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## Remembrance on the Eve of My Retirement

Tai-loi Ma

A few years back, Guoqing Li of Ohio State described me and some of my contemporaries still working as from an earlier generation, and he was correct. I remember quite vividly the anxiety of the library world when it had to change to AACR2 in the seventies. It was the Y2K problem of its day. It involved a lot of work, and everything was done manually. So before this old librarian fades away, he would like to recall a few events of his time which may be of interest to some younger colleagues.

Longevity has played a major role in my library career. I simply did things at an early stage and for a longer period of time. I am also fortunate to have met the right people at the right time. I served as the local guide for some first-time visitors to the States, including Gu Tinglong, Wu Xiaoling, Fu Xuancong, and An Pingqiu. It allowed me to have hours of private conversation, and in the case of Mr. Wu, days of discussion about traditional Chinese fiction.

I attended the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago from 1970 to 1972. I would not have come to the United States had I not received a full scholarship (tuition plus a monthly stipend of \$225). The Graduate Library School itself did not have much scholarship funding to distribute. Prof. T.H. Tsien must have convinced the School's Dean of Students to recommend me to the International House Fellowship committee. Among the application materials for admission I submitted was an article of mine which cited but disagreed with Dr. Tsien. It was evident that he did not take offence. I was also the only MA student in the Far Eastern Librarianship Program. My classmates, including David Tsai, Ming-sun Poon and James Cheng, all had studied in American library schools and had MLS degrees when enrolled, and therefore had little chance to receive the I House Fellowship. The Graduate Library School was closed in 1989, and the International House still provides Residential Fellowships at about \$2,000 per year but no longer pays the tuition.

I first learned of Nixon's intended visit to China when I saw the TV evening news in the lobby of International House. After that historic visit, there were a few guest speakers talking about their experience in China as visitors or locals, including Jack Chen and Ding Ling. Jack Chen stated that Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang would be released very soon. That eventually took place a year or two later. Ding Ling impressed me as an elderly lady steadfast to her beliefs. It looked as if the Cultural Revolution had taught her nothing. To be fair, at that time most people outside of China were fans of the Cultural Revolution.

In 1979 Shanghai's *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* published some articles by Hu Shi. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Dr. Hu had been the target of vicious campaigns. What did the publication mean? Relaxation on academic freedom? I

wanted to find out and submitted a short research note on Pu Songling to the journal. It was published in January 1980, together with another article by a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. These two articles were probably the first articles published in China by authors residing outside of China after the Cultural Revolution. The event was duly reported in the *People's Daily* on April 25, 1980. In 1981 I had another article published in *Wen shi*. In both cases, I just sent in the articles without contacting anyone. This approach did not always work. After I discovered the contemporary poem about Song Jiang's surrender, I wrote an article and sent it to *Lishi yanjiu*. It was returned without any explanation. After my article was later published in *Zhonghua wenshi luncong*, Deng Guangming, the dean of Song historical studies who had argued repeatedly that Song Jiang never surrendered, accepted my theory and applauded me for announcing my discovery in a timely manner. He did not realize that my announcement was delayed by about a year. In 2009 Song Dejin, [a frontline editor of *Lishi yanjiu*], finally explained that he rejected my article to avoid controversy.

1980 was an eventful year for me. In May, Prof. Chow Tse-tsung of the University of Wisconsin organized the first international conference on the *Honglouloumeng*. (Due to some peculiar LC rule interpretations, Prof. Chow is represented as Zhou Cezong in library catalogs.) It was also the first non-science conference outside of China after the Cultural Revolution attended by scholars from China. Prof. Chow was very considerate and asked me to go to Chicago's O'Hare Airport to help the three Chinese representatives, Zhou Ruchang, Feng Qiyong and Chen Yupi, change to the plane to Madison. I had read the works of all three scholars but I had never thought that one day I would meet them in person, especially in America. All three scholars gave me signed copies of their recent publications. I regretted that I forgot to bring my own copy of Zhou's *Honglouloumeng xinzheng* for his signature. I bought this original Tangdi chubanshe edition in a regular bookstore in Hong Kong when it was already quite rare. It must have come from the storage after an inventory.

In December 1983 I went to Guangzhou to attend my first conference in China (on the *Nanfang caomuzhuang*). I received an ACLS travel grant, probably due to favorable recommendations of Professors L. Carrington Goodrich and Frederick Mote. At that time there was only the Chinese embassy in Washington, D.C. and I had to send my travel document by registered mail to get the visa. In one instance I had to telegraph the sponsor, the South China Agricultural College. Faxing and e-mail were not options at that time. It was my first trip to my birthplace since my family moved back to Hong Kong after World War 2 when I was still a toddler. After the Conference, I visited the Sun Yatsen University Library and the Provincial Zhongshan Library to consult some rare books. The Zhongshan Library did not have electricity on the day of my visit. Electricity was provided in rotation for different districts during peak periods. What a big difference when I visited the new buildings of these two institutes in 2012! I made no attempt to find the exact place of my birth, but did get some useful information about my grandfather from the Islamic Association of Guangzhou.

In early June 1989 the late Eizaburo Okuizumi and I went to Ann Arbor to attend a Midwest Japanese Library Consortium meeting organized by the Asia Library of the University of Michigan. The weather was very bad, and the flights from Chicago were either cancelled or delayed. Eventually we had to rent a car for the trip. Oku did all the driving, and we arrived after midnight. I have forgotten practically all the formal discussion. What I remember was that people's attention had turned to what was happening in Beijing. I only got a fuller picture of the situation after I returned to Chicago the next day. Things changed rapidly and drastically after the Tiananmen Incident.