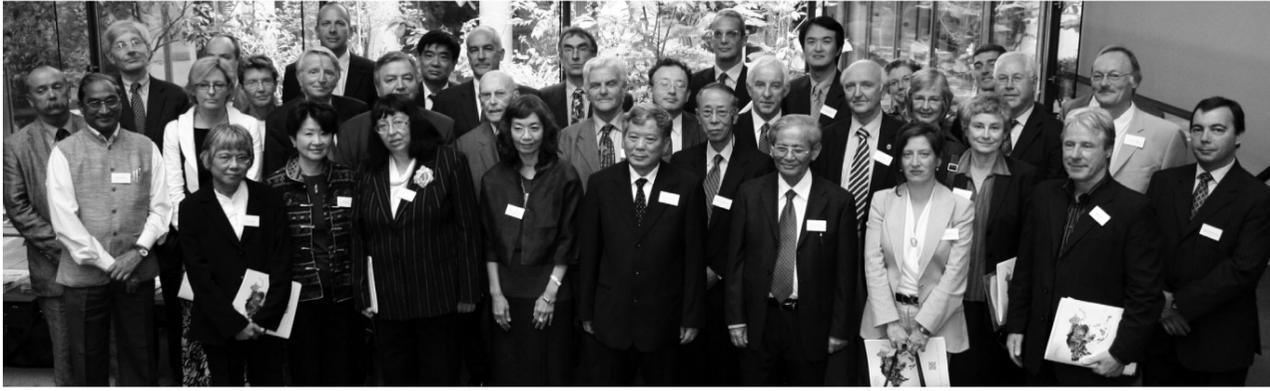


Leading European institutions launch a consortium for Asian Field Studies



On 3 September 2007, representatives of leading institutions in Asian studies from the European Union and Asia met at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Paris, to sign an agreement founding the European Consortium for Asian Field Studies (ECAF). An initiative of the EFEO, the Consortium Agreement will create a unique network out of twenty-one existing research centres across Asia, from Pakistan to Korea. Seventeen of the centres are operated by the EFEO, two by the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), one by the Asien-Afrika-Institut (AAI) and one by the Asia Research Institute (ARI). The signing ceremony, attended by representatives of several Asian embassies in Paris, was followed by a reception hosted by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres under the auspices of its Permanent Secretary, Professor Jean Leclant.

For the 30 founding members, which include academies, universities, foundations, museums, and research institutes in France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, the principal objective of the Consortium is to increase the capacity of European institutions to conduct Asian field studies through the sharing of resources and the development of joint research programmes. Professor Michael Fulford, Vice President of the British Academy, the UK's national organisation for the encouragement of studies in the humanities and social sciences, described ECAF as a cooperation of prime importance between European and Asian research institutions.

The 10 Asian or non-EU partners, who joined the consortium as associate members, are looking to increased collaboration with institutions and research programmes in the EU. The consortium also counts several EU organisations, such as the Asia-Europe Foundation based in Singapore or the European Science Foundation, Strasbourg, with observer status. Mr Didier Le Bret, Counsellor to the French Secretary of State for Cooperation, Mr. Jean-Marie Bockel, conveyed the Minister's appreciation of the joining of French, European and Asian research endeavours into this partnership that "can only promote a wider appreciation of the results of their research, leading to a deeper understanding of the great emerging strength of Asia".

According to Professor Verellen, Director of the EFEO, "In an international context where the most effective actors in the domain of Asian studies are developing and innovating at a rapid pace thanks to substantial investments and advanced levels of professional and institutional organisation, it is indispensable for European institutions to build alliances in order to maintain their competitiveness and meet new challenges in producing and disseminating knowledge about Asian societies and civilisations".

Moreover, as Professor Leclant stated in his inaugural speech, "Field work constitutes a vital dimension of the study of Asian societies and civilisations, and federating existing centres in Asia is the most effective way of providing specialists with the necessary facilities and opportunities for conducting in-depth research and training." The Consortium aims to provide field access and research facilities for its members' academic and technical staff, as well as fellowship holders and students, and to encourage the development of joint interdisciplinary research programmes in the humanities and social sciences. It also plans to share documentary resources from centres in Asia, and to pool funding to acquire new digital archives. More generally, it will promote Euro-Asian partnerships and dialogue among scholars and academic communities from both continents. The disciplinary fields range from archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics, to sociology and religious studies.

This initiative is conceived in the spirit of the EU policy to develop an integrated space for research and higher education among member states. As Professor Verellen pointed out, the success of ECAF will be largely about people, their ability to bridge cultural differences, solve logistical problems, meet the challenges of working together and sharing facilities.

For further information, contact elisabeth.lacroix@efeo.net

Jean-François Jarrige, President, Musée Guimet

"Only an organisation of research at the European scale can do justice to the weight of Asia today... The participation of the Guimet Museum offers the prospect of extending the coverage of our joint interests to the civilisations of Central Asia."

Norbert Kroo, Vice President, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

"As the representative of the European Research Council at this ceremony, I feel privileged to express the Council's welcome to this initiative."

Roel Sterckx, Professor and Chair, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Cambridge

"The new association emphasises the primacy of fieldwork and person-to-person contact in an age too easily seduced by databases and the impersonality of computers."

Silvio Vita, Professor of Japanese Studies, IsIAO

"IsIAO already cooperates closely with the EFEO in Kyoto, including common activities and the joint operation of facilities, and together they outreach to Japanese institutions – such fruitful relations can both strengthen and be strengthened by this new consortium."

Harunaga Isaacson, Professor of Indian Studies, Asian-Afrika-Institute, Hamburg

"This agreement places an existing and most fruitful interaction between the Asian-Afrika-Institute and the EFEO on a firmer and more permanent basis – a child that will far outlive all of us here today!"

John Kleinen, Professor of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam

"Notwithstanding the fact that the French and the Dutch both voted against the European constitution, the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden and the International Institute of Asian Studies are keen to join this enterprise."

João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, Director, Centro de História de Além-Mar
"Although new on the scene of Asian studies, Portugal preserves the sources on the earliest contacts between Europe and Asia through its history of worldwide exploration and imperial expansion. Many of these records remain to be opened by translation to Western and Asian scholars alike."

Jan Kučera, Professor, Nuclear Physics Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

"In addition to the Oriental Institute with its long history of study of Asia, the ASCR Physics Institute welcomes the Consortium as a means to disseminate and refine the use of its nuclear technology in the field of archaeology, already under way at Angkor."

Founding Members and Observers

France

Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, Paris
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Observer)
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en sciences sociales, Paris
Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris
Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris
Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, Paris
Musée national des Arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris
Société asiatique, Paris

Germany

Asien-Afrika-Institut, Hamburg
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (Observer)
Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung, Halle/Saale

Hungary

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asiatic Art, Budapest

Italy

Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, Rome
Fondazione Ing. Carlo Maurilio Lericci, Rome

Portugal

Centro de História de Além-Mar, Lisbon

The Czech Republic

Centrum výzkumu Řež, Rez
Nuclear Physics Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Rez
Oriental Studies Institute, ASCR, Prague

The Netherlands

European League of Non-Western Studies, Leiden
International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden (Observer)
University of Amsterdam
University of Leiden

United-Kingdom

British Academy, London
Needham Research Institute, Cambridge
Royal Asiatic Society, London
School of Oriental and African Studies
The White Rose East Asia Centre, Leeds and Sheffield
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University of Oxford

European Union

Asia-Europe Foundation, Singapore (Observer)
European science foundation, Strasbourg (Observer)

Founding Associate Members

Academia Sinica, Taipei
Asia Research Institute, Singapore
Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing
Chinese University of Hongkong
Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg
Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Centre for Anthropology, Bangkok
Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan/National Foundation of Sanskrit Culture, New Delhi
Tōyō Bunko/ Oriental Library, Tokyo
University of Korea, Seoul
Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi