and is concerned with Asian peoples, their cultures, languages, history and politics. The typical Asian studies, under the former name of 'Oriental studies', is the academic field of study that embraces Near Eastern and Far Eastern cultures, and that still pertains largely to archaeology and history, languages and linguistics, anthropological and cultural studies, philosophy, religion, arts and literature, as well as all the related disciplines in the domain of humanities. However, within the Asian sphere, Asian studies also brings together, in the current situation, aspects of sociology and political and economic phenomena, not only with regard to Asian traditional societies, but also in contemporary societies.

The replacement of 'Oriental studies' by 'Asian studies' has also been motivated by the fact that the term 'Orientalism' has come to acquire negative connotations, as it was interpreted to refer to the study of the East by Westerners, shaped by the attitudes of the era of European imperialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was often seen to imply prejudiced, outsider-caricatured interpretations of Eastern cultures and peoples and it became some-

1. D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

times offensive to non-Westerners. Furthermore, the Orient is not a single, monolithic region but rather a broad area encompassing multiple civilisations. Finally, the fact that a growing number of professional scholars and students of Asian studies are themselves Asian in origin has also probably furnished another good reason to adopt the term 'Asian studies' instead of 'Oriental studies'.

It was in order to do a stocktake of the revival and change of Asian studies in the humanities that the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) and the Taiwan Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (CCKF) invited the next generation of leading scholars in the humanities to participate in a three-day Humanities Spring workshop in Prague, Czech Republic, from 27 to 30 May 2009.

CCKF has worked for years to achieve the goal of promoting the internationalisation of Chinese studies, blending the best of academic trends both in Taiwan and abroad while also helping to cultivate young talent in order to promote the development of new fields and conceptual frameworks. In today's age of globalisation, an appreciation of world history and geography, as well as a cross-cultural interdisciplinary perspective, are essential for ensuring the growth of Asian studies as one of the world's areas of knowledge, as well as the development of Asian culture as a long-term and vital component of human civilisation. Through the "ESF Humanities Spring 2009 – New Perspectives for Asian Studies in the Humanities", the CCKF wished to incorporate the most stimulating topics, sources and artifacts from Asia for the next generation of humanities scholars, helping them gain a more profound appreciation of traditional and contemporary Asian culture.

A distinguished group of 17 young scholars was selected to debate and sketch possible and/or desired futures for Asian studies research in the humanities. Participants were asked to address some of the challenges and opportunities humanities scholarship is facing in this particular field of study (in terms of both topics and research communities). The discussions were facilitated by senior colleagues from the field.

Following the workshop, outputs of break-out sessions and plenary discussions were summarised by discussants into 'conclusions and recommendations'.

**Professor Alain Peyraube,**

*Emeritus Director of Research at CNRS, France and  
Director of the Institute of Advanced Study of Lyon*

**Professor Ayling Wang,**

*Vice-President of CCKF and Senior Research Fellow  
at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy  
at the Academia Sinica of Taiwan*



# Conclusions and Recommendations



## Mission

The study of Asian languages, cultures and civilisations contributes pivotal insights into the diverse aspects of humanity. European identities have been and continue to be shaped by centuries of interaction and exchanges with Asia in the traditional scope of the notion. The study of Asia is therefore essential in the making and preservation of our own European identity. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more than ever, European institutions are at a crossroads in their scholarly encounters with Asian languages and cultures. To achieve a rich and accurate understanding of Asia in an increasingly globalised world, there is a need to thoroughly engage with the study of different forms of knowledge, for which in-depth research and professionally sustained language training are essential.

Today, the demand for European societies to develop cultural, political and economic relationships with Asia that are mutually beneficial is greater than ever before. The study of Asian languages and civilisations plays a key role in training the human resources and creating the knowledge base necessary to facilitate this process. The field of Asian studies is in need of securing substantial and continuous growth in academic research and training, so as to further consolidate its place in the humanities and respond to the expectations of contemporary societies. The inter- and multi-disciplinary study of Asia in diverse academic contexts is fundamental in fostering these goals.

## Setting agendas

We understand Asian studies to be a multi-faceted field which requires both advanced linguistic competence, creative disciplinary engagement across the humanities and in-depth fieldwork experience. It should be emphasised however that an advanced proficiency in philological and language skills constitutes a non-negotiable core. We further understand Asian studies to be inclusive, covering a wide range of cultures and civilisations – textual, visual, material, etc. It is essential that we should build on the long-standing tradition of European scholarship in the humanities as they relate to Asia. Advanced scholarship in its traditions as well as its modern and classical languages is an indispensable part of this process, since it is only through this approach that our understanding of Asian cultures can be thorough, accurate and beneficial for the wider community of the humanities.

The requirement to further both linguistic and disciplinary expertise poses a number of significant intellectual and strategic challenges. Training in Asian languages together with acquiring discipline-specific core competences is a long term process that requires a sustained institutional commitment. It is only with such a firm institutional basis in place that Asian studies in Europe can have a platform to develop an agenda for the future which is marked by diversity, dialogue and innovation.

First, we believe that preserving, consolidating and expanding the essential diversity and flexibility of the field of Asian studies is essential for its ongoing development. Secondly, scholarship in Asian studies consists of dialogue and cooperation among multiple actors, including a rapidly growing number of Asian partners. Efforts to collaborate with

Asian partner institutions need to be sustained and expanded. Finally, scholarship in Asian languages and cultures should attempt to be pro-active and open up innovative research agendas. More than any other field, we believe, the study of Asia offers prospects for challenging pre-established research categories in the humanities. European academia, in all its diversity, possesses the potential for developing such unique perspectives and opportunities.

## Themes and Approaches

Among the core themes and important topics of scholarly inquiry that need to be addressed systematically in the immediate future we would include the following:

- Narratives of cultural encounters, past and present
- The transmission and transformation of knowledge through time and space
- Interactions between human and natural environments in Asia, past and present
- The study of border-crossing, transnational, intra- and inter-regional phenomena
- The dynamics of the local and the global, past and present
- Language, philology, communication, and trans-lingual practices
- Categories and classifications of knowledge in Asia
- Belief systems

It is essential that research efforts in Asian studies should not solely concentrate on the currently dominant cultural and geographical research areas of Asia, but also include the less-studied languages and regions. The need to continue fostering expertise on less dominant language areas and their textual traditions is crucial. Much scholarship related to topics as diverse as the rise of Islam in Southeast Asia, the dissemination of Buddhism or Silk Road related scholarship could not flourish unless constant support and development is secured, so that languages, scripts and texts continue to be comprehensively mapped and studied.

## Facilitating human and material resources

Asian studies in Europe is a diverse field and one that is deeply influenced by national heritage, culture and identity. Asian studies is in principle a European invention which has made considerable impact on researches in Asian countries themselves. This intellectually varied and fragmented landscape should be valued as a unique European asset and therefore carefully preserved and developed.

Institutionally, Asian studies is a scattered field. This means that in order to create critical mass, scholars and institutions have to be linked in networks for teaching and research. We see several ways in which this could be accomplished. First, and more generally, we would welcome discussion on the institutional place of Asian studies within university faculties and departments. European institutions incorporate and organise Asian studies in different ways. Such diversity is to be encouraged. However we would welcome a wider debate on how Asian studies can be profiled better within institutions so as to create an optimal platform for research and teaching in Asian languages and civilisations. There are advantages in being part of a wider disciplinary community in the humanities (linguistics, literary studies, history, etc.) and greater effort should be made by researchers and research institutions to achieve this. Integrating provision in Asian studies into established Eurocentric disciplines would contribute to the debate on methodological and theoretical issues in these disciplines. On the other hand, it is essential too that Asian studies retain an institutional identity and that institutions encourage Asianists to profile their discipline internally and not simply in pursuit of what are perceived to be established fields in the Western humanities. Asian studies should aim at setting intellectual agendas for the humanities, promoting scholarly inquiry according to its particular categories. The ability of Asian studies to develop and promote critical theories based on data and paradigms of thought from Asian contexts will establish Asian studies as a key partner in projects targeting the production of knowledge. Achieving critical mass in quantitative and structural terms would create the necessary conditions for this to happen.

Secondly, and more specifically, one of the most acute needs for scholars working on Asia is the availability of opportunities for continuous training. We recommend that institutions and scholarly organisations develop platforms that enable scholars in Asian studies to acquire more than one Asian language. Scholars, including those who are more advanced

in their careers, would benefit from opportunities for constant training currently offered in often isolated centres of learning scattered across Europe. This could be facilitated through targeted grants or fellowships for sabbatical leave or through programmes that allow Asianists to undertake training in European institutions where particular expertise is on offer. More opportunities that enhance mobility of Asian scholars across Europe would enable a more efficient dissemination of expertise while preserving the diversity of the learning and research environments that are so unique to Europe. We emphasise again that more flexible mechanisms to promote additional training will be essential for maintaining and expanding expertise in classical Asian languages, some of which are in danger of disappearing from European research and teaching curricula.

We believe therefore that establishing functional networks linking scholars and institutions in Europe, Asia and beyond is crucial for strengthening the research community. In addition to the exchange of scholars, material networks that bring together archival and library collections located all over Europe would enhance greater accessibility and critical mass. This includes integrating existing databases and networks, improving the ways in which scholars can access resources and resources can travel to scholars, digitising and mapping less-accessible repositories of source materials, and integrating new research technologies. As in the case of the exact sciences, language-based research requires its own laboratories and equipment, and building capacity in digital resources and database expertise is invaluable for improving communication, indexing and disseminating existing information and materials. We emphasise that, despite advances in creating virtual and digital research infrastructures, the requirement for scholars to travel to other institutions and work *in situ* will remain essential.

The availability of opportunities for continuous training in Asian languages should envision a broad scope and allow room for the lesser studied languages, not all of which are necessarily categorised as endangered languages. Scholarship in Asian studies consists of dialogue and cooperation among multiple actors. Establishing cross-cultural links and accessibility to a diversity of languages is essential for its ongoing development and dissemination of advanced knowledge of the field to the global academic communities and broader public.

In order to continue to produce significant results, it is essential that Asian studies sustains and develops a critical presence across European

research and higher education institutions. To preserve and develop existing institutional research structures that foster expertise in classical and modern Asian languages (including the lesser studied ones) will require substantial efforts and investment. It is therefore necessary to analyse needs, establish priorities and develop a coordinated approach across Europe to address them.

## Outreach: dissemination strategies

Finally the mechanisms by which research results can be disseminated both to the wider public at large as well as scholars in adjacent and other disciplines need substantial improvement. At present, textbooks and educational materials, at all levels, are highly inadequate and outdated in their presentation of Asian cultures and civilisations. Likewise, research results in Asian studies are too often overlooked by a Eurocentric mainstream that dominates the traditional humanities. To promote the type of knowledge and understanding that future generations in Europe will need to interact effectively in a globalised world, facilitating outreach and dissemination to the public will prove essential.



Young Researchers Forum  
**'New Perspectives for Asian Studies in the Humanities'**

**Thursday 28 May**

**Opening Session**

**09:00 – 10:00**

Opening remarks by Professor Milena Žic-Fuchs,  
*Chair Standing Committee for the Humanities*

**Introductions to the workshop**

Professor Ayling Wang,

*CCKF Vice-President, co-chair*

Professor Alain Peyraube,

*Linguistic Research Center CNRS, co-chair*

**Session 1**

Chair: Professor Milena Žic-Fuchs

**10:00 – 11:00**

Plenary presentations – 5 minutes per participant  
 Biography, field of research, vision on Asian studies

**11:30 – 12:30**

Plenary presentations – 5 minutes per participant –  
 continued

**Session 2**

Chair: Professor Ayling Wang

**13:30 – 14:15**

**Plenary lecture I:**

Professor Hans van Ess,

*Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich, Germany*

*"Asian studies, area studies and the importance  
 of knowing languages"*

**14:15 – 14:30**

Introduction to break-out sessions by co-chairs

**14:30 – 16:30**

First series of break-out sessions

*Group 1: Asian studies in the age*

*of interdisciplinarity*

Chair: Alain Peyraube

Discussant: Andrea Janku

*Group 2: Asian studies: addressing cultural*

*and geographical diversity*

Chair: Ayling Wang

Discussant: Federica Ferlanti

**16:30 – 17:15**

Plenary reporting of break-out sessions  
 and discussion

**Friday 29 May**

**Session 3**

Chair: Professor Alain Peyraube

**09:00 – 09:45**

**Plenary lecture II:**

Professor François Lachaud,

*École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris, France*

*"Classical Japanese Studies at the Crossroads:  
 An Overview"*

**09:45 – 11:45**

**Second series of break-out sessions**

*Group 1: Asian studies in the age  
 of interdisciplinarity*

Chair: Alain Peyraube

Discussant: Lara Marconi

*Group 2: Asian studies: addressing cultural  
 and geographical diversity*

Chair: Ayling Wang

Discussant: Dinu Luca

**11:45 – 12:30**

Plenary reporting of break-out sessions  
 and discussion

**Session 4**

Chair: Professor Ayling Wang

**13:30 – 14:15**

**Plenary lecture III:**

Dr. Imre Galambos, *International Dunhuang  
 Project, British Library, UK*

*"The International Dunhuang Project (IDP)  
 and scholarly collaboration"*

**14:15 – 15:00**

**Plenary lecture IV:**

Professor Pierfrancesco Callieri,

*University of Bologna, Italy*

*"Present trends and future perspectives  
 in the archaeology of Iran and Central Asia"*

**15:30 – 17:30**

**Third series of break-out sessions**

*Group 1: Asian studies in the age  
 of interdisciplinarity*

Chair: Alain Peyraube

Discussant: Roel Sterckx

*Group 2: Asian studies: addressing cultural  
 and geographical diversity*

Chair: Ayling Wang

Discussant: Ann Heylen

**17:30 – 18:00**

Plenary reporting of break-out sessions  
 and discussion

## Saturday 30 May

### Session 5

Chair: Professor Alain Peyraube

**09:00 – 09:30**

#### Plenary lecture V:

Professor Luboš Kropáček,  
*Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*  
"Inter-Religious Dialogue, in particular vis-à-vis Islam"

**09.30 – 10:00**

Introduction to drafting 'Vision for future of Asian studies in the humanities'

**10:00– 12:00**

#### Break-out drafting sessions

**12:00 – 12:30**

Plenary reporting on document progress

### Session 6

Chairs: Professor Ayling Wang  
and Professor Alain Peyraube

**13:30 – 15:30**

#### Break-out drafting sessions

**16:00 – 16:45**

Plenary reporting on drafted document

**16:45 – 17:30**

Wrap-up and conclusions

### Participants

- Dr Federica Ferlanti, *University of Oxford, United Kingdom*
- Dr Simona Grano, *Zurich University, Switzerland*
- Dr James Hegarty, *Cardiff University, United Kingdom*
- Dr Ann Heylen, *National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU)*
- Dr Margaret Hillenbrand, *University of Oxford, United Kingdom*
- Dr Andrea Janku, *University of London, United Kingdom*
- Dr Sascha Klotzbücher, *University of Vienna, Austria*
- Dr Dinu Luca, *University of Bucharest, Romania*
- Dr Lara Maconi, *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris, France*
- Dr Andronika Martonova, *Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, Bulgaria*
- Dr Aaron Moore, *University of Oxford, United Kingdom*
- Dr Helena Motoh, *University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia*
- Dr Charles Sanft, *University of Muenster, Germany*
- Dr Roman Siebertz, *University of Bonn, Germany*
- Professor Roel Sterckx, *University of Cambridge, United Kingdom*
- Dr Arianna Traviglia, *University Ca' Foscari of Venice, Italy*
- Dr Nicolai Volland, *National University of Singapore, Singapore*

### Invited Speakers

- Professor Pierfrancesco Callieri, *University of Bologna, Italy*
- Dr Imre Galambos, *The British Library, London, United Kingdom*
- Professor Luboš Kropáček, *Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*
- Professor François Lachaud, *École française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris, France*
- Professor Hans van Ess, *Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, Germany*

### Chairs

- Professor Alain Peyraube, *SCH member*
- Professor Milena Žic-Fuchs, *SCH Chair*
- Professor Ayling Wang, *CCKF Vice-President*

### Organisers

- Dr Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman, *ESF Humanities Head of Unit*
- Professor Olga Lomova, *CCKF/Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic*

### Observer

- Dr Monique van Donzel, *Nanyang Technological University, Singapore/former ESF Humanities HoU*







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