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Dear Presidents, dear colleagues, dear friends,

it was a great pleasure to have a long talk to Prof. Dai Bingham, one of the pioneers of the European Studies outside the European Union, the founder and President of ECSA China. Very often in the last years he was saying to me that ECSA-World President is "the President of Presidents", and also in this talk -in which the main issue was the history of the European Studies and therefore also a relevant part of his biography- the sense for humor was present. Again a relation to a relevant personality who devoted his academic life to an issue that was not close to his origins. As translator of the European treaties into Chinese he also is a relevant mediator between two worlds.

The occasion for this talk was the yearly conference organized by EUSA Asia-Pacific, the umbrella organization for ten associations having each of them their own expertise and activity but joining together for this event. I was invited several times to the conference and could experience the hospitality of our colleagues from this part of the world. The conference took place this time in the Baptist University in Hong Kong, where Professor Ting Wei, the chair of the Hong Kong ECSA, is teaching.

This was my second visit to Hong Kong; someone who was my colleague in Barcelona, lecturer at the School of Communication in my university, is now living and working in this city. He invited me the day after the conference to two meetings, one of them a lunch with young professionals, and the other one a dinner with students. In both occasions the topic was the "Brexit", and I had to answer to many questions - some of them not very easy. And we were talking about a lot of issues on the European integration, and I was happy to see that there are young people well-informed and interested for the problems and challenges of this part of the world.

Best regards,
Enrique Banús

Interview

**“It’s my pleasure, if I could contribute to write
the history of European Studies”**

Prof. Dai Bingham

President of ECSA China

Enrique Banús: Today es June 29, 2016, and I am here, at the Baptist University in Hong Kong, with professor Dai Bingham from Fudan University, Shanghai. He is a well-known expert in European studies and one of the founders and the president of ECSA China. Professor Dai Bingham, many thanks

for the opportunity to talk about the foundation of ECSA China but also of ECSA World. When did you first come to the idea of devoting yourself to the European studies?

Dai Bingham: I think we could say the beginning of European studies in China goes back very close to the '60s, early '60s, when China tried to open to the world. It was in 1964, when France and China, the new China I mean, started diplomatic relations that opened China to the Western world. So in China we started a kind of international relations on our own and -very important- in the level of university study. And the Fudan University in Shanghai was appointed by the State Council to start a study of the Western European economies. Of course, you know that soon after '64 there was the Cultural Revolution. We restart this initiative after China returned to the United Nations, in 1971. So really I was not the founder. I joined the Fudan University in 1978, but actually there was a centre... people, academics older than me, who already started European studies.

EB: Who was the real pioneer?

DB: I think that professor Yu Kaixiang. He was the director of the Institute of World Economy at the Fudan. And Professor Wu Yicang, he is still there, he is the former president of the Chinese Association of EU Studies. And a group of scholars from different universities. Actually they started the European studies in China. I was a latecomer. The question is that the older generation of European scholars in China have managed to communicate in English, but had major difficulties with this language. Maybe I was better known in Europe because I could speak better English so I tried to start this kind of connections of the Chinese scholars with the European scholars. But the European studies in China started earlier than me.

EB: When did you join Fudan?

I joined in '78. Then they gave me the task to try to establish connections with outside, in the whole world. Especially, you see, when we started the EC studies we lacked information and data. So I was given the task to make contacts, including with the Commission. I wrote a lot to Madame Lastenouse and tried to ask for some first-hand information. It was in '79, that the European Commission decided to start a European Documentation Centre at the Fudan. They sent us all official documents.



EB: On which way you decided to work in the field of European studies?

DB: Well, it's a good question. During my college days I was prepared to be an English teacher. Because of the Cultural Revolution I went back to Shanghai to work in a factory for 9 years. That is from 1969 to 1978, I worked in a factory as a worker. Then, after that, during the '70s, in 1977, the Fudan wanted me -one of the former professors recommended me- so I went there. Of course, at that time I had two choices: one, to study Shakespeare. The other was European Community...

Relations with the European Commission

EB: [laughs] It is a pity that we lost an expert in Shakespeare studies, but for European studies this was a very good decision. And you... what was the way in which you established relations with European Commission and more concrete to Jacqueline Lastenouse?

DB: First, what we wanted was information, direct information, especially the file information. To my memory comes the moment when I got a publication from the EU delegation in UK. We translated a part of that and I wrote to the delegation asking for their approval. Gradually, I came to know there was a

European news distribution system. So in 1983, I got a government scholarship to study at the LSE (London School of Economics) for two years. And I already had connections, contacts with Madame Lastenouse. So I asked to come to visit the Commission in '83.

EB: So the Documentation Centre was established before you went to Europe, only on written correspondence.

DB: Yes, on correspondence. It was Mme Lastenouse's and Mr Noël's suggestion that Chinese scholars should organise themselves. At that time I sent my information back, this kind of advice, back to China. Then in 1984 at Mme Lastenouse's suggestion we organised the national association, at the time called Chinese Society for Western European Studies. That is really the start of what we call ECSA China.

EB: Were you also meeting Émile Noël?

DB: Yes, in '86 we called a conference in the Fudan, the first conference of our Chinese Society. Then at that time Mr Noël and Mme Lastenouse came over to take part in that. In the first conference there were only 25 representatives. But after that, every 2 years we have a national conference of the society, up to now. So in that moment, in the Chinese structure of European Studies, there was a National Association for European Studies.

EB: When establishing the Chinese association there was no ECSA World or ECSA Europe?

DB: Not yet.

EB: Was Jacqueline talking to you about this umbrella association for the different national associations?

DB: Yes. I think our ECSA China has been associated with the ECSA World since the beginning, since the very beginning.

EB: I think to remember that talking to Jacqueline she said that the fact there was an ECSA in China was decisive to transform ECSA Europe into ECSA World. At the beginning they thought only in ECSA Europe. But then they saw there are associations outside Europe, so they had to take this also into account. You are in a certain sense responsible for the existence of ECSA World.

DB: *[laughs]* I feel honoured for that.

About ECSA China

EB: If you think on all these years of the existence of ECSA China would you say there is an evolution or did it remain as it was in the beginning, a small association? What is your impression of the history of ECSA China?

DB: I think that especially after '75, after the European Community and China started formal relations, there was a boost for these kind of studies. People were getting interested. And I think during the '70s and the '80s is the period the European Community tried to expand quite rapidly. Of course, China and the EC relations developed very rapidly. That's really the boost, the stress for the development of the studies in China. I think that during the national conferences we registered membership of 200 to 300, or almost. To us the membership should be at the level of lecturers, and should not include students. I think that in '83 at the Fudan we started a master programme, a European Studies master programme, under the structure of what we called World Economy. That's the beginning of the [independent] European Studies. Now I think that in China there are several centres, that have also started teaching programmes, that's the training of the students, to attract young people to this kind of studies, to European studies. I think it is very important. Also I think that later on the Commission started the cooperation programme in higher education. That was a very important program when it came to expanding EU studies in China.

EB: Do you remember some talks with Émile Noël or Jacqueline Lastenouse about the role of ECSA on the European Studies in universities?

DB: Sure. You see, since the beginning, in China in the late '70s universities tried to establish connections with European universities, especially for European Studies. It was very, very important to study that. There's also cooperation among specific regions. I can mention Professor Tanaka [from Japan, past President of ECSA in this country]. I met Professor Tanaka in '84 in Europe. I think at the time he was working in the Japanese Embassy or something like that. So we started to cooperate.

European studies in China

EB: What's the situation nowadays in the European Studies in China?

DB: There is a second Commission programme for the European studies programme in China and I think they contribute a great deal. There is support: there are around 23 European Studies Centres in China. China is such a big country [laughs].

EB: [laughs] Of course.

DB: I think that is a peak of tide for the European studies in China. I remember professors and students who went to Europe, to European universities and institutions for a period of studies. After that I think it really depends on the universities to continue it. At the moment I think that the older centres are still working quite a lot. The main concentration is still in Beijing and Shanghai. The most important are Wuhan University and Sichuan University. In recent years, Sichuan University is doing quite well.

EB: Is there anything else you want to add about the history, the beginnings...?

DB: I think that Mme Lastenouse and Mr Noël gave very strong support to the development of the European Studies in China. They came to take part in our national conference for several times. I remember in Shanghai; the second time, the third time in Wuhan. The last time Mr Noël came to Tianjin. Each time we have different locations and they still came, so we became good friends.

EB: Someone was telling me that you translated the European Treaties into Chinese. Is this true?

DB: Yes, that is the truth. Formerly, of course, it was our Minister for Foreign Relations that translated these kinds of treaties; there's a special department for translating the international treaties into Chinese. So we have

the version of the EC treaties, the three treaties in Chinese. A quite early version, but in older Chinese and the treaties have been revised for so many times. It was in the late '70, and I thought it would be important to have them, because it was basic documentation. I thought we should translate them; we should try to translate them into Chinese, the EC treaties. So I have done that [laughs]. It was the most difficult job I have ever done.

EB: So you have entered the history of European Studies.

DB: In the '80s I got the prize, the Jean Monnet prize... I was quite surprised. I asked "why?" [laughs]. They said: "You translated the treaties into Chinese. It means you have read them all at least once. In China you must be the one to read all of our publications" [laughs].

EB: [laughs] Professor Bingham, many thanks.

DB: It's my pleasure, if I could contribute to write the history of European Studies.

EB: Yes, this is one more cornerstone in the history we have been collecting for the last two years.

DB: I must say again that European Studies started much earlier than me. I could not accept that they call me the father of European Studies in China. [laughs]

EB: [laughs] But you were the son who was sent to Europe.

DB: I am the connector.

EB: Right. You established the bridge.

DB: [laughs] That is my contribution.

EB: This is a very decisive contribution.

DB: My contribution to build that bridge of the European studies in China with the European Studies in Europe.

EB: In that sense thanks a lot and we will publish this in one of our next newsletters. Thank you, Professor!