



Association for Asian Studies

825 Michigan Way, Suite 310
Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA
Phone: (734) 665-2490
Fax: (734) 665-3801

February 9, 2021

President and Vice-Chancellor Rocky S. Tuan, and Provost Alan K. L. Chan
Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, Hong Kong SAR

Dear President and Vice Chancellor Tuan, and Provost Chan,

As the largest international scholarly and professional association open to all persons interested in the study of Asia, representing approximately 6,500 members worldwide, we at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) write to express our concern over the proposed restructuring of your distinguished university's Universities Service Centre for China Studies (USC). The missions of AAS and USC are so closely aligned that in 1959, then AAS president John King Fairbank convened a meeting in New York to consider how to expand studies of contemporary China with the aim of establishing what has now become the USC. Following that meeting, he yielded to those who believed that the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) were better poised than the AAS to establish such an organisation. As a result, the SSRC and ACLS Joint Committee on Contemporary China determined that the organisation that is now the USC should be founded. However, the AAS through its many members retains an encompassing interest in the future of the USC as an independent organisation providing the services for which it was founded.

When the USC was seeking a new permanent home in the 1980s, several Hong Kong universities expressed an interest in hosting the Centre, but the Chinese University of Hong Kong was chosen for the strength of its international scholarly reputation. CUHK is one of the leading institutions of higher learning in the world and has provided a beneficial home for the USC for many years. We greatly appreciate the considerable investment CUHK has made in the Centre since 1991, and recognise that the proposed plans, including digitisation of its collection, will involve even more investment moving forward. We welcome CUHK's commitment to the Centre's continued role in the global community of Asian scholars.

At the same time, given CUHK's long history of support for the USC, we are deeply concerned to have learned of the proposed plans to reorganise the USC. While we recognise the importance of preserving the USC's collection of original historic materials, we are troubled by public comments that after reorganisation, the Centre will cease to exist. The

paramount goals should be to keep the Centre's collection intact, maintain its valuable services, and preserve its independence in order to guarantee continued access to the collection by all scholars regardless of institutional affiliation. As an independent research unit that provides desk and office space for visiting scholars, hosts regular academic talks at lunchtime on site, and organises the very successful annual graduate student conference, the USC is far more than simply a collection of documents, periodicals, and volumes. The core of the Centre, as the name itself indicates, is the services it provides, which are best delivered as an independent centre set within a university. Such services facilitate the production of scholarship, an area of notable international success for the USC over six decades. Therefore, preserving the USC as an internationally accessible centre for research and learning can only buttress CUHK's international reputation for academic excellence.

Because the USC has served so many of our members, past and present, the AAS has an abiding interest in the future success of the Centre. We therefore request that the implementation of any reorganisation be delayed in order to allow for a full and transparent process of consultation involving all stakeholders, including all long-term USC staff, former directors of the USC, the members of the advisory board, and long-standing alumni who continue to make frequent use of the Centre and its holdings, and to maintain close ties with the USC and its staff.

Respectfully yours,

Association for Asian Studies
Board of Directors