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Looking Back after Half a Century

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Dr. Chen Fong Ching obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Physics from Harvard University and PhD in Physics from Brandeis University. He joined the Department of Physics of The Chinese University of Hong Kong as Lecturer in 1966 and was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1977. He was made University Secretary in 1980 and Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies in 1986. Dr. Chen is a distinguished scholar and university administrator who has rendered nearly half a century of outstanding service to The Chinese University. He is currently Honorary Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Senior College Tutor of United College, and Honorary Professor of the Department of Physics. Dr. Chen was awarded Zhu Kezhen History of Science Visiting Professorship by the Institute of History of Natural Science of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2004.

In this article, Dr. Chen Fong Ching reviews his teaching, administrative and research work at the Chinese University over a period of almost half a century, during which he has made impacts on the development of the University and the promotion of Chinese Culture.

It has been nearly half a century since I returned to teach at the Chinese University of Hong Kong after completing my studies in 1966. During the past 50 years, Hong Kong has undergone enormous change and the Chinese University of Hong Kong has thrived. I myself have also experienced several twists and turns in my own research and career. Looking back, I can divide this long period into three 14-year phases.

In the first 14 years from 1966 to 1980, I started my career at the Department of Physics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Apart from teaching and research, I also participated in university affairs. Life was busy and pleasant. Sometimes I would give general lectures and write essays for newspapers and magazines. Other than that, I did not have the opportunity to touch upon liberal arts subjects, although I had developed an interest in the liberal arts as a middle school student.

With much freedom over course selection back in my college days, I spent about one third of my time on literature, history and philosophy. As a result, certain vague ideas began fermenting in my mind during my first 14 years at the Department of Physics. However, the division between different disciplines was rigid in the 1950s and 1960s. Scientific education focused purely on science. Other aspects, such as the effects of science on society and humanity as a whole, were rarely paid any attention. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, regarded as an alternative popular science book, was published in the year I completed my university education. Ten years later, E F Schumacher's book *Small Is Beautiful* became popular, but that was all. The history of science and its philosophical and religious background were still a blank field for most scientists, including me, even though I had some curiosity that went beyond science itself. In 1980, I went to work at the University Secretariat and spent six years there. This was an important interregnum in my academic career. It allowed me to stop and think about my future life and work. I also got the chance to write and present articles to the public, which brought me the opportunity to work at the Institute of Chinese Studies.

I thus stepped into the second 14-year period (1986–2000). At that time, the Institute of Chinese Studies was not very active and aroused little attention. Only one of its units, the Art Museum, occasionally held exhibitions with exciting opening ceremonies that attracted some interest. While working at the institute on existing projects such as archaeological excavations and the publication of translations, I also promoted new developments such as the founding of the journal *Newsletter of Chinese Language*, but I put most of my effort into three other areas. Firstly, I collaborated with Professor King Ambrose Yeo-chi, Professor Jin Guantao and Professor Liu Qingfeng to found the journal *Twenty-First Century* to provide a platform for communication among Chinese intellectuals around the world. Secondly, I established the Research Centre for Contemporary Chinese Culture, through which we organised many lectures and seminars and published many influential books, including the ten volumes of *History of the People's Republic of China*. Thirdly, working with Professor Lau Din Cheuk, I built a database of traditional Chinese ancient texts, and published more than 60 indexes of related texts based on the database. Later I also collaborated with Professor Jao Tsung I to include excavated ancient texts in the database and promote relevant publications. The smooth development of these projects was due to several factors. First, the institute itself had certain resources. More importantly, we got support from the university, especially from President Kao Kuen. In founding *Twenty-First Century*, for instance, we encountered many obstacles, but President Kao Kuen was among the few to fully support the concept of the journal. We were also very lucky that the Hong Kong government began implementing new policies in the 1980s that included financial support for university research. Otherwise projects such as the ancient text database would have been impossible.

Apart from institutional affairs, I also did some research myself. I was interested in comparative research on modernisation at the time. The core issue was why the outcomes of modernisation were so different among non-Western countries. Although Western scholars used to answer this question by applying a sociological view, the attempt was unsuccessful. The drastic change in Russia later further proved that these opinions were one-sided. I therefore decided to study the question all over again. The first country I explored was Turkey. Although in the long-term confrontation with Europe, Turkey had become the "sick man of the Near East", it finally recovered under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was deeply admired by Sun Yat-sen. Unlike the situation in China under the Manchu reign, several successful centralised monarchs emerged in Turkey. However, all of their reforms failed in the end because the Islamic conservatives were too powerful. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the only one who saw through the situation and resolutely got rid of this obstacle. The case of Russia was even more peculiar. Modernisation in Russia started at the beginning of the 18th century. With absolute power, the Russian tsar pushed through a top-down modernisation without being hindered by either internal obstacles or external intervention. Compared with China, which struggled for reform between domestic troubles and foreign invasions, Russia was much more fortunate. However, after 200 years of endeavour, modernisation failed in Russia also. Why? In my opinion, the process of modernisation is affected by different types of factors, namely, random factors (such as the combination of individuals)

and structural factors (such as society and cultural traditions). These two types of factors interact with one another. In the book *Understanding Imperial Russia*, Marc Raeff stated that although the tsar had a strong mind and great power, he lacked an understanding of the fundamental meaning of ‘modern’ that meant that his efforts were in vain. I found the analysis very insightful. I also studied why Spain, an advanced and powerful maritime empire in the 16th century, was reduced to a mere appendage in the battle for supremacy between Britain and France in the 18th century, and why Japan, a disunited feudal country in the early 19th century, rapidly came to dominate East Asia within a mere 30 years. Although I expended a lot of effort exploring these questions in the 1990s, they were vast and complicated, and I did not have the time to dig deep enough. Apart from academic articles, I compiled a translation collection of *The World under the Impact of Modernization* consisting of six kinds of books (Academia Press, Shanghai, 1996). The collection attracted quite a lot of attention and two of the books were reprinted.

Fortuitously, I also became interested in the history of science. At first, I studied the history of Chinese astronomy to prepare lecture notes, and got to know the first ancient astronomical text in China, the *Zhou Bi Suan Jing*. Later, I wrote a research article on this ancient text for an international conference on sinology. I thus became interested in Chinese mathematics, and wrote several articles on the topic in succession. At the end of 1997, I published the article “Why Did Modern Science Arise in the West?” in *Twenty-First Century*. This was the beginning of the book *Heritage and Betrayal: A Treatise on the Emergence of Modern Science in Western Civilization*.

I was 60 years old at the turn of the century. It was time for me to think about retirement. The Institute of Chinese Studies had recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. To mark the event, I wrote and edited the book *Growing up with The Chinese University: CUHK and ICS: A Photo History, 1949–1997*. The book was published in 2000, and thus marked the end of my second 14 years.

After serving the Chinese University of Hong Kong for 36 years, I retired in 2002. Freed from institutional affairs, I was able to devote all my time to academic research. I felt completely relieved, and a whole new world awaited me. In that year, I had a collection of papers published: *On the Threshold of the Brave New World: Selected Papers 1984–2000*. I was also invited by Professor Tang Yijie to speak at the Cai Yuanpei Lectures and the Tang Yongtong Lectures at Peking University. My lectures focused on past critics of science and philosophy and current ideas about freedom and equality. These lectures were later collected and published by the Peking University Press. The following year I accepted Professor Chen Shaoming’s invitation to give several lectures on the relationship between science and other disciplines at the Department of Philosophy of the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. The lectures were also arranged into several papers for later publication.

The most influential event in my academic research was an invitation from Professor Liu Dun to be the Zhu Kezhen History of Science Visiting Professor at the Institute of History of Natural Science of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2004. I mainly gave public lectures and courses for graduate students. I prepared about 100,000 words of lecture notes that basically depicted the embryo of Western scientific history, including its religious, academic and historical background. Ms Zhang Yanhua, an editor of the Joint Publishing Company who also came to my lectures, invited me to arrange my lecture notes for publication. I accepted without hesitation and promised to hand in the draft a year later. The idea proved naive, however, because my lecture notes were merely outlines, and needed further analysis and detailed discussion before they could be published as a proper academic work. I spent four years working on and putting together the materials. The book *Heritage and Betrayal: A Treatise on the Emergence of Modern Science in Western Civilization* was finally published in 2009. The development of science has lasted more than two thousand years in the West, and the emergence of the history of science as a subject can be traced back almost 100 years. My research mainly absorbed and combined previous achievements to develop an integrated and systematic history of Western science. Although there were not many original discoveries, I emphasised that the appearance of *Euclid’s Elements* in Ancient Greece was a breakthrough that represented the first revolution in the history of Western

science. In other words, Newton's Classical Mechanics was not the first but the second revolution in Western science. Although this idea was not previously unknown, no one had pointed it out directly. How did the scientific revolution emerge in Ancient Greece? It was closely related to the pursuit of universal mysteries by the mystical Pythagorean School, and especially their worship of 'numbers'. Interestingly and paradoxically, Western science emerged from religion. In ancient times, only religion and its doctrine of eternal life had the magical power to attract and motivate the most talented people at the time to devote themselves to researching impractical abstract ideas and theories. As a matter of fact, the Christian doctrines of the immortal soul and eternal life for humans did not exist in Hebrew Monotheism. The origin was also probably related to the Pythagorean School.

I was prompted mainly by the *Zhou Bi Suan Jing* to explore the origin of Western science. The *Zhou Bi Suan Jing* and the *Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art* are the two treasured classics of ancient Chinese mathematics. However, in depth and precision of thought, they can hardly be compared to *Euclid's Elements*, which emerged in a similar period or even earlier. Tracing back the roots of *Euclid's Elements* throws up two clues. The first is ancient Babylonian mathematics. Emerging around 1900–1600 BC, the period of the Xia and Shang dynasties in China, ancient Babylonian mathematics far surpassed the *Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art* in various respects. The existence of systematic ways of solving quadratic equations was one example. The other clue was Pythagoras. The mystical school he founded is closely related to the entire academic tradition in the West, including Plato and his Academy. For instance, according to the *Dialogues of Plato: The Republic*, the leaders of a country should receive training in rational thinking through the "Four Arts", namely music, astronomy, mathematics and geometry. This idea was borrowed from the Pythagorean School. In China, such an idea would barely have been accepted, let alone further developed. However, in the West, Pythagoras became the symbol of the fountain of wisdom. His constant influence could still be felt in the 17th century, when Kepler was still deeply engrossed in certain peculiar ideas of the Pythagorean School. I spent a lot of time studying Pythagoras and his influence before I finally reached my conclusion about 'the first scientific revolution' mentioned earlier. I also started to question Joseph Needham. On the one hand, he overly exaggerated and praised the achievements of ancient Chinese science and technology (actually mainly technology). On the other hand, he denigrated ancient Greek science (especially mathematics) and ignored the connections between Islamic and European science in medieval times. For me, these opinions were too subjective. While Chinese people often felt pride because of Joseph Needham's arguments, such blind optimism was not helpful for the development of contemporary Chinese culture.

The next question is how we compare the ancient science of China with that of the West. As a matter of fact, the *Zhou Bi Suan Jing* is almost the only book in ancient China that accords with the modern scientific spirit. It proposes an operational model of the Sun to explain the natural phenomena of sunrise, sunset, longer daytime in summer and shorter daytime in winter, and so on. The model is also extended to explain daytime and night-time during summer and winter at the North Pole and the Equatorial areas. These explanations were based on fundamental assumptions obtained through mathematical deduction. However, the book was later negated due to apparent defects, and its mode of thinking was ignored and forgotten. Of course, the book of *Mozi* also contained certain scientific observations, such as the observation of lenses. These were the only achievements in ancient Chinese science that were comparable to those of ancient Greece. Unfortunately, such paltry achievements were not able to flourish in Chinese culture. Both the *Zhou Bi Suan Jing* and *Mozi* were later completely neglected and forgotten. Why did ancient China lack the grounds for the growth of analytical and theoretical science? An apparent answer is that the Chinese were too practical to become interested in theoretical discoveries that lacked obvious practical value, whereas people in ancient Greece loved analytical thinking. However, there may be a deeper reason. Most people in ancient Greece were practical too, which can be seen from the fact that Greek comedy often made fun of philosophers. In my opinion, the deeper reason is that, rather than a homogeneous society, ancient Greece consisted of several hundred independent city states in different regions. It thus contained numerous heterogeneous factors. Unique ideas and thoughts beyond the dominant

stream were therefore able to find a niche in which to survive, or to transfer to other niches during times of radical change. By contrast, China achieved a grand political unification ('the entire world under the sky belongs to the empire') and an almost homogeneous cultural atmosphere from very early times. Such a society was not only unfavourable for the development of unique thought and ideas, but also unfavourable for people of exceptional thinking to find a niche in which to survive. I once wrote an article about the paradoxical development of traditional mathematics in China: in the 'golden ages' (such as the Han, Tang and Northern Song dynasties), mathematics did not involve much creativity, whereas in 'declining times' (such as the Wei-Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties and the period between the Song and Yuan dynasties), mathematics experienced surprising growth. The key reason is that during a decline, the country underwent disruption and orthodox culture decayed. Alternative thought and ideas were accordingly provoked and tolerated.

Overall, what features in ancient Chinese science is a practical spirit. This is most apparent in the powerful life of Chinese medicine. However, Chinese medical science is to a large extent not rational science but empirical science. Rather than seeking fundamental principles from natural phenomena to form a logical system, the 'theory' of Chinese medicine comprises largely empirical inductions from extensive practical experience. Certainly, for a highly complicated organism like the human body, the synthetic diagnostic method of Chinese medicine does show advantages in certain respects. It therefore survives today and has even won space for further development, rather than being eliminated by modern medical science, which is indeed a miracle.

Although the history of science as a subject in the West can be traced back almost two hundred years, as a university subject it only dates back to the 1920s, less than 100 years ago. However, since the 1960s, it has begun to develop at a tremendous speed. In China, the history of science is still at its beginning. Although scholars such as Li Yan and Qian Baocong started to study the history of mathematics and astronomy, respectively, in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until the 1980s that the history of science was included as a university subject. As for Hong Kong, to my knowledge there are even fewer scholars of the history of science. Unfortunately, such a poor situation cannot easily be changed in the near future.

The importance of the history of science lies not only in its relationship to science itself, but also in its connection with the origin of Western civilisation in its entirety. As a result, the two questions of why modern science first appeared in the West and why the modern world first emerged in the West are two sides of the same coin. Since the May Fourth era, Chinese people have been longing to learn from the West. However, to really understand the West and the modern world, we have to study the formation of Western civilisation over the long term rather than merely looking at its political and economic development in the past one or two hundred years. That is why I consider the history of Western science (and certainly the history of religion and thought) to be a subject that is in need of urgent and careful study by the Chinese. Of course, it is a long-term project that cannot be achieved by one or two individuals or one or two universities, but requires the transformation of the ideas and thinking of the whole nation.

Now the third 14-year period of my life at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has passed. There is still a long road ahead. I only wish more people would join me on this road.

Göran Malmqvist and CUHK:2014

Interview Excerpts

Professor Göran Malmqvist

When Professor Göran Malmqvist, the first Jao-Tsung I Visiting Professor, visited CUHK in March 2014, the associate director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Professor Lai Chi-tim, took this precious opportunity to visit him. Professor Lai wanted to know about Professor Malmqvist's relationship with the CUHK, his latest research topics and achievements, and his expectations for the future development of Chinese Studies at CUHK. The following are excerpts from the interview.

I undertook two years of fieldwork for a dialect survey in Sichuan from 1948 to 1950, and then came to Hong Kong in July 1950 when I was 26 and lived here for some time. I paid a visit to Mr Qian Mu (錢穆) who had established the New Asia College. He was already a very established and renowned scholar, but he received me warmly although I was just a young scholar at that time. We talked about the sinology research of my teacher, the sinologist Bernhard Karlgren (高本漢). I began to have contact with CUHK in the 1990s, serving as a visiting scholar for *Renditions* (《譯叢》) for seven months, and also several times as an outside reviewer for the Department of Chinese Language and Literature and the Department of Translation. I gave a public lecture on the metrical pattern of poetry by the Song dynasty poet Xin Qiji (辛棄疾), and another on Kang Youwei (康有為) and his *Da Tong Shu* (大同書, 'The Book of Great Unity') for the Department of Chinese Language and Literature. This article was published in 1991 in the third issue of the journal *Twenty-first Century* (《二十一世紀》) under the title 'Exploring the Differences of the Views on Utopia between China and the West from the Research on *Da Tong Shu*'. At that time I first met the Chinese writers Mo Yan and Han Shaogong at the Department of Chinese Language and Literature.

I undertook a lot of translation work after I retired in 1990. I translated *Outlaws of the Marsh* (《水滸傳》) into Swedish in the 1970s and *Journey to the West* (《西遊記》) in the 1990s. I spent a year and a half on the translation of *Journey to the West*, but only 26 weeks on *Outlaws of the Marsh*. This is because I had already read this novel many times and was familiar with its language. I also translated the poetry of Beidao (北島), Gu Cheng (顧城) and several other poets within the Mist School of Poetry (朦朧詩派), and the works of Shanxi writers such as Li Rui (李銳) and Cao Naiqian (曹乃謙). I also translated some Taiwanese poetry. I cooperated with Xi Mi (奚密) to compile an English *Anthology of 20th Century Taiwan Poems*, which contains the works of fifty Taiwanese poets, including Lo Fu (洛夫), Ya Xian (痲弦), Shang Qin (商禽), Luo Men (羅門) and Xiang Yang (向陽). I took greatly to the poetry of the Taiwanese poet Yang Mu, so I translated his works into Swedish a few years ago.

My current research work for roughly the past year has been on the relationship between old pre-Qin Chinese texts and the spoken Chinese of that time. Hu Shi (胡適) argues in his *History of Chinese Vernacular Literature* (《白話文學史》) that the classical Chinese language (文言文) has been dead for 2000 years. I agree with him. I think classical Chinese after the Han Dynasty had nothing to do with the spoken Chinese of that time. However, the old pre-Qin Chinese had many different variants, for example, the old Chinese in *Mencius* (《孟子》) is distinct from that of *Zuo Zhuan* (《左傳》), *Xun Zi* (《荀子》), *Zhuang Zi* (《莊子》) and *Mo Zi* (《墨子》) in grammatical structure. I argue that the old Chinese used in the *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *Zuo Zhuan* and *Mo Zi* had a very close relationship with the oral language of that time. I have done some research on this. I found a vivid and dramatic dialogue between the King of Chu and his general on a chariot in *Zuo Zhuan*. I used the old Chinese phonetic alphabet to spell out these paragraphs to find out how many homophones there were. I found that 30 per cent of the words did not have homophones, especially the most commonly used words such as ‘ye’ and ‘wei’; and that 15 per cent of the words did have homophones. Usually, within a pair of homophones, one is a noun or a pronoun that cannot be negated and the other is a verb or adjective that can be negated. I hope to continue this research using different texts such as *Zhuang Zi* and *Hui Zi* to launch a comparative study. Early Swedish sinologists held the idea that pre-Qin Chinese was a dead language, but my supervisor Bernhard Karlgren and French sinologist Henri Maspéro oppose this view. Henri Maspéro contends that the discourse in *Mo Zi* is close to the spoken language of that time.

Last month, I noticed a scholar named Zhou Shoujuan (周瘦鵑) to whom I had not paid attention before. I think his contribution to translation is much more significant than that of Lin Shu (林紓). He translated foreign literary works into four different languages: pre-Qin Chinese, traditional Chinese, vernacular Chinese like that used in *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and the modern Chinese of his time. In 1915 he published *An Anthology of European and American Short Fiction*, which includes works by 48 famous writers in Europe and the USA. The language of the translation is very beautiful, but his contribution has not been fully recognised. He even translated the works of two famous Swedish writers, August Strindberg and Selma Lagerlöf. I converted the translation of the latter back into Swedish and then compared my translation with the original, through which I discovered that Zhou’s translation was really good. I wrote an article about this and shared it with academicians at the Swedish Academy. This is part of my recent work of exploring contributions to the translation of Western literature by Chinese translators during the May Fourth era. I also looked up the introduction and translation of Nordic literature in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (《小說月報》) from its very first issue. Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing, 沈雁冰) and his brother Shen Zemin (沈澤民) both took part in this translation work. Shen Zemin was a young Chinese Communist Party member then, and his interest in and translation of a nineteenth-century Swedish romantic poet is very interesting to me. I also intend to explore other translators who have translated Swedish literature into Chinese, such as Guo Moruo (郭沫若) and Zhou Zuoren (周作人). All of these examples prove the great Chinese interest in European and especially Nordic literature at that time. Many journalists have asked me when Chinese literature will reach the level of World Literature. My argument is that the *Book of Songs* (《詩經》), a work of literature with a 3000-year history, can be considered one of the greatest poems in World Literature. The categorisation of different literary genres in *Wen Xin Diao Long* (《文心雕龍》) is much more progressive than that of Europe in the same period. When Wang Wei (王維), Li Bai (李白) and Du Fu (杜甫) appeared during the Tang Dynasty, there was only spoken language in Northern Europe. So I think that China reached the level of World Literature

2000 years earlier than Europe.

Translation plays a critical role in disseminating literature. There are two major responsibilities for translators. One is a responsibility towards the author: they cannot add or delete original text at will. The other is a responsibility towards readers: for example, the badly written poems in *Outlaws of the Marsh* should be strictly translated into bad poems according to the original text, without rewriting them into good poems. Therefore, regarding the generally held standards of translation, ‘faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance’ (信達雅), I do not agree with the last. I think that translation ought to be true to the original text. When I translate farmers’ discourses in the novels of Li Rui and Cao Naiqian, I do not change those discourses into elegant or beautiful language. Cao Naiqian uses lots of dirty words and swearing to express certain feelings of his protagonists; I have to invent corresponding words to achieve the same effect. Many Chinese translators do good work translating foreign works into Chinese, but usually fail when doing the reverse.

When I served as president of the European Association for Chinese Studies, I invited about 100 sinologists to work on an English book, *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900–1949*, for which I was chief editor. It has four volumes: one contains 100 novels, one 100 short stories, one 100 poems and one 100 plays. The aim of this guide was to help us to remember these writers. Now a Chinese publisher is preparing to release a Chinese version of this book. Literary critic David Der-Wei Wang (王德威) has affirmed the significance of this guide, and the new journal *Literature* (《文學》), sponsored by Fudan University, is now organising a group of scholars to comment on the book.

Finally, because I always work by myself, I think highly of the working conditions of scholars at CUHK. Both the Department of Chinese Language and Literature and the Department of Translation with its *Renditions* have made a great contribution to translation. I believe that the Department of Chinese Language and Literature could make even greater achievements given its strength. Rather than the concept of ‘Chinese Literature’ (中國文學), I personally prefer the concept of ‘Written Chinese Literature’ (中文文學), that is, all Chinese literary writing. I think that CUHK should cooperate more with world-famous sinologists and translators and invite them to discuss issues of translation here. This would be really worthwhile work.

Young Scholars' Forum in Chinese Studies

The first Young Scholars' Forum in Chinese Studies was held successfully during 18 – 20 June 2014 at the Institute of Chinese Studies. We are also pleased to have Professor Sang Bing, Yat-sen Chair Professor of Sun Yat-sen University to conduct a keynote speech at the opening ceremony.

The Forum attracted thirty young scholars from Europe, Asia and local institutions. Professors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong met with participants and discuss their work in the paper presentation sessions. Participants found these discussions and the Professor's comments extremely beneficial.



OBITUARY

T.T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre (CLRC) mourns the passing of Dr. Felix Ching-him Wong, former Executive Editor of *Newsletter of Chinese Language*, on June 3, 2014. After he graduated from CUHK, Dr. Wong studied in Tokyo University and SOAS, University of London and received his doctoral degree from the University of Hong Kong. He joined the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at CUHK as Lecturer in December 2010 and served as Executive Editor of *Newsletter of Chinese Language* of CLRC from 2012 until he left CUHK in mid 2013. Dr. Wong devoted much of his time and energy towards the development of *Newsletter of Chinese Language* during his serving as Executive Editor.

2014 ICS Luncheon III

Cantonese and Chinese: What are the Controversies and Why?

Tang Sze-Wing is Associate Professor in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature and Director of the T T Ng Chinese Language Research Centre of the Institute of Chinese Studies.

Professor Tang Sze-Wing received his BA and MPhil degrees in Chinese language and literature from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and completed his doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Irvine. His research interests lie primarily in Chinese syntax, theoretical approaches to the study of Chinese dialects and comparative grammar. Professor Tang is currently Vice-Chairman (Curriculum and Administration) of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Director of the T T Ng Chinese Language Research Centre of the Institute of Chinese Studies and Chief Editor of *Studies in Chinese Linguistics* and *Newsletter of Chinese Language*.

At the ICS Luncheon on 31 March 2014, Tang Sze-Wing, Associate Professor in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature and Director of the T T Ng Chinese Language Research Centre at the Institute of Chinese Studies, presented his research in a talk entitled ‘Cantonese and Chinese: What are the Controversies and Why?’.

In his talk, Professor Tang first reviewed several recent controversies concerning the status of Cantonese in Hong Kong, including “Cantonese as an official language or a dialect?”, “Cantonese being ‘demonised’?” and “the problems with ‘Putonghua as Medium of Instruction (PMI)’”. In late January of this year, an article entitled “Language Learning Support” was posted on the website of the Education Bureau, in which Cantonese was referred to in parentheses as “a Chinese dialect that is not used as an official language”. This statement has become the current focus of public debate. The Education Bureau later removed the article from the website and posted another article entitled “Clearing the Air for the Policy of Bi-literacy and Trilingualism” on 2 February. The new article cited the relevant regulation in the *Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (Article 9) that “In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language”, and the rule in the *Official Languages Ordinance* (Chapter 5 Section 3) that the “English and Chinese languages are declared to be the official languages of Hong Kong”. The two articles aroused heated discussions in various newspaper columns and websites.

Professor Tang addressed each of these controversies concerning the use of Cantonese. First, the original wording used in the article on the website of the Education Bureau is “法定語言”, not “法定語文”, a term that has an “official” status in the *Official Languages Ordinance* (Section 3 of Chapter 5). In Chinese “語言” and “語文” are not the same. The former generally refers to the spoken form of a language while the latter covers both the spoken and written forms though both of them could also be translated as “official language” in English. What we know is the statutory status of “Chinese” in Hong Kong and “Chinese” is not defined clearly in the *Official Languages Ordinance* or in the *Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*. Whether Cantonese should be considered an “official language” in the above official documents is rather vague and would be a legal issue, not a linguistic issue.

The second controversy focuses on whether Cantonese is a dialect. A number of articles and criticisms about the status of Cantonese were published in local newspapers and have attracted the attention of many readers. A definition of “dialect”

that has been widely accepted by dialectologists is that a dialect is a regional variety of a language. Contrary to “dialects”, a “common language” is the language that is shared by all the people in the country and is regarded as the standardised variety of the language. In the People’s Republic of China, “Putonghua” is the standardised common language and is regarded as the standard Chinese. Its sound system is from the Beijing dialect, its vocabulary is mainly from the northern dialects, and its grammar is based on the modern literary works written in vernacular Chinese. The rationale behind choosing the Beijing dialect/northern dialects as the base of the common language of China is associated with a range of non-linguistic factors, such as political, economic and cultural factors. A dialect should not be regarded as a degraded form of a language. Actually, every dialect is also a language. In *Language and Problems of Knowledge: The Managua Lectures*, Noam Chomsky states that the term language refers to “an individual phenomenon, a system represented in the mind/brain of a particular individual”. Cantonese is in fact a system that can be stored in the mind/brain of an individual, for example, a native speaker of Cantonese and thus should be an independent language in this sense. It is absolutely not contradictory to say that Cantonese is both a Chinese dialect and an independent human language.

A television programme produced by the Education Bureau to promote Putonghua in primary schools in 2004 was criticised in February this year for “demonising” Cantonese. Professor Tang clearly stated that all languages are equal. Neither local dialects nor the standard common language should be “demonised”.

The last issue concerns the long-standing debate on PMI (Putonghua as a Medium of Instruction). Back in 1991, there was a proposal by the Curriculum Development Council, in which it is clearly suggested that Putonghua learning elements should be incorporated into the Chinese language education curriculum as one entity and in the long term Putonghua should be adopted as the medium of instruction in the Chinese language education. The debate about PMI has returned to public attention, especially since the removal of a statement from the website of the Education Bureau in the beginning of this year, which says that “students from PMI secondary schools are not better or even worse than other students”. This aroused a great deal of controversy. According to the investigation of a PMI concern group, over 70% of local primary schools are PMI schools. It is expected that the number of PMI secondary schools would also be increasing.

Five major criticisms of PMI were summarized in Professor Tang’s talk: (1) Putonghua is neither vernacular Chinese, a written language, nor an elegant language; (2) learning Putonghua skills is different from Chinese language learning; (3) using a non-native language in class may reduce students’ initiatives to learn; (4) it is difficult to hire qualified teachers; and (5) PMI is a threat to the survival of Cantonese. The first criticism is a linguistic problem. The next three criticisms are only technical problems. The last criticism is a political problem, not a linguistic issue. Vernacular Chinese was originally used in popular literary works and gradually developed from colloquial languages of the Tang and Song Dynasties. It was not until the May Fourth era that vernacular Chinese became widely used in the society and was adopted as the written form of modern Chinese, on which Putonghua is based. To some extent, modern vernacular Chinese is Putonghua. Although Cantonese is used in those non-PMI schools to teach Chinese as the medium of instruction, it is modern vernacular Chinese that is taught, definitely not written Cantonese. Along these lines, shall we say that PMI has already been partially implemented in non-PMI schools, given that modern vernacular Chinese belongs to Putonghua? If there is no controversy over the written form taught in school, the spoken form becomes an issue. Professor Tang concluded that it would be feasible to separate the spoken form/medium of instruction (either in Cantonese or in the Beijing dialect) from the written form (i.e. modern vernacular Chinese) although consistency of the two forms would be more reasonable.

Considering the recent controversies concerning Cantonese, Professor Tang pointed out that they were closely due to social and political problems as well as some confusion over the linguistics terms, reflecting public ignorance about linguistics, which is a cause for concern. For the future development of Cantonese, we should cherish Cantonese and appreciate its real characteristics from an objective linguistic perspective on the one hand and should avoid being arrogant or having a sense of inferiority on the other hand.

Boulevard Echoes • Chinese Music Lunchtime Performance
jointly presented by the Institute of Chinese Studies and the
Department of Music



The Department of Music and the Institute of Chinese Studies co-organised another series of three lunchtime concerts, entitled 'Boulevard Echoes', which were held between February and April.

The concerts featured a selection of classical pieces, including *Xi yang yang* 喜洋洋, *Feng yang fa gu* 鳳陽花鼓 and *Bu bu gao* 步步高 for the full ensemble and for smaller combinations. The concerts drew audiences of more than 100, including the Vice-Chancellor and the University President, Professor Joseph Sung.

Various instruments were used for the performances included bowed string (e.g., Gaohe, Zhonghu and Erhu), plucked string (e.g., Pipa, Zhongruan, Sanxiao, Guzheng, Yangqin and Liuqin), wind (e.g., Dizi, Sheng and Xiao) and Chinese percussion instruments.



The Research Centre for Contemporary Chinese Culture

Conference on ‘Biographies and Databases for Modern China: Hong Kong and Shanghai’

A conference entitled ‘Biographies and Databases for Modern China: Hong Kong and Shanghai’, co-organised by the Research Centre of Contemporary Chinese Culture and the History Departments of Fudan University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, was successfully held on the 8th and 9th of May at the Institute of Chinese Studies, CUHK.



Twenty-one scholars from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong spoke on six major topics, namely, Hong Kong Business Families, the Building of a Biographical Database, Biographies on Political and Military Leaders, Stories of the Entrepreneurs, Research on Biographies, and Females and Artists. Participants at the Conference included Professors Xiong Yue Zhi and Jiang Yihua of Fudan University, Professors Ko-wu Huang and Kuo-hsing Hsieh of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, and Professors Leung Yuen Sang and Cheng Hwei Shing of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong for their kind sponsorship of this event.



中國文化研究所
近代人物傳記及數據庫建設
學術研討會
2014年5月8日及9日



Forum on University Chinese in the Four Year Curriculum



Co-organised by the T T Ng Chinese Language Research Centre, the Institute of Chinese Studies and the Chinese Language Teaching Development Centre of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, the 'Forum on University Chinese in the Four Year Curriculum' was held on April 25 at CUHK.



When the new four year undergraduate curriculum was launched in 2012, local tertiary institutions were required to introduce mandatory university Chinese language programmes for all students to enhance their language skills. At the forum, representatives from local universities presented updates on the progress in implementing their Chinese language programmes and shared their precious teaching and learning experience. The forum began with welcoming speeches by Professor Hau Kit-tai, Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Vice-President, and Professor Ho Che Wah, Chairman of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature, and ended with concluding remarks by Professor Tang Sze-Wing, Director of the T.T Ng Chinese Language Research Centre.

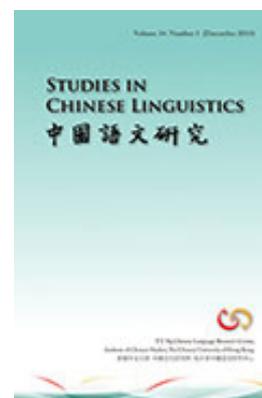
NEW PUBLICATIONS

***Studies in Chinese Linguistics* (Volume 34 Number 3) , T.T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre**

The latest issue of *Studies in Chinese Linguistics* (Volume 34 Number 3) was released in December 2013. This issue contains the following two articles:

1. Ting-Chi Wei: Fragment Question and Ellipsis in Chinese
2. Paul Law: Word-order and Constituent Structure in Naxi

PDF copies of these articles can be downloaded for free via <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/clrc/>.



The Bei Shan Tang Legacy: Chinese Calligraphy Education Gallery

– Art Museum

The Art Museum recently launched an exhibition of 100 pieces of calligraphic works from the Tang to the Qing Dynasty from the Bei Shan Tang collection. The exhibition, entitled ‘The Bei Shan Tang Legacy: Chinese Calligraphy’, is open to the public until November and entry is free. Bei Shan Tang was the name of the private studio of the late Dr Lee Jung Sen, and the Bei Shan Tang collection contains an extensive assortment of Chinese art and antiquities. It is especially renowned for its outstanding examples of Chinese calligraphy and paintings, most of which have been contributed to the Art Museum at CUHK. To showcase the Bei Shan Tang collection to the public in a comprehensive manner, the Art Museum has planned a series of themed exhibitions, of which ‘The Bei Shan Tang Legacy: Chinese Calligraphy’, which was jointly organised with the Department of Fine Arts, is the first.

The aim of the exhibition is to show visitors the aesthetics and culture of Chinese calligraphy. Chinese calligraphy possesses astounding beauty and a profound cultural legacy. Apart from the artistic skill and stylistic changes, these notable calligraphic works reflect the rise and fall of the dynasties, and the artist’s personality, sensibility and, in some cases, social life.

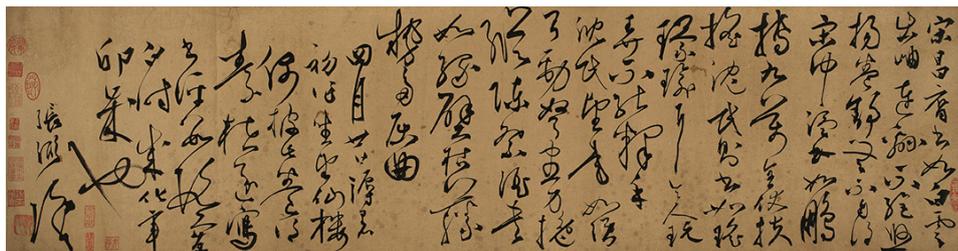
The exhibition, which is divided into two phases, features 100 pieces of calligraphic works from the Tang to the Qing Dynasty. The works include poems, letters, couplets, essays, manuscripts and Buddhist sutras. The highlights include the precious handwritings of the Chinese emperor, the exquisite works of esteemed calligraphers such as Ni Zan, Zhu Yunming, Wen Zhengming and Dong Qichang, and calligraphic works from Guangdong artists. The exhibition’s diverse categories and styles give visitors a thorough picture of the aesthetic and cultural characteristics of Chinese calligraphy. Six selected pieces are displayed below.



1. Anonymous
Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in Regular Script
Tang Dynasty
Handscroll, ink on hemp paper
25.4 x 680 cm



2. Emperor Ningzong (1194-1224) of the Song Dynasty
Birthday Poem for Empress Yang in Regular Script
Dated 1216
Album leaf, ink on silk
19.6 x 20.7 cm



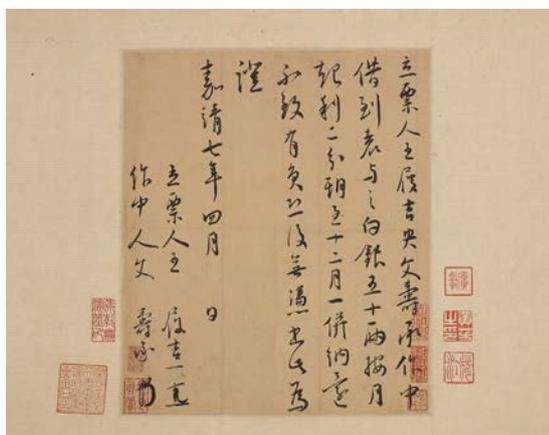
3. Zhang Bi (1425-1487)
Comment of Calligraphy in Cursive Script

Date 1471
Handscroll, ink on paper
25.6 x 102.5 cm



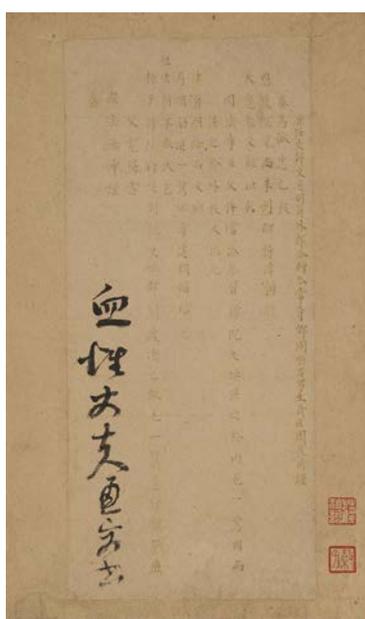
4. Wen Zhengming (1470-1559)
Ci-poem for Xu Lin in Running Script

Undated, 1528 or after
Hanging scroll, ink on paper
348 x 103 cm



5. Wang Chong (1494-1533)
Loan Agreement in Running Script

Dated 1528
Handscroll, ink on paper
24.3 x 21.5 cm (main body)



6. Zhou Maolan (1605-1686)
Memorial to the Throne

Undated, ca. 1628
Two handscrolls, blood on paper
28.8 x 72.5 cm (main body)

To complement the exhibition, the Art Museum and the Bei Shan Tang Foundation have also jointly provided an education gallery to arouse visitors' interests in and enhance their basic understanding of the art of Chinese calligraphy. A variety of public education programmes will also be launched, including a lecture series, guided tours, calligraphy workshops and demonstrations. For details, please visit <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/amm/>.

The three-volume exhibition catalogue is now available. The catalogue, which includes eight essays and introduces the 100 exhibits in both Chinese and English, serves as an important reference for studying the Bei Shan Tang Collection and Chinese calligraphy.

Details of the exhibition are as follows:

Exhibition Period : Phase I: 12 April – 3 August 2014

Phase II: 11 August – 16 November 2014

Exhibition Venue : Gallery II, III, IV, Art Museum, CUHK

Opening Hours : Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Sundays and Public Holidays 1:00 – 5:00 pm

Thursdays, New Year, Lunar New Year, Easter and Christmas Holidays Closed

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