



10-1-1994

# From the Chairperson

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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Klein, Ken (1994) "From the Chairperson," *Journal of East Asian Libraries*: Vol. 1994 : No. 104 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jeal/vol1994/iss104/2>

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# *From the Chairperson*

October 15, 1994

Yen t'ieh lun (Discourses on Salt and Iron) is Huan K'uan's version of a debate which took place in 81 B.C. about state policy towards commerce and monopoly control over coinage and production of basic commodities. The excerpt shown on the cover comes from the end of chapter four, in which the Confucian literati relate the dangers of a debased currency and argue against establishing central control over production and trade. They also warn against ignoring foreigners.

Since mid-summer, CEAL has been involved in a dispute with exporters of Chinese publications over the methods used for pricing books. Our complaints have centered over the proposal to base prices on an arbitrarily fixed RMB-to-dollar exchange rate for books, on the one hand, and on the attempt to impose this policy over all export companies through a cartel arrangement. The outcome of our agitation remains to be seen, but what is almost as important, to my mind, is the process we used to confront the issue.

Through the use of fax machines and email, primarily, the issues were debated, opinions were exchanged, drafts of letters were circulated, and a unified stance was galvanized. A rapid concensus was developed and communicated back to China. A few years ago, this process would have taken months and the offensive policy would have been put into practice before any but disparate protests could have been registered. We now have within our means technologies which allow CEAL to operate as a more effective organization for advocacy; we can even coordinate our initiatives with our colleagues in Europe and Australia, if that happens to make sense.

This is not to say that we are spoiling for more fights, but that as we continue to rethink what sort of an organization CEAL should be, we should not overlook the new arrows in our quiver.

