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In Memoriam: Ma Tai-loi

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IN MEMORIAM

Ma Tai-loi

Ma Tai-loi was born in Guangzhou (Canton) but his family moved back in time to Hong Kong before 1949. He attended parochial schools (Salesian Catholic, Anglican Protestant), and worked for two years before entering the Chinese Department at Hong Kong University, where he studied a wide variety of Chinese and English subjects, including history and literature. Some of his famous teachers were Rao Zongyi and P.K. Yu, who confirmed Tai-loi's interest in bibliographical studies.

After graduating and teaching for one year, he received a US scholarship to study Far Eastern Librarianship in Chicago, where Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, had begun to put that field on the American intellectual map. Tai-loi entered Chicago in fall 1970, and after obtaining his MA started working full-time in the library from 1972, while at the same time studying Chinese history under Ho Ping-ti. He continued this dual path until receiving his Ph.D. in 1987, with a dissertation entitled *Private Academies in Ming China (1368-1644)*. In that year he became Curator of the East Asian Library at Chicago, having worked his way up from cataloger to head of cataloging. He remained the Curator until 1997.

In the meantime, Tai-loi filled many positions nationally in the library field; in 1997 he became CEAL president. He also served on several task forces, including participating in the establishment of cataloging guidelines for Chinese rare books for the well-known RLG project (1989). As chair of the Chinese Materials Committee, Tai-loi successfully made CEAL stand tall in 1994 when a cartel monopolizing book prices in China was forming.

In late 1997 he moved to be the head of the Fung Ping Shan library at his alma mater, which gave him a great opportunity to establish more contacts with librarians in Hong Kong, China and also Taiwan.

For those in the Chinese field, perhaps the most interesting feat of Tai-loi was his discovery of a contemporary poem demonstrating that Song Jiang, hero of the novel *All Men Are Brothers* but also a real historical figure had indeed surrendered; Chinese communist historians had argued that that story of surrender was slander by writers maligning peasant rebellions, and Tai-loi's article was not published in the PRC. Finally, Deng Guangming, a prominent member of the presidium of the Chinese Historiography Association and President of the Chinese Song History Research Association, had to acknowledge that Tai-loi's discovery was undeniable.

In Hong Kong early retirement was mandatory; therefore, when the position as Director of the East Asian Library at Princeton opened up, he applied for and received the position. Princeton beckoned since, as a Ming scholar and a rare book specialist, Tai-loi was quite aware of Princeton's strengths in these fields. Already in 1991, he had become a member of the Advisory Board of *The Gest Library Journal*, the later *East Asian Library Journal*, which initiated in this country the current field of the history of the Chinese book.

In the decade before his retirement in 2014 Tai-loi's scholarly attention had been mainly devoted to reconstructing the collections and activities of a famous collector from the late Ming, Xu Bo—this work was published in 2014 as *Xin ji Hong yu lou ti ji*. A collection of his other works was published in 2017 as *Cai tong yu shan: Ma Tailai wen shi lun ji* (2017). The

combination of research and librarianship Tai-loi showed was unparalleled and leaves the newer generations a stellar example.

Submitted by Martin Heijdra