

**CHAMBERS** By Ned Kelly

## That's Shanghai? That's Amore!

*How the China-Italy Chamber of Commerce serenaded the city*

The year is 49 B.C. and Julius Caesar heads back towards Italy after an all-conquering campaign in Gaul. He is facing an agonising decision: Give up his army – and power – and face political marginalization, or cross the Rubicon and declare war on the Roman state. Uttering the immortal words, “The die is cast,” he crossed the river and assured spurious mentions of his name in magazines for millennia to come. Fast forward to 2008 and the CICC have a quandary their own: Stay in Puxi in a venue too small for their purposes, or cross the Huangpu, and risk losing their loyal following.

Just like their most famous son, they took the gamble, and once again the crossing of a river turned out to be a masterstroke as the 4th Italian Song Festival in Shanghai – The Best Years of Our Lives, on October 10 – attracted

more people than ever before; the location, Malone’s Pudong, offered a modern, stylish facility, fully equipped to accommodate an enthusiastic audience who filled the place to capacity.

Organized by the CICC with the support of the Italian Cultural Office, and with the artistic direction of Ermanno Cima Vivarelli and Alice Cosulich, over 500 CICC members, their families, friends and anybody who is passionate about Italy turned out to celebrate 40 years of Italian cultural history, with images from movies that have become icons of the Dolce Vita and the Italian lifestyle, plus the performance of songs expressing the progress of Italian society which sparked happy memories (and joyous crowd participation) from those who have cherished these melodies over the years.

Displaying the famously warm,



demonstrative family- and community-oriented character of the Italians which clearly makes the CICC proud, all proceeds resulting from ticket sales and sponsor donations will be used to support a charity organization in Beijing dedicated to the help and support of disabled and abandoned children. Bravo!



“Some spirited gentlemen thinking that tea, silk and Manchester goods, however important they were from a mercantile standpoint, were not sufficient food for the mind created a literary and scientific association.”

In a city where the pursuit of loot remains the overriding preoccupation of the populace, these words, describing the 1857 formation of what was soon to become the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai, will still strike a chord inside those citizens with a hunger for intellectual and cultural stimulation. It was in this belief that the RAS China was resurrected in the city in 2007.

In its original incarnation, the RAS, which ceased to function in 1952, laid out its threefold aims: the investigation of subjects connected with China and the surrounding nations; the publication of papers in a Journal; and the formation

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## Return of the RAS

*This once neglected city appreciation society is ready for a revival – with a little help from you*

of a library and a museum. All of which it went about achieving with gusto, building up a library – of over 40,000 books – now incorporated into the Shanghai library and still accessible – and a museum, many of whose displays can now be seen in the Shanghai Natural History Museum.

Accomplishments that current president Peter Hibbard hopes to emulate. “We are getting on our feet again, and have good personnel in place.” he said, “But we need members, and we need people with something to give, whether that be time, money or venues. The key is finding a permanent home – that really would be something to give.”

The society hosts monthly lectures and RAS Studio events: a more informal platform for members and visitors to share what interests them about the city. And they have begun to put together a new library (“Where is it?” “Piling up in the VP’s office...” Hibbard replies with a wry smile) the nucleus of which they hope to be recovered RAS Shanghai Journals, 80 of which – dating from 1859 to 1948 – were found in a Beijing bookstore.

As well as publishing articles that advanced scholarship on an eclectic range of subjects (including the Chinese language, botany, ornithology, minorities, chess and medicine), the journals serve as a fascinating archive of the society’s activities and membership over a tumultuous span of history. “We want to make it a public thing,” says Hibbard, “These are the people who made Shanghai what it is, up to the present day.”

There are also plans to revive the journal, to document the new chapter in the society’s history, and to publish original research. “Our aim is to save Shanghai heritage, to explore and add to it, and pass it onto the future Shanghai,” Said Hibbard.

“I do what I believe in,” He added, “and I believe in Shanghai.”

They are sentiments it is hard not to get enthused by, whether you are an academic ensconced in an ivory tower or a shoestrapping traveler who simply enjoys a good tale. And this city is full of them. Ones that demand to be heard. \To become involved with the RAS China e-mail enquiries@royalasiatic-society.org.cn or visit www.royalasiaticsociety.org.cn