Fang-Kuei Li

LINGUISTICS EAST AND WEST: AMERICAN INDIAN, SINO-TIBETAN, AND THAI

With an Introduction by
George Taylor

Interviews Conducted by
Ning-Ping Chan
and
Randy LaPolla
in 1986

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Chang Fu-Yun (1890-1983)

Li Fang-Kuei (b. 1902)
DONORS TO THE FANG-KUEI LI ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Mrs. Nancy Hsu
Alex K. Hsu
Lindy Li Mark, Ph.D.
Mrs. Hsu Ying Li
Nanqian Li
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Mrs. Shu Feng Hsu
Henry and Barbara Noel
Mrs. Lily S.J. Sun Wong
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INTRODUCTION by George Taylor

Oral history was invented to add a human dimension to the memory of men and women of outstanding achievement and character. When it is well done, as this one is, it brings to life, for those who had no personal contact with Dr. Li, a man known only through books, articles, and reputation. With the help of oral history we can learn about his motivations, his view of the field of study, of his colleagues, of the persons who inspired him, of his hopes and fears (if you read between the lines), of his failures and achievements, of his stature as a human being. Not that an oral history is an essay in depth analysis. It is not. But for those who lacked personal knowledge of this man over a long period of time an oral history provides the missing dimension; it is a key to the understanding of his formal written legacy.

We knew Fang-Kuei at the University of Washington for twenty years, the longest he stayed at any job anywhere. He joined us right after the war at a crucial time in the history of the University of Washington and for that matter, of many other schools. We had just begun the task of introducing into the American university curriculum the study of the non-Western world. Other universities such as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Berkeley undertook the same task, each one in its own specific way. But each one found it necessary to set up a kind of task force to get the job done because changing a curriculum and stimulating new research is about as easy as moving a graveyard.

The University of Washington established what was known as the Far Eastern and later the Far Eastern and Russian Institute. The mission of this task force was to stimulate teaching and research concerning that vast area which we call the non-Western world, for lack of a positive term. It includes China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, South America, and Africa. Obviously there had to be a division of labor, no university could attract the scarce talent to cover all these societies and no one was rich enough, in any case, to do a first class job of all this territory.

The University of Washington chose to put its energies into the study of Eastern Asia, especially China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia. The Soviet Union was added very soon because none of the discipline departments was taking up the task. Their hesitation can be understood because it became quite clear that the study of a country such as China, for example, required an interdisciplinary approach. No one discipline could do it alone. We had to have a combination of language, politics, economics, religion and philosophy, anthropology, sociology, geography, and history. The Far Eastern and Russian Institute came to shelter, succour and direct all these disciplines for the study of China. It probably took two decades before the non-Western world was accepted as a necessary and respectable scholarly activity of the University.
The mission would not have succeeded without a combination of several important elements. There had to be administrative support in order to overcome inertia and plain obstructionism on the part of some of the faculty. Only the administration could give us this necessary core of professorships for the institute. There had to be inter-university agreement on standards and degrees. Fortunately the Social Science Research Council under the inspired leadership of Pendleton Herring and the American Association of Learned Societies under the equally imaginative leadership of Fred Burkhart rose to the occasion by establishing a Joint Committee on Area Studies under the chairmanship of Robert Hall of the University of Michigan. This committee established the pattern for higher degrees that included foreign area studies. Most important was the agreement that area studies was not a discipline in itself. To understand and to take part in interdisciplinary studies a student had to have command of the tools of at least one discipline. We respected this decision in theory and practice. The Ph.D. was to be taken in the discipline department. And the political science professor, for example, who specialized on China, had to be a member of the political science department as well as of the Far Eastern and Russian Institute.

Essential to the success of our mission was money for research. Fortunately the foundations, first Rockefeller, then Carnegie, and finally Ford, provided funds both to the committees set up by the Learned Societies and directly to established university programs. The many millions of dollars poured into the field of area studies -- the generally accepted shorthand for study of the non-Western world -- were of vital importance. The foundations provided professorships and student support in a field which was barren of university funds for such luxuries. The provided funding for training of scholars in difficult languages that required more commitment than most European tongues and in disciplines which were reluctant to assist in the study of societies that were almost unknown and apparently had an unpredictable future academically.

All these elements were essential. But most important of all was the human factor. To carry out the mission the director and his close associates had to find a special kind of professor and student. The student had to make a long term commitment, especially to language study in a new field at a time when the future for employment was unclear. It was a risky undertaking. The professor had to know his subject but he also had to believe in the mission and accept with patience the long struggle to be fully accepted by his discipline department and most of all to be willing to cooperate with other disciplines in research and teaching. Rarest of all, the professor had to be one who had the ability and motivation to provide leadership.

We were lucky. In the China field at the University of Washington we had Professor Franz Michael, a man of extraordinary energy and ability and driving leadership in interdisciplinary research. It was he who took the initiative in securing Li Fang-Kuei for our team. Among the initial China faculty were Hellmut Wilhelm, a Sinologist par excellence who also understood the social sciences; Vincent Shih, a rare scholar of Chinese philosophy, Hsiao Kung-Chuan, a distinguished political scientist, Rhoads Murphy, a geographer, Ma Feng-Hua, an economist, and Karl August Wittfogel, in economic history.
In other words, Li Fang-Kuei joined our faculty at a monumental time in American academic history. The motivation to study the non-Western world was very high because World War II had brought our ignorance of these societies to our attention and many academics who had been involved in the war were determined to rectify the situation. One of the most important contributions that Li made in his whole career was to the development of area studies at the University of Washington and at the national and even the international level. He modernized the teaching of the Chinese language and linguistics. He was able to do this because of his unassailable scholarship and his capacity for leadership. He was instrumental in introducing Thai and Tibetan studies.

His hand was as gentle as it was firm. He trained some excellent graduate students, many of whom have made names for themselves, but he also paid detailed attention to the teaching of the language at the undergraduate level. He thoroughly understood and helped to promote the interdisciplinary approach to the study of Chinese society. He was a good team player who even helped, on occasion, with administration. From my point of view as director of the institute, Li Fang-Kuei was a very close associate in a common task. I knew that I did not have to worry about Chinese language and linguistics; most important, I knew that they would stay securely in the institute and not fight for departmental independence. Having all the disciplines together under one roof was essential to the success of the institute's mission. Fang-Kuei more than pulled his weight in one of the great academic revolutions of the post-war period.

Fang-Kuei and his wife, Hsu Ying, were the center of a lively and gracious social circle. They entertained young and old over the whole range of the institute. Hsu Ying was the first Chinese woman to offer classes in Chinese cooking. I had the good fortune to be one of her students and am now a constant user of the Chinese cookbook she published a few years ago. The two Li's were the heart of a great family, both domestic and academic.

Dr. Li Fang-Kuei was indeed a very special person and one of the most outstanding members of the institute faculty in the years when we were laying the foundations of what is now the Henry Jackson School of International Studies. The sadness that comes with the loss of a great human being and a great scholar is matched only by remembering with joy and satisfaction the privilege of knowing him. What a treasured block of time it was and what an inner glow we feel just to recall Fang-Kuei's quiet and massive presence. He was a citizen and scholar of the world, a tower of strength for international scholarly cooperation, a person of great human dignity. He will live a long time among those who knew him.

George Taylor
Professor Emeritus
Far Eastern and Russian Institute
University of Washington

21 February 1988
Seattle, Washington
F.K. Li, linguist, was born in Canton. His family later moved to Beijing where his progressive minded mother prepared him for Qinghua Junior College, then a preparatory school for students going to study in the U.S. From 1924-26 he attended the University of Michigan, where he became interested in linguistics. Later at the University of Chicago, he studied with Edward Sapir, Leonard Bloomfield, Carl D. Buck, and received his MA and PhD degrees in 1927 and 1929 respectively.

F.K. Li's linguistic research spans both sides of the Pacific. In 1927, he came to California to practice field methods with Edward Sapir. His research with the last two surviving Mattole Indians is the only linguistic record of that language. Other North American Indian languages he worked on included Sarcee, Wailaki, Hare, and Eyak.

Upon returning to China in 1929, F.K. Li applied the method of historical linguistics to the study of Chinese, and pioneered descriptive linguistics of non written languages of ethnic minorities of China. The comparative study of Tai dialects in China and in Thailand was one of his many projects. He also made significant contributions in Sino-Tibetan studies in his later years.

Back to America again in 1946, F.K. Li taught at Harvard and Yale, eventually settling at the University of Washington, Seattle in 1949. In 1969, he accepted an appointment to the University of Hawaii, which he held until he retired for the second time in 1974. Honolulu was his home for fifteen years before moving to Oakland, California in 1985. He authored 9 books and scores of articles.

In addition to his academic accomplishments, F.K. Li was a talented artist, both in Chinese brush painting and Western watercolor. He played the Chinese flute extremely well and enjoyed singing and teaching Kunqu, the musical drama of the Ming dynasty. On July 6, he happily attended the American debut of the Shanghai Kun Opera in San Francisco. At dawn on July 7 he suffered a stroke. On August 21, F.K. Li passed away in the Kaiser Foundation Hospital, Redwood City. Farewell service was held in Oakland, CA on August 24 by family and close friends.

Fang-Kuei Li is survived by his wife Hsu Ying, his three children Lindy, Peter, Annie, and six grandchildren.
Fang-Kuei Li

A memorial service is planned in Beijing, China, for Fang-Kuei Li, a scholar of American Indian languages, who died in Redwood City on August 21. He was 85.

Mr. Li, who earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1929, taught at Harvard, Yale and the universities of Washington and Hawaii, and was emeritus professor at the two latter schools.

He did linguistic research into the Sarcee, Wailaki, Hare and Eyak American Indian languages and also into dialects in China and Thailand.

Mr. Li wrote numerous articles and nine books on his linguistic studies. He and his wife, Hsu Ying, moved to Oakland in 1965.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by two daughters, Lindy Mark of Oakland and Annie Li of Seattle, a son, Peter, of Highland Park, N.J., and six grandchildren.

A farewell service was held in Oakland last month. A memorial service is to be held in Beijing by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.
HISTORY OF THE FANG-KUEI LI PROJECT

Over the years, my long-time friend Lindy Li Mark, a professor of anthropology at California State University, Hayward, would occasionally talk to me about an oral history with her father, Fang-Kuei Li, the renowned linguist. By 1986, the time was right to begin the oral history. The Regional Oral History Office had completed an oral history with Yuen-Ren Chao, colleague and friend of Fang-Kuei Li, as part of an ongoing China Scholars Oral History Series; Mr. and Mrs. Li had moved from Hawaii to Oakland; and most importantly, Professor Li had agreed to participate.

In order to document Professor Li's career as competently as possible, Willa Baum, the Regional Oral History Office's division head, and Lindy Li Mark decided that the interviews should be conducted by a linguist knowledgeable in the Far Eastern languages in which Professor Li had carved out his reputation. Ning-Ping Chan, a student of Professor Li's and friend of the family, was asked to serve as interviewer but she soon realized that her inbred Chinese tradition of deference for an elder of such eminence limited her asking probing questions. An American student of linguistics was sought to work with her. Randy LaPolla was selected. Both he and Ning-Ping have graduate degrees in linguistics with emphasis on Far Eastern languages and dialects, were well acquainted with Professor Li's publications and his reputation, and both speak Chinese.

My task was to coordinate the work of the interviewers with the established process of the Regional Oral History Office. I would oversee transcription of the interview tapes and assist Ning-Ping and Randy with the development of interview outlines, editing, and other procedures necessary to complete the project. Gradually Randy assumed most of the interviewer-editing tasks and came into the office frequently to turn in the tapes, the edited transcripts, seek advice, and generally keep me apprised of progress. On the following pages Ning-Ping and Randy have written personal accounts of their experiences working with Professor Li. Randy's was the basis for the essay he read at Fang-Kuei Li's memorial service on August 24, 1987.

Approximately twelve interview hours were recorded between July 15, and December 6, 1986. It took a while for Professor Li and his interviewers to feel comfortable with the interview process. Professor Li was a modest person not given to talking about himself, and the interviewers had such awe and respect for him that they did not at first feel that they could push him to talk about his extraordinary career. As might be expected of a person eighty-four years of age who had studied, written, taught, and traveled extensively for sixty years, Professor Li recalled some aspects of his life more clearly than others. Mrs. Li, present at all the interview sessions, helped her husband fill in details. Their conversation was usually in Chinese. Son, Peter Li, visiting from Rutgers University where he teaches Asian languages and literature, and daughter Lindy occasionally joined the session, adding encouragement and questions. By the time the interviewers and Professor Li had become comfortable with one another and the interviewers were ready to assume direction, several of the early interviews, while replete with fascinating and important information, contained repetition and overlapping detail. Mrs. Baum, Lindy, Randy, and I
agreed that the oral history would be more useful and readable if the basic story were available without the repetitions and that anyone wanting the uncut version could listen to the tapes on deposit in the Microforms Division of The Bancroft Library.

I assumed responsibility for reorganizing the verbatim transcript edited previously by Randy. Lindy and I carefully reviewed my ideas before I made revisions. She had planned to ask her father to fill in some details but a stroke on July 7, 1987 made his further participation impossible. The reorganization eliminates repetition but preserves Professor Li's speaking style and the essentials of his life history.

Next, Randy, Lindy, and Ning-Ping read the retyped manuscript to verify spelling of proper names, clarify some sentences, and add footnotes. Randy advised me on some of the intricacies of indexing Chinese linguistics. Lindy was responsible for the photos, the essays on the Li's trips to China in 1978 and 1983, the curriculum vitae and bibliography, and for other material in the text and appendix.

At Lindy's request, Professor Emeritus George Taylor, past director of the Far Eastern and Russian Institute of the University of Washington, wrote the insightful introduction which defines Fang-Kuei Li's stature in linguistics, something which Professor Li was too modest to attempt.

The decisions about the pictures and related materials were made during informal meetings in the Li's beautiful apartment overlooking Lake Merritt in Oakland. Filled with Chinese nature paintings, calligraphy, and other objets d'art of Chinese origin, the home is a comfortable blend of East and West.

Mrs. Li is one of the most delightful persons I have known. I feel privileged to have become acquainted (through his oral history) with Fang-Kuei Li, his culture, his career in linguistics, and his family. It had never occurred to me when I talked to Lindy about an oral history of her father that I would have so close a relationship to the project.

We are especially grateful to Professor Li's family and friends for helping to fund this project. Unfortunately Professor Li died August 21, 1987, so he could not review the transcript nor see the final product of his efforts. It is hoped that the oral history will offer Fang-Kuei Li's colleagues, former students, as well as scholars, an account of his life and career which is largely missing from his eighty-plus published works.

Malca Chall
Senior Editor

23 September 1988
Regional Oral History Office
Berkeley, California
INTERVIEW HISTORY by Ning-Ping Chan

Linguistics East and West: American Indian, Sino-Tibetan, and Thai consists of eight interviews with Professor Fang-Kuei Li. The purpose was to document Professor Li's account of his distinguished contemporaries and rich experience in the format of an oral history project. There are only a handful of linguists whose work unqualifiably stands out on its own in the way that Professor Li's does. Few words are necessary to characterize his brilliance in linguistic studies. I will just take the opportunity to state briefly the factors which led to the decision of my involvement in the project and the degree of my involvement.

My interest in documenting Professor Li's life work had been building since our earliest encounters. Prior to the summer of 1985, I was a distant admirer of him. My familiarity with him other than his work was limited to a few conference lectures and short conversations in some social gatherings. After I returned from my year at University of Hong Kong in 1985, I had more time to devote to research projects. That was also the time I learned that Professor and Mrs. Li had chosen to settle in Oakland. Frequent visits to his house, often by myself but sometimes with other students of linguistics, American Indian studies, Thai studies, and Oriental studies, became a source of intellectual stimulation. He entertained naive questions as well as questions with profound theoretical consequences. Later he joined the research staff at the Department of Linguistics on campus. During his guest lecture at Professor James A. Matisoff's Comparative Li Languages class, he shared with us a most remarkable venture -- his early Tai fieldwork in the Guangxi Province of China. A project to record such experiences as these was conceived.

Although I was familiar with Professor Yuen-Ren Chao's oral history, the idea of incorporating family resources in conjunction with the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library at U.C. Berkeley came from Dr. Lindy Li. She made attempts first to obtain funding from the Chinese American Foundation. She also encouraged me to apply for a grant from the Wang Institute. I took the initiative to approach the Princeton University-based Project of Linguistic Analysis which I thought would be more likely to finance a project of this nature. However, due to the pressure of time, I was urged to begin the recording sessions.

I did not realize my typical Chinese upbringing would be in the way at the actual scene of interviews. Soon after a couple of initial sessions, I began to acknowledge that in the given time frame I could not bring myself to direct my senior's narrative even when I was doing so without the slightest tone of challenge or confrontation. Randy J. LaPolla agreed to collaboration when I solicited his help.
As we prepared for the interviews we set a few goals: We wanted the people and events which Professor Li would discuss to be integrated with the social history of the period; we wanted to develop the history of the Academia Sinica -- the conception, its selection process, and how it became one of the most prominent research institutions in the world.

We were also interested in knowing the genesis of his own work -- his conceptual approach, his research methods, and the development of his analogies and syntheses. We hoped he would respond to questions about interdisciplinary research and evaluate competing trends in linguistics.

I believe the fact that these interviews were conducted in an informal conversational style allowed us to delve into topics of a highly technical and substantial nature: Amplifications and explanations were requested and analyzed further; alternative theories were juxtaposed; active discussion ensued between points of view and theoretical stands which otherwise hardly meet each other.

We can all benefit from Professor Li's subtle perception of linguistics of all orientations. His clinical skill and experiences, along with his probing intellect will enlighten many generations of scholars.

Ning-Ping Chan, Ph.D.
Department of Linguistics
University of California

23 July 1987
Berkeley, California
The idea to record the oral history of Professor Li Fang-Kuei was first brought up by Mrs. Li and Lindy Li Mark, Professor Li's daughter. They contacted the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library, which had done the oral history of Professor Chao Yuen-Ren, a close friend of the Li family. Ning-Ping Chan and myself were asked to do the interviewing, as we were known to the Li's and both had backgrounds in linguistics. I was thrilled at the opportunity to learn more about Professor Li and his work; his books and articles had long ago become one of the cornerstones of my own studies in Thai and Sino-Tibetan linguistics.

Professor Li's career in linguistics spans over sixty-three years and two continents. From Ann Arbor to Chicago, where he worked with the greats of American linguistics, to the Academia Sinica, where he worked with such luminaries as Chao Yuen-Ren and Luo Changpei, then back to America, where he taught at Harvard, Yale, and the universities of Washington and Hawaii. Many of his students, such as Chang Kun, Ma Xueliang, and Nicolas Bodman have themselves gone on to become bright stars in the firmament of linguistics. Yet in the interviews we did, Professor Li was always modest and unassuming. Many times we tried to get him to make a statement about a person, or take a stand on an issue, but except for rare cases, he would criticize an idea or person only in the most polite and euphemistic way. What did come through very clear, at least in terms of linguistics, was that Professor Li believed in doing careful, data-oriented (as opposed to theory-oriented) work. In almost all cases where Professor Li did criticize someone's work, it was usually because that person had insufficient control of the data he/she was working with, so was just working from word lists. For the same reason, Professor Li made it clear he didn't think it proper to be making unprovable claims about the genetic relationship of this group to that group when there was a lot of work still to be done within each group. For example, we tried very hard to pin him down on the question of Thai-Chinese relatedness, though he spoke vaguely about "Well, some people say... and some people say..." Though I know (from other discussions) that he had an opinion about this question, he did not want to go on the record with it, probably because he didn't feel it to be an important question.

We began the interviewing on July 15, 1986. The first interview was an overview of Professor Li's life, which we fleshed out in the ensuing interviews. These later interviews were of two types: those that chronicled events, and those that discussed individuals who were significant in Professor Li's life and (generally) significant in the field of linguistics as well. The eighth and last interview was completed on December 6, though we had hoped that after we had transcribed and edited the tapes, we could show them to Professor Li and his family, and if there were any questions remaining, or we just felt it important to add material, we could do one more interview. Unfortunately, the transcribing and editing took longer than we expected (as had the interviewing because of Professor
Li's busy schedule and frequent traveling), so Professor Li was not able to see the transcripts before he was incapacitated by illness in July of 1987. On the twenty-first of the next month, one day after his eighty-fifth birthday, Professor Li quietly passed away. Below, I would like to give a short sketch of what Professor Li felt to be the highlights of his life.

Li Fang-Kuei was born in Canton on August 20, 1902. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, his father, who had been an official in that government, retired to his native place in Shanxi. The whole family set out together, but on the way to Shanxi, Fang-Kuei's mother decided that in such a poor and isolated place (what is now known as Dazhai) the children would not be able to get a good education, so took them instead to Peking. Times were hard at first, but their hardship paid off, as Fang-Kuei was later able to attend the best middle school in Peking, then to enter Qinghua Junior College.

At first he intended to study medicine, but later developed an interest in language while learning the English, Latin, and German necessary for his studies. When it came time for Fang-Kuei to go to the United States (Qinghua was at that time a preparatory school for those going to the U.S. to study), he decided to study linguistics. From 1924 to 1926 he attended the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, which he chose because he wanted to start at a good school, but not one in a large, impersonal city. Professor Li said two of the most enjoyable years of his life in America were spent in Ann Arbor, as he did all of the things other college students were doing, such as going to PAC-10 football games every Saturday. Later, in 1926, he moved to Chicago and studied under Edward Sapir, Leonard Bloomfield, and Carl Darling Buck, three of the most important names in American linguistics.

Sapir had the greatest influence on the young Fang-Kuei. From Sapir he learned phonetics, field methods, and about the languages of the American Indians. Sapir also had a broad knowledge of developments in the study of East and South-East Asian languages, and encouraged Fang-Kuei to read articles in this area. It was Sapir's influence that led Professor Li to take up and stay with Thai, Sino-Tibetan, and American Indian linguistics. In the summer of 1927, Sapir took Fang-Kuei to California to do field work. At first they worked together, but then Sapir sent Fang-Kuei off on his own to look for the Mattole Indians. There were only two Mattole Indians left, and it took some time for Fang-Kuei to find them, but once he did, he spent a solid month, seven or eight hours per day, recording their language. His notes, which he later used as the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation, are the only record of the now extinct Mattole language. After a month with the Mattole, he spent a month with the Wailaki Indians and recorded their language. It was memories of this summer, and other field work he did later in Canada, that seemed the most vibrant and interesting to Professor Li.

With Bloomfield, Fang-Kuei studied Germanic linguistics and the methods of text analysis. Professor Li said he was Bloomfield's star pupil; he was also Bloomfield's only student for a long time. Of the lessons he learned from Bloomfield, one that Professor Li felt particularly important was that when you are planning to do comparative work on a group of languages, you
should first learn at least one of the languages in that group well enough so that it is in your head while you are looking at the other languages in the group. That is the reason why, when Professor Li decided to study the Thai-related languages in south-west China, he first spent several months in Thailand learning the Thai language.

With Carl Darling Buck, Fang-Kuei studied Indo-European linguistics, especially Greek and Latin. At that time, Fang-Kuei actually thought he would become a teacher of Indo-European linguistics. It was Buck who also got Fang-Kuei a fellowship to Harvard in 1928. At Harvard, Fang-Kuei studied Sanskrit for six months, then decided he wanted to go to Europe. He first went back to Chicago, picked up his degree, and then, with letters of recommendation from Franz Boas, whom he had met through Sapir, headed off to Europe to visit linguists there.

On his return to North America in 1928, he spent three months in Canada doing field work on the Hare language, living the whole time on an island in the middle of the McKenzie River north of the Arctic Circle, far away from any other settlements. Then from Canada he returned to China.

On his arrival in Shanghai, the president of the newly established Academia Sinica invited him to become a member. Professor Li first did some work on the Chinese dialects on Hainan Island, then returned to Peking and worked for a while on Tibetan.

On the social side, as a handsome, well educated young man, Professor Li had his pick of the beautiful young women of Peking, and judging from the pictures of the young Mrs. Li, it seems he got the prettiest, but there was a lot more to their relationship than looks. It is rare to see a couple so much in love after so many years together. One of the nicest things about visiting the Li's was seeing them interact with each other in such a loving way. They were married in 1932 and had three children, Lindy, Peter, and Annie.

In 1933, Professor Li went to Thailand to learn Thai, then went to Guangxi to study the Thai-related languages there. The value of Professor Li's work on these languages, especially his Handbook of Comparative Tai, cannot be overestimated. From 1937 to 1939, Professor Li was a visiting professor at Yale, then he returned to China and spent the rest of the war years in Yunnan and Sichuan, the years 1943-46 as a visiting professor at the relocated Yanying University in Chengdu. In 1946 he returned again to America, accepting visiting professorships at Harvard, for two years, and at Yale, for one more. In 1949 Professor Li and the people at the university there urged him not to go back to China, as the Communists were taking over. They convinced him to stay in Seattle and teach there. He stayed there until 1969, when he retired, then accepted an appointment at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, where he received a second professor emeritus-ship in 1974. He stayed in Hawaii until he moved to Oakland, California in 1985.

Though he retired from teaching, Professor Li never stopped doing research and publishing. In all he authored nine books, including one which
just came out this year, a monumental work done with W. South Coblin on the entire corpus of the Old Tibetan inscriptions, and over one hundred articles.

In addition to his academic accomplishments, Professor Li was a talented artist, both in Chinese and Western watercolors. He played the Chinese flute extremely well, and enjoyed singing and teaching Kunqu, the musical drama of the Ming dynasty.

I would like to add a personal note. I feel it a great honor to have been able to take part in this project, and I learned quite a bit while doing it, not only about how to do linguistics, but also about the intangibles that made Professor Li such an exceptional individual. To me, Professor Li was a giant, and though this giant of a man has passed from our midst, his footprints are indelible in the soil of linguistics, and memories of his wit, his charm, and his kindness will always be a part of me.*

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August 1988
Berkeley, California

*All of this essay except for paragraphs one and three were read by Randy LaPolla at a memorial service for Professor Li held on August 24, 1987, and another version of it was published in the Linguistic Society of America Bulletin, No. 119, March 1988.
I CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION IN CHINA

Chan: Professor Li, we want to begin by getting some background on your life in China before you came to the United States as a student in 1924.

Li: Well, you know I was born in 1902, in Canton where my father held an official position.* I stayed there until I was three or four or five or six; most of the time. But some years we went to Gaoyao, because my father held a position for a year or two at that place. So we all went to Gaoyao, I think we went there twice, because of his government business.

But that was when I was very young, when I was four, five or six years old. I don't remember much about that.

After we came back to Canton, we began to have a teacher in our home to teach my brothers and sisters. But I was only, merely an appendage, because I didn't really study much in those days. So, until about 1910 I only began to learn some characters or read some stories--didactic stories, very much like Washington's cutting down the cherry tree, that kind of story.

By 1910 my father lost his position for some reason or other that I did not quite understand.

Chan: Was it because of the revolution?

Li: Not yet.

By 1911, the government changed. There was the revolution.

LaPolla: Were you aware of the Xinhai Geming [Republican Revolution] when it was happening?

*Professor Li's father, Li Guang-Yu, received the scholarly title of Jinshi through imperial examination while in his twenties.
Li: I don't know, I only know that the Qing [Ching] dynasty ended. I was at that time only nine years old, so I was not interested in the political shifts at all.

LaPolla: It didn't change your life in any way?

Li: Well, I was too young to know then, but it did change it a good deal. Because at that time my father practically retired from his official job. He wanted to be a loyal Qing dynasty man. He didn't want to serve in the Republican government. We had really no money from our stay in Canton but he mortgaged our house in Peking and got about $6,000. He took that, and wanted to take all of us back to Shanxi Province to a little village or district, which is now very famous because it's now Dazhai. But at that time it was a very poor and small village—I think it is still poor. At that time it was nowhere at all.

Chan: That was your parents' home, wasn't it?

Li: Yes, that's my hometown, Dazhai. And now I am famous, because when anybody asks, "Where do you come from?" "I come from Dazhai."

So he got the money, mortgaged our house in Peking, and took the money and all of us to Shanxi Province. On our way to Shanxi we stopped in Baoding. When we stopped there it happened there was what in Chinese we called a Bing Bian—a rebellion. I don't know for what reason they started, the rebellion. It was just the troops rioting, and trying to loot all the people, you know. We were right in the midst of that, and we lost many, many things in Baoding. It was only one or two days' business, but we lost everything on that day.

After that my father continued on to Shanxi, but my mother changed her mind. She said, "I don't think we should go to Shanxi, to that small place." The reason she said that was, "I have children. That's a little village. They must have an education. In that Dazhai you don't get much education." It was not good for the children. So she decided that she wouldn't go back to Shanxi. So my father went alone and she took us all back after less than a year's stay in Baoding. We came back to Peking in about 1912 or something like that.

Education in Beijin, 1912-1924

Li: So we all stayed in Peking from that time on, and I started my education first in the primary school, later on in the middle school, and later on went to Qinghua College until 1924 when I
Li: came to the States. That was about life in Peking, education-wise.

When we came to Peking we were very poor. We had lost all our money. My father took all the money back to Shanxi and we were very poor. So, first we stayed with my grandfather and grandmother on my mother's side, for a very short time.

Chan: The He family, is that?

Li: Yes. But apparently it was not possible to stay long because, you know, when there are two families living together it gets into lots of trouble, so my mother moved out and rented a small sihefang [courtyard-type house], only one part of it, and we stayed in that. She had to make her living partly, but not completely. So my mother sold part of her jewelry, and bought one little house and rented it out, and used the income to live.

That was about the time when I was in primary school. In 1914 I graduated from primary school and went to the middle school, which was one of the best in Peking, even up to now. It is still the best middle school in Peking.

Chan: What is it called?

Li: Shifan Xue Yuan Fushu Zhongyue [Middle School Attached to Teacher's College]. There I graduated in 1918. We had a friend in the middle school who apparently knew something about Qinghua College. He suggested that we go to take the examination and try to get into Qinghua College, because after you graduated from Qinghua College you would be sent to America to study on government funds. We didn't have to spend money to come here to study.*

So three of us from the middle school came to take the examination to go into Qinghua College. We did not go from the very start, because we had already part of the education, so we went to the so-called junior college part of the school and we had a very funny kind of examination to enter Qinghua. One of the examinations [laughs] was mostly in English, and we hadn't studied that much English in middle school. In the first place, the examination consisted of some very strange types of subjects. First the exam would be something about health, for a program. And also an examination on woodwork [laughs]. Very funny. All in English, you know; we never even spoke English in the middle

* Qinghua University was established with money that the Chinese government was paying America as part of the Boxer Indemnity.
Li: school. It was very peculiar. Then we had geography, in English. History was examined in Chinese, mathematics in English. Chinese was in Chinese, of course. So there were only Chinese and history in Chinese, the rest of them all examined in English.

When we decided to enter Qinghua we had to know what books to read for the examination. So we got a book on health from the Qinghua students who had that course, and other courses like mathematics and geography. We had to read up in English. Because they examined them in English.

So the three of us went to take the examinations at that school.

Mrs. Li: Who are the three—the other two?

Li: Mr. Zhang Yuzhe,* Mr. Liu Xigu.

But, you know, in those days you went to one school and took the examination, but you weren't sure you would be admitted, because the examination was rather stiff. So we had to take the examination in several schools in order to get into one of the schools. The other school we went to was an engineering school in Tianjin, Beiyang University. It was a school in, I think, civil engineering and mining engineering and so on. In those days, you know, technology and engineering were very favored subjects for students to take. A third university we tried to enter into was the Peking Union Medical School. The three of us decided to try together.

The schools did not have their examinations at the same time. The engineering school in Tianjin was probably the first examination we took. They had it in Peking, and all three of us went there and took the examination. After a couple of weeks it came out that all three of us were admitted to that school, because we passed our examination. Then, of course, we took the examination at Qinghua College. And the last examination was in Peking Union Medical School; we were going to take that. But while we were preparing to take that, we got the news that we had already passed our examination to enter Qinghua College, so we didn't take the Peking Union Medical School exam.

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*Zhang Yuzhe, 1902-1986, was later director of the National Institute of Astronomy.
Mrs. Li: [Originally, in Chinese, Xiehe Yixueyuan, then Shoudu Yiyuan, (Capital Hospital), now once again Xiehe Yixueyuan.]

Li: Yes, it was also called Rockefeller Medical School, because that medical school was entirely supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. It is very well known. It's very bad now, not well kept, but in those days it was very well kept, and the Rockefeller Foundation every year supported the medical school until the government changed, that is, 1949s or '50s. Then the Rockefeller Foundation gave a big sum of money to the medical school and said, "Now we stop supporting that," because the government was not favorable to foreign-established schools. But that is something that came later. We didn't go to medical school because we were admitted to Qinghua, and we thought that was the best chance, so we went there.

There were four different places where the entrance examinations were given. One was in Peking, one was in Shanghai, one was in Hankou, the other was in Canton. And the result was, that from all the four places, there were seven persons admitted to Qinghua. It was very strict.

Mrs. Li: Out of how many, do you know?

Li: That, nobody knows. Because there were four different places. But in every place there must have been at least about fifty or sixty students taking the exam, or maybe even more. But there were only seven persons admitted, and out of those seven the three of us who came from Peking were admitted. So we finally all went to Quinghua College, and started school there.

Decision to Study Linguistics

Li: After a couple of years at Qinghua College we were asked, "What are you going to study in America? You have to decide what to study." At that time I was still interested in studying medicine. So I said, "I will go to the pre-medical program," which would require the study of chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics, and among them also Latin. Because it was thought that in medical school many terms—particularly anatomical terms—were in Latin, so it was best to know some Latin. I think the real reason was that there was one person who could teach Latin in the school. [laughs] So I studied one year of Latin.

That was the first introduction for me into linguistic studies. Then we of course all had German; I had about two or three years of German in school. And then finally, "Decide now, what are you going to do?" My first decision was in pre-medical
school, but at the end I said, "I want to change. I want to change into linguistics, because of my interest in Latin and German."

So we were asked, "What school do you want to go to? Do you want to go to Chicago, Harvard, Columbia?" But we were told that when you go to America you do not want to go to a big city, like Chicago or New York. It's too big, you get there and you'd get lost. So they advised us to go to some small-town university. Yet it had to be rather a good university. One of those was the University of Michigan.
II UNIVERSITY AND RELATED EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE, 1924-1929

The University of Michigan, 1924-1926

Li: The University of Michigan is in Ann Arbor, a small town, and the university is the town. I mean, more than half of the population consists of university students. And in the second place, there were some very interesting linguistics there—there was experimental phonetics and so on. So I was advised to go to the University of Michigan.

In 1924 I came to the University of Michigan and got into the junior class, undergraduate. So I did two years of undergraduate work at the University of Michigan. That was the most delightful two years I had in America. [laughs] I thoroughly enjoyed my student life in America. I joined all the things that the university students tried to do. Every Saturday I'd go to the football game, you know. [chuckles] Big Ten football game! Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana, every weekend. And Michigan also had a very good music program. Every spring there is a spring festival, and there are concerts and all sorts of activities connected with the music department.

In Michigan, in those days--1924, that's about sixty years ago—linguistics was not the linguistics of today. It was very different. So that in choosing that field, my study was studying the different masterpieces of different languages. One thing I studied was Latin literature, such as the famous Latin epic Virgil, and also the Latin dramatists, Plautus, Terence, and Latin lyric, Catullus and so on. So I spent one year thoroughly going into the Latin literature, because that was the thing—you would read the language. That was linguistics.

Then another thing was studying the history of the English language. So I studied first Old English, and after that Middle English dialects. That Middle English dialect study was linguistically very important for me, because the professor was a
great English philologist. He taught us methods of how to work on Middle English texts. Middle English has many dialects. And we were told, "You are reading a Middle English text. Try to find out what dialect it was written in." So we had very good training in Middle English.

But I began to feel that English was part of the Germanic languages, so I began to branch out in to Germanic philology. I studied also Gothic—Gothic is the oldest Germanic language—and then I studied Middle-High German. I read the famous Nibelungenlied of German literature. So I began to branch out from English into Germanic languages.

Besides that I took lots of philosophy courses and so on. Then, in 1926 I graduated from Michigan, with so-called (in those days) High Distinction, and was made a member of the Phi Beta Kappa, and also a special ceremony was held. Then I decided to move to Chicago. So I then entered graduate school in 1926, in Chicago.

The University of Chicago, 1926-1928

After graduation I went to the University of Chicago in 1926. At that time Chicago was probably one of the best schools in linguistics in America.

What I decided to study was determined by who was teaching what subject. I was only interested in studying with different professors. At that time in Chicago there were some very famous (later on) linguists teaching. The head of the Department of Linguistics was Professor Buck.

Carl Darling Buck. He was a student of—who was the famous German philologist at that time? Well, he was his student. Buck had written a grammar of Oscan and Umbrian, some old Italic dialects. He wrote a book on Greek dialects, and he was teaching me a course called Comparative Greek and Latin Grammar.

I took very careful notes of Buck's lectures. I have a stack of little cards, notes which he gave in the lecture. Later on, he published his book, Comparative Greek and Latin Grammar. University of Chicago Press published it. I looked at my cards, they are exactly what is published in that book. Very interesting. Apparently he had that book almost written but not published, so he just kept on lecturing on it. I happened to take very careful notes of all his lectures, and when I compared that with his book, it was exactly what he'd written in the book.
Chan: You could have published it first! [all laugh]

Li: He taught also all the other Indo-European exotic languages, such as Old Persian, Avestan, Old Church Slavic, and a number of those exotic Indo-European languages. I think the only language I didn't take of the Indo-European family was the Celtic family; I never studied Irish. Perhaps also I didn't study Armenian or some of those languages, which no one taught in the States in those days.

So those were all the Indo-European languages. I tried to get as much as I could in the field.

Then there was Professor [Leonard] Bloomfield, who was in the Germanic department, not in the linguistics department.

He went to Chicago in 1927—came to Chicago one year later than I did. I took some Germanic courses with him. He gave a course on Germanic word formation, Germanic phonology, and also Germanic syntax, and so on. I took a whole-year course with Bloomfield, and I was one of his star students because at one time I was the only student in the class. [laughs]

Then in the anthropology department was the professor of linguistics, Edward Sapir. Now, he taught phonetics, field methods, and American Indian languages. His influence on me was great, because he was always talking to me aside from American Indian languages, about all sorts of problems in Asian linguistics. So he would guide me to read all those things beside American Indian languages, and often talked to me about various problems, and so on.

Apparently he liked me very much, and so in 1927, after I had a course on phonetics and field methods, he said, "Do you want to study American Indian languages?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Okay, this summer I'll get a grant, and we can all go to California to study American Indian languages in California."

Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir: Teaching Methods Compared

Li: Sapir came to the University of Chicago in 1925. I think that is correct, because I came to Chicago in 1926. Bloomfield came to Chicago in 1927. I stayed in Chicago until 1928, so I had one year of work with Bloomfield and two years of work with Sapir.
Both of them were very nice to me, very kind. But they were very different kinds of professors. Sapir used to talk about all sorts of things, very chatty—except while he was lecturing. He talked to me about all sorts of languages, problems, and so on.

Bloomfield did not talk so much, except his assignment for me to do one kind of work or another. He would sometimes say, "Well, that you don't know how to do yet, I will explain that to you." Things such as Panini's Grammar; "It would take a good deal of time to read it, [laughs] but I'll explain it to you," and so on.

Sapir gave lectures very objectively and fluently, and lots of people, students, just dropped in on his class for nothing else except to hear him talk. His English was very elegant, and his delivery was extremely attractive, so that lots of girl and boy students—they didn't know anything about linguistics—but they wanted to listen to the lectures.

Bloomfield did not talk. He did not lecture very well, and both of them often talked about their specialties. They would give you an assignment to read the books, but they never talked about the books they were asking you to read.

For instance, Sapir would talk about the verbal system of the Yanna Language. He would spend two or three lectures just on the verbal system. Bloomfield would talk maybe three or four hours about the Germanic prefix /ga/ in Gothic (which is later on, you know, in modern German /ge/, 'ge kommen' and so on). But in Gothic it is used much more extensively, and he wanted to know the function of /ga/ in Germanic languages. He would lecture for instance for a week or more on that Germanic /ga/. So they never talked about the books they asked us to read, they just talked mostly about the results of their own research. But they were very attentive to students, so they knew what students did and did not understand.

The first course I took with Bloomfield was called Germanic Phonology and Word Formation. After half the quarter was gone, he said, "Well, there are three students. You two students may write a short paper on Germanic phonology. Just read your books and pick out the important phonological changes in Germanic. Remember, give examples for each of the changes." And then he turned to me and said, "Well, you don't want to write that kind of a paper. You write on Germanic word formation." [laughs] Apparently he knew that I knew more about Germanic phonology than the other two students.

Sapir never asked students to write papers. He just lectured. He prepared his lectures well, usually holding a piece of card when he came to lecture, and then went on lecturing.
Peter Li: Did he give exams, if he didn't ask for papers?

Li: None of them gave exams.

LaPolla: No exam, no paper? That sounds like a great system!

Li: Well, Bloomfield was much more academic. He did ask us to write papers. I wrote that paper on Germanic word formation, and the other two students wrote papers on Germanic phonology. He'd tell us how to write it, also. It is easy to write a paper on phonology, you just read the Germanic grammar and, "Let's see, an Indo-European 'p' becomes a Germanic 'f'," and so on, and then give examples for all that. That's all.

The other two students, of course, were Ph.D. candidates in Germanic languages and literature, but they were more on literature than on language. "Do I have to take this course?" They did because they had to fulfill a course on Germanic linguistics. So they just had to take it, and Bloomfield knew that.

The next quarter in Bloomfield's course the other students dropped out. They had fulfilled their requirements. I was the only student enrolled in his course. So he said, "Well, you read up on Germanic morphology and syntax." "How do you do that?" He said, "Well, you read up on, say, some Germanic language such as Old English. You read Old English; read King Alfred's Pastoral Care, which is about two volumes. You read that, and see if you find anything about Germanic use of case in Old English. Don't read Old English poetry; that's tricky. You had better just read the Old English prose."

So I started reading King Alfred's Pastoral Care, and after a couple of weeks I reported, "I think there's something about the use of the genitive in Alfred's English."

He said, "What was it?" I said, "He used the genitive sometimes with verbs, sometimes with some other kind of use, like prepositions and so on." "All right, you work on the Old English use of the genitive."

So I kept on reading the Old English texts, and I gave a short outline on what I found out. He said, "Well, that's very good, it's okay. I think nothing has been written on that yet, about the Old English genitive. Would you like to write a dissertation on the Old English genitive?"
Li: At that time I broke the news that I had my dissertation written already, on American Indian languages [Editor's note: following Professor Li's summer in California]. "Oh," he says, "That's fine. Okay." And he kept on lecturing on Panini's Grammar and that sort of business.

So that was a whole year I spent with Bloomfield.

With Sapir I spent much more time, because out of the class he was very chatty. He talked also about Sino-Tibetan, about Burmese, about Thai, about Tibetan, and so on. He would often refer me to read some of the publications, you know, on Chinese. "Have you read [Bernard] Karlren's Phonologie Chinoise?"* I said, "No, I haven't read that yet." He said, "Well, you'd better read that." And, "Have you read Maspero's Le Dialecte de Changan?"** "No, I haven't read that." So, "You'd better read all these."

He would assign all these things for me to read on Sinology, and then he asked me to read books on Thai grammar. He was particularly interested in Tibetan. He said, "There are lots of books on Tibetan in the library. You can take a look at that. There is a very famous Tibetanist in Chicago. He is the curator of the Chicago Museum, Mr. [Berthold] Laufer." He said, "You can try to contact him to see if he has anything to say."

So I wrote to Laufer, and Laufer was very brusque. He said, "I have nothing on Tibetan at all." So I never got anything out of Laufer. I think Laufer was rather depressed; I don't know why. He was depressed, and as you know, Laufer jumped from the stairs above the museum and killed himself. So there must have been something psychologically wrong with him at that time. But anyway, I got nothing on Tibetan from him except that he said, "You can read Jaschke's Tibetan Dictionary." So I started reading the Tibetan Dictionary, and so on.

But Sapir talked about lots of things, gave lots of references to read. You could never finish that in a couple weeks, but he gave you lots of references. Apparently he must have read all of those things, because he just got it out of his head. But he kept on lecturing about American Indian languages, which was his specialty.

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* Études sur la Phonologie Chinoise

** Le Dialecte de Tch'ang-ngan sous les T'ang
Very soon that year's time I spent in Chicago was up. But after the first year, Sapir gave me some American Indian—Athabaskan—material to work at, and then he told me that in the summer he was going to northern California to do some field work on American Indian linguistics, and am I interested to work on field work on American Indian linguistics? That, of course, was exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to get some experience of how to do field work on languages that I knew nothing about. He said, "Okay, I have some funds, enough to support you."

Field Work on Indian Languages in California, 1927

So in 1927, first we took the train and got to Berkeley. There, of course, Sapir had lots of friends in the anthropology department. One of them was Professor [Alfred] Kroeber. Kroeber and Sapir were old friends. So he stayed with Kroeber and put me up in the faculty club to spend a couple of days.

He consulted Kroeber and said, "I am bringing a Chinese student to study American Indian languages. It will be the first time a Chinese student studied American Indian languages."

[laughs]

I think Kroeber gave him some news about the local situation here, and I think one of the things was about where we were going in Humboldt County, Eureka, where the Hoopa Indians were located. He said, "There the people are against Chinese." What was the reason they were against Chinese? Because in those days there were some Chinese settlements there. The Chinese got into a so-called "Tong War." The Chinese began to shoot at each other. By mistake, one of the parties shot the mayor of Eureka, and killed him. And that, of course, angered the whole city. And they asked all the Chinese to leave Humboldt County, so that there was no settlement of Chinese in Humboldt County. That was, of course, a difficulty which happened to me, because I was not supposed to stay in Humboldt County. A Chinese—they may have to evict me out of there.

Sapir learned this in Berkeley from Kroeber, because he knew the local situation. So when I got to Eureka, we both stayed in a very high-class hotel. And when we got to Hoopa Valley Sapir arranged to have the Department of the Interior, the Indian agent who stayed in Hoopa Valley, write an official letter from the Department of the Interior to say that I am asked to work on Indian languages in Humboldt County, as evidence that I was somehow connected with Washington D. C. [laughs]. So I got that letter. I didn't know all of that until I got the letter. He said, "Here, you take this letter, and in case there is trouble you can--."
The Hoopa Indians

Li: We both took the train from Berkeley north to Eureka, which is the northern point of California. And from Eureka we took the bus to the Hoopa Valley, inland to the Hoopa Indian Reservation.

My interest was, of course, to work with Sapir for a couple of weeks just to get his field method of how to work on a grammar which we do not know, both it's phonological system and its grammatical system and so on. I learned a good deal of field methods from the two weeks that I spent together with him.

Peter: He didn't lecture on his field method?

Li: No, no. He didn't lecture. He'd just sit there, I'd sit there, and the informant would sit here. He'd ask, "How do you say this? How do you say that? How do you say, 'I am gone'? 'He is gone'?" All those grammatical points. The Indians would just translate that, his questions, and he and I, both of us, started out writing our own notes. He didn't ask me whether I got it or not. [laughs]

One thing I learned, a technique, was this: when you ask an informant to say something for you, do not imitate him. Just write what he said. If you have to imitate, you imitate after the series of questions have been asked. Then you repeat it, say, "Is this the way you say it?" If the informant says "yes", that means your record is right. If he says "No, I say that that way," then you know that you did not record it correctly. But don't say, as soon as the informant says, "I am gone," "Oh, I am gone" [laughs]

Don't do that. If you do that, you confuse your informant. Because you may imitate him wrongly. He may correct you once, maybe even twice. But after twice, he will say, "Okay, if that's the way you insist." [laughs] You confuse your informant, you don't know whether you are right or wrong, and he will not correct you anymore. He'll say, "Okay, that's right, that's right, that's right," no matter how wrong you are. [all laugh] So you better not imitate your informant; just write it down and afterwards repeat it. If he understands it, it must be right. If he doesn't understand, he will correct you.

Chan: But he will ask the informant to repeat something?

Li: No, you can ask him, "Say that again?" But do not ask him too often. If you ask too often he'll get—the informant gets tired, you know. "Okay, that's right, that's right." So do not imitate your informant, and do not ask him to repeat too much. Because he will get tired of your asking. He will think, "Oh, you will never learn it."
The Indians usually had this kind of notion, that the white people will never learn it.

That's the way—some of the techniques you learn by asking questions and so on. So after two weeks—we worked from about nine to twelve and two to five every day, and in the evening we would look at our notes and file our cards and so on. It was a very tedious day, and in the summer in Hoopa Valley it is like Sacramento Valley in the summer; it is very hot. So after a couple of weeks he said, "We will take a rest." I said, "I thought we never took a rest!"

Anyway, he said, "Let us take a walk to a nearby Indian village." So we walked to that village and we found an Indian lady who spoke the Yurok Indian language. So: "We'll take a rest and learn some of that." [laughs] So we started asking similar questions about the Yurok language. I forget whether it was Karok or Yurok, but some kind of Indian language.

Those languages, of course, were very different from the Hoopa. There are lots of—the speaker would very often whisper consonants and vowels at the end of the sentence. Very much sometimes like Japanese: at the end of the discourse is "ssssss," something like that. So I was very much surprised because I never had that kind of experience before.

We later on did two or three trips to there. He did more but then I left Hoopa Valley to go on on my own.

The Mattole Indians

After a few weeks he said, "Well, now you can go. You know all the techniques of how to ask questions, how to handle your informant. Now you can go and try to look for the Mattole Indians."

The Mattole Indians were known to be along the Mattole River, but they were supposed to be extinct. That is to say, all the Mattole Indians had died. But there was news that there were still one or two still alive. One of our projects was to make a record of all those Indians that were still alive, because after that, that language would be dead; it would be no more. As a matter of fact, that is the case.

I took the material of the Mattole Indians after I got to that place and did about four or five weeks of recording texts and grammar and so on. After I left, I know that all the Indians of
that tribe died, so my record of that language is still the only record of the language.

After I left Hoopa Valley I went to some place called Fortuna, in order to look for the Mattole. So I wandered around all over that area in a taxi, asking where the Mattole Indians were. It was a kind of wild goose hunt.

But some people said, "Well, further south along the Mattole River you may find some Mattole Indians." There was no bus or anything but a kind of a so-called post truck, that sent letters from one village to the other. So I took one of those trucks and went down to a small town called Petrolia. It was called Petrolia because it was thought at one time that there would be oil in that area, so that little town was called Petrolia.

I stayed in a hotel and started asking whether there were Mattole Indians there or not. They said, "Well, yes there are Mattole Indians, but they are on the mouth of the Mattole River on the Pacific Ocean. There is one family we know there who are Mattole Indians." It was about, oh, three or four miles from Petrolia.

The only thing to do for me was to take a walk to the mouth of the river, and so I started walking. There was just the Mattole River going one way, so I forded it one way, and forded back and forth the other way, until I came to a farm house. I found it too hard to walk further (some 10 miles), so I borrowed a horse from a farmer. I said, "Can you lend me your horse so I can ride it to the mouth of the river?" The farmer was very nice, he said, "Yes, you can take my horse." He started to put on the saddle, you know, for me, and I said, "I want a very old, very good-tempered horse, because I never learned how to ride."

He said, "Oh, this is an old horse." He said, "Now you take this, and if you follow the river, you'll go down and get to the place. When you come back, take the horse to the stable." He didn't want to have any money paid.

So now the first time I took a trip on that horse, and went down to the mouth of the river and met these two old Indians. One was very old, seventy something, the other was about forty, fifty, something like that. I started asking them questions about their language.

The old man, I think was blind or something.

I asked them, "Will you teach me how to speak the Mattole language?" He apparently was willing. I said, "It is impossible for me to make a trip every day to your house. You have a horse.
Li: You can ride down to town every morning, and I will provide you with a lunch at the hotel, and after we work, about four o'clock, you can ride back, and I'll pay you for your trouble.

At that time I inquired of Kroeber what was the normal rate to pay an informant. This is important, because you have to know the local rate in order not to pay more than the University of California, you see. Because that would have spoiled their game. Kroeber said, "Oh, pay him about forty cents an hour." Forty cents an hour, for one day of six hours. "You pay him two dollars something, and you give him a lunch." At that time that was quite sufficient; forty cents an hour was the going rate for the University of California.

So I told him, "I am going to pay you forty cents an hour," and he was happy because he wouldn't be able to get anything, normally. So he came every day to me, and I got some material for a little bit over a month.

I found him very dull, a very dull person. He didn't know how to get your point, what you asked. And he could not—-I said, "Can you tell me a story?" I thought I would give him—- No, he didn't know how to tell story. [all laugh] It is a difficult thing. You do get informants that cannot tell stories. If you ask you, yourself: "Can I tell me a story?" You'll search, but you may not be able to find any story to tell.

So he could not tell a story.

Peter: This was the younger person?

Li: Yes, the old man could not come out; he was blind and over seventy years old. He could not come to me.

Lindy Li

Mark: He probably knew the stories.

Li: I got mostly grammatical material, like "I come, you come, he comes," and so on. This kind of grammatical material which you could easily get from him. Or, say, "I go from here to there," and so on.

So, after a little over a month I found that this was getting a little bit—-the, how would you say it? Economically it is called what, the limit of returns?

Lindy: Diminishing returns.

Li: You stay longer, you get less. So I said, "I had better try another Indian tribe."
The Wailaki Indians

Li: So I left Petrolia and went to another county; not Humboldt, but Mendocino—is that the name of it? I went to Round Valley. I knew that there was an Athabaskan tribe called the Wailaki, and I got an old man, a Wailaki old man.

He was called Tip, old Tip. I got hold of him and asked him to give me information about the Wailaki language. I stayed there about another month.

The language was not particularly interesting.

Peter: Why do you say it was not interesting?

Li: Oh, because there was no funny sounds in it. [all laugh]

So, my summer was gone, you see. Two weeks in Hoopa Valley, one month in Petrolia, another month in Round Valley, so it was over two months of this three month vacation gone. So I wrote to Sapir and said, "I called a stop, I am going back to Chicago."

After that I went back to Chicago and made my report to Sapir about the work that I did.

Sapir wrote a small article in the University of Chicago magazine, the student magazine, about this field trip. You'll find that my picture was in that article, because he talked about me going to study American Indian languages. He says, "Mr. Li is the first Chinese student studying American Indian language. He rescued an American Indian language for us," and that's true because that was Mattole. Mine was the only material you have on that language. Then he told what kind of work he was doing and how important field work is for anthropology and the linguistic student.

This was the article in the Chicago magazine. [shows magazine] And there, that's my picture over there. [laughs] "An Expedition to Ancient America."

Mrs. Li: Who sent you this magazine?

Li: I think South Coblin. He looked at this and said, "I read something about you, do you want a copy?" So I said, "Okay, make a xerox copy." You see, here it says, "Mr. Li."

This was first of all a report on his [Sapir's] own work on the Hoopa, and then about my work. Oh yes, here he says, "Mr. Li proceeded to the Round Valley reservation, where he made the records of the Wailaki language, another Athabaskan dialect. The
combined party therefore succeeded in making a rather complete and adequate record of no less than three Athabaskan languages in the course of the summer's work." That was Sapir and me.

Bloomfield, Sapir, Boas, and Others: Field Work Methods Compared

Li: Well, you know, in those days the linguist did not go to the field to study language, he took books. And that's what you learned your language from, either Latin, Greek, or German, or English. You just used your book. But this was one of the more modern ways of learning a language—going out in the field.

Chan: Did Bloomfield engage much in field work? Was he as interested in field work as Sapir?

Li: Bloomfield? Yes, Bloomfield did a lot of work on American Indian languages too, you know. He was an Algonquin specialist. He even did some comparative work on Algonquin languages and wrote a historical phonology of so-called Central Algonquin. There are several groups; he only limited himself to Central. Like Fox and some others. So he was one of the distinguished American Indian linguists in America in those days.

There were about three or four people who did distinguished work, one was Franz Boas. He was really the grandfather of the American Indian people. And there was Michaelson, who was also working on Algonquin languages. Then Bloomfield worked on Algonquin languages, and Sapir worked on different languages. Kroeber did a lot of work, but Kroeber confessed that he was no phonetician. His record sometimes is not very dependable. Then there is Dickson at Harvard University. He did lots of American Indian work. But he is also not very dependable, his records. Then there is Godard. Godard worked a good deal on all the Athabaskan languages, including Hoopa and so on. But Godard's phonetics is also very poor; his ear is very poor. He often confused consonants.

For instance, the word—there is a consonant "k", but Hoopa will pronounce it as /ka/. Then there is also another word /qa/. Well, /ka/ and /qa/ are two different kinds of case, but he confused them very often. That, of course, makes phonology, particularly comparative phonology, very dangerous.

Lindy: How did you find out about these mistakes?

Li: Sapir worked on another Athabaskan language in Canada, and the two are distinguished. There is just no reason the Hoopa should confuse these two, so he knew that Godard made a mistake. But
Li: Godard worked on many Athabaskan languages when he was very often undependable on such minor phonetic and nice points.

Chan: That's not minor.

Li: Yes, it's also minor.

So Sapir went to work on Hoopa again, because Hoopa has some very peculiar phonetic points, and he wanted to make—. And Godard was very angry, because if you work on Hoopa and I come into your field, intrude into your field— But Sapir didn't care about that. So Godard became very antagonistic toward—

Chan: Chicago school!

Li: —Sapir and also complained to Boas. Well, this was a kind of professional jealousy. "You don't come into my field, that's my area."

So later on Godard wrote some paper against Sapir's theory about Na-Dene languages and so on. But that's over now.

Franz Boas

LaPolla: Could you talk more about Franz Boas?

Li: Yes. Franz Boas at the time I first met him was working with Edward Sapir, and I think Bloomfield. Three of them were members of a committee for the promotion of American Indian languages. I think some foundation gave a sum of money to this committee to study American Indian languages. At that time, of course, so very few people wanted to study American Indian languages except scholars at Berkeley and there was no money for fieldwork at that time. So this foundation gave money to Boas, Sapir, and Bloomfield, three persons as the members of the committee for this study and promotion of American Indian languages.

It was the first time that we made use of the money. Boas was traveling from New York to Chicago. He met with Sapir and I was fortunate to also meet Boas at that moment. Then Boas went to the Northwest to Washington State and also, I think, perhaps to Canada, too. He was interested in, I think, Nootka, or some other northwestern languages. He brought with him Jacobs; that was Boas's student. So the two of them were traveling across the United States and I met both of them in Chicago. Sapir was taking this opportunity to bring me to northern California to work on the
Li: Athabaskan Indians. That is Hoopa Indians, Mattole Indians, Bear River Indians; they're all Athabaskan Indians. So we went from Chicago, after we met Boas, and we came to Berkeley.

Completing the Dissertation and Exams for the Ph.D.

Li: When we got back I started writing out my report on the Mattole language. I came back about late August, September, and I finished my report about Christmastime. I sent it to Sapir and said, "Now I finished this very small book of about 150 printed pages." Sapir took a look at my report and said, "Well, I think it's good enough for a doctoral dissertation. Why don't you present that as your dissertation?"

This was about January or February of 1928. I said, "I never thought about that. In the first place, I never even put in a request saying I am a candidate for a Ph.D. degree. I didn't even send anything like that to the university. So I don't think I can do it." Sapir says, "That's quite queer. Why don't you go to the registrar's office, you send in a request that you want to be a candidate for your Ph.D. degree."

But then I was involved in certain university regulations. They said, "Okay, your request for candidacy to a Ph.D. is okay, but there are several things you have to do. First, a candidate must pass a French and German examination. So you go to the department and say, 'I want to take a French examination and a German examination.' But then you have to get your examination passed nine months before you can receive your degree." It was about February when I applied. "Your degree can't be given to you until November or December of this year. Earliest you can get it."

So I said, "Well, I don't care when I get it. But if I have to do it, I'll do it." I went to take the French examination, and they give you, of course, a passage of a French text, and you translate that into English. And I went to take the German exam. The German instructor who gave me the examination looked at me and said, "What do you come here for?" I said, "I come here to take my German exam." He had been in the same class with me for several seasons, mostly in Germanic phonology and Germanic linguistics and so on. He said, "Why do you come here to take this examination?" I said, "Well, I have to take it."

So I passed my German, passed my French examination, and so I was formally a candidate for a degree. My dissertation was already written, you see. The head of the department was Professor Buck. Very nice man, one of the most distinguished Indo-Europeanists in those days.
Buck, Bloomfield, and Sapir, those three were my teachers and three important members of the linguistics department. They came to have a conference, and said, "Now he took all the courses he can take." Indo-European courses: I took a course in Sanskrit; I took a course in comparative Greek and Latin grammar; I took a course in Old Slavic; I took a course on Lithuanian; I took all the Germanic courses; Old Norse and so on. "He has taken all the Indo-European courses that we can offer. In American Indian courses he wrote a dissertation and took all the courses that Sapir offered," and so on. "So what's the use of keeping him here until the date he receives his degree?"

Buck says, "Well, we'll send him to Harvard." So Buck wrote a letter to the graduate school dean of Harvard University and recommended me for a scholarship in Harvard to spend the next year. And of course, Harvard gave it to him.

So I packed my luggage and went to Cambridge. Harvard's conditions were very generous. They said, "You can take courses or not take courses. You can do whatever you want to do this year while you are at Harvard." But if you do not take courses, it is nonsense.

To Harvard University for Six Months, 1928

But Harvard, in those days, is no linguistics—even today it is no center of linguistics—

It still is not.

Yes. [all laugh] So I didn't want to take any linguistics courses. The linguistic courses that they had—what was the man's name, the head of the linguistic department? Actually he was the head of Indo-European linguistics. He was an Englishman.

This is Clark. Professor Walter E. Clark. There was a well-known tradition of Sanskrit studies at Harvard, starting from Charles R. Lanman and others.

So I took Vedic. I also took classes with Clark, and another visiting professor, Professor Stael von Holstein. We started to read some Buddhist Sanskrit texts. This text was edited by Stael von Holstein together with some Tibetan translation of that. So, I also learned some Tibetan from that course. Because there is Sanskrit, and there is Tibetan, and there is also a Chinese translation of that text.
Now Clark only knew Sanskrit, but he learned Tibetan. He couldn't learn Chinese. [laughs] Stael Holstein knew how to read Chinese, and I read Chinese, and I learned to read Sanskrit and Tibetan. So we had a very interesting group, three or four people, two of them Harvard professors. We went on with the so-called high Buddhist Sanskrit texts together, learned some Tibetan and so on.

After about half a year I thought that was enough for me. I told Harvard, "I want to go to Europe, take a look." And Harvard allowed me. They said, "Okay, if you want to go you can go. We won't keep you here."

So from Harvard I came back to Chicago, took my degree, and made a trip to Europe: first to England, then Paris, then to Berlin.

The Trip to Europe for Three Months, 1929

Li: So from that point, about February or March, I sailed from New York.

In Germany and I met a famous German musicologist--

Lindy: Hertzog?

Li: Hertzog's teacher. He was a musicologist. I forget his name.

Lindy: Oh, von Hornbostel?

Li: Hornbostel, yes. I met him in Paris, and he was interested in collecting records of primitive music. He said, "The university has certain equipment." You know, very primitive wax cylinders and also a very simple machine to record. He said, "You buy a set of that and go back to China and record some primitive music for us and send it to us."

So I brought that machine back to China and did record some songs, particularly the Thai people's songs, and sent part of it to Germany, to Hornbostel. By that time Hitler was in power in Germany and Hornbostel, of course, was a Jew. He had to go to England. So nothing happened anymore with that batch of records which I had sent him.

LaPolla: When you went to Germany, you mentioned that you had a letter of introduction from Franz Boas.
Li: Yes, after I got through with a half year's work at Harvard University, I thought I'd better go to Europe, so I came to New York and looked up Franz Boas. Franz Boas says, "I'd like to write you some letters to people in Germany." One was to a well-known scholar, somehow I forgot his name. He used to work on some languages in Chinese Turkestan on which they had found some manuscripts. He [Boas] wrote me a letter to him and wrote me a letter to someone in Hamburg. This person is a good experimental phonetician. Boas still believes in that experimental phonetician. So he wrote me two letters to Germany.

I met Boas' friend. He was very nice. He was a quite famous man. He was a member of the Royal Imperial German Academy. He was old, pretty old. He usually didn't see anybody but Boas was his old friend so he saw me. He showed me how he studied Chinese. He says, "I studied Chinese by studying Manchu first," because there are so many Manchu texts, the translation of old Chinese texts; for that reason he began to read Chinese by using Manchu translations of Chinese.

In Germany I began to also take a course in German, because I didn't speak German in those days. I had to learn to speak it. And in Germany I met a scholar, a professor Walter Simon. He later on went to teach in London as professor of Chinese in the School of Oriental Studies in London University. His son, of course, as you know, is in Australia.

Walter Simon, of course, was fairly young. In America, he would probably be called an instructor, but in Germany he was called a privatdocent [a private teacher who gets his salary not from the state but from the students]. We began to talk about Chinese linguistic, historical linguistic problems, and also talk about Sino-Tibetan things.

At that time, he was writing an article on a comparison of Tibetan and Chinese, something like that. At that time, Karlgren, a well-known sinologist, wrote an article in T'ung Pao criticizing, even scolding, Walter Simon for his comparative Chinese and Tibetan. Yes, I think that book is called Word Comparisons Between Chinese and Tibetan. So that was who I met. Then and there I became very good friends of Walter Simon. From that time on we often corresponded about Tibetan stuff.

We talked about problems in Chinese linguistics. You see, I had no knowledge of Chinese linguistics at all in Chicago. Nobody taught it, incidentally, in any American school in those times. The 1920s, you know. Many of them would just teach Chinese. What would they teach? You get Mencius and then say, "Now you translate it." Learn the characters: you translate that into English, and that's your Chinese lesson in those days. Very different from what it is now.
Simon lived in Berlin's west section called Grunewald. And we would go to his home and have tea and we would start walking around the forest, you know, the Grunewald forest. We'd talk about, oh, Karlgren's reconstruction of Old Chinese. You know, Karlgren criticized Walter Simon very seriously. I tried to say that Karlgren was too critical, and he said, "Oh, Karlgren has that tendency." That means he had the tendency of discouraging any young people from working in his field. You know, he would criticize so badly that people would say, "Oh, I can't work in that field."

So I told Simon, "Karlgren's a little bit too critical toward young scholars." And Simon was very much impressed by my observation. [laughs] So we became very friendly. We talked about his work. He had a short paper called "Old Chinese Rhyming Systems," something like that.

Later on when I met Karlgren, many years later, I asked him, "What about Walter Simon?" He said, "Oh, yes, I recommended him to London University."

I became a highly respected person later, when the Chinese University was established in Hong Kong. I became one of the advisors to the president of the Hong Kong University, I think because of Walter Simon.

Field Trip to Study the Hare Indians, Canada, 1928

And then from Europe I came to Canada, because I got money from Sapir's funds to do another American Indian language in Northern Canada. This time it was way up to the Arctic Coast. I was there a very short time because there was no airplane, nothing. You could only take the boat down the MacKenzie River. It took about three weeks to go down from Edmonton to the place where I wanted to go, which was called Good Hope. It was one of those trading stations of the famous British trading company, Hudson's Bay Company.

I went there and tried to find an Indian, but the Indians in the summer all went to the river, on an island. It was important to them because they had to get all the fish they could get in the summer. In the winter they needed all the fish they had to feed the dogs—they call them huskies. Because in the winter it snowed and they could travel only by dog teams, and the dogs were pulling the dog sleds from one place to another. Every day they gave every dog one fish. This was fish they dried during the summer. They'd give them one fish, and the next day they started off again, and at the end of the day they'd give the dogs another
Li: fish. So they had to provide a fairly large number of dried fish for the winter use. They were all on that island to try to get fish.

I went to that island and got somebody to work with me on the language, called Hare. But time was very short, and there was no place to stay on the island. There weren't any houses on the island, we had to pitch a tent. Well, I didn't know how to pitch a tent, and I didn't have a kitchen, stove, you know, to cook things. I didn't have anything; I was not prepared for this kind of life. But I had to be there, so I borrowed one tent from the Hudson's Bay Company back in town, and I got some blankets to put on the floor, and then an Indian took me and said, "Now you have your tent, you need poles to put it up." I said, "Okay, I'll go with you." So the old Indian went into the forest, I followed him, and he cut down five or six spruce saplings for posts, and said, "Now we can go back." I think he cut six, and he said, "I'll take four poles, you carry two, back to your tent." So I carried those two poles back to my tent—the first time I ever pitched a tent. I didn't know how to pitch it, so he helped me.

Then I brought some canned food—something like Hungarian goulash. You opened it up and then ate it. I bought ten or fifteen cans of that, and about a hundred eggs—

Mrs. Li: One hundred eggs?

Li: Yes, for one month. And a few cans of fruit, like peach or pear, because there are no fruits up there. Since I had no stove, I borrowed one tin can for putting gasoline in. I borrowed one of those as my stove. Everyday I went into the forest to get some dry wood as fuel, got back and made a fire, and then put my eggs or fish or what ever I had in and cooked my own breakfast, lunch, dinner on that thing.

Well, the first few days were okay, because I had eggs and canned Hungarian goulash. I just heated them up. But soon I was out of that, and the first thing I was out of was bread; there was no bread. You cannot keep bread for about a week or month or so, so I couldn't take that much. I had those so-called sailor biscuits, about that size [gesturing], dry, so you can keep them for months. I had those things, but they also soon ran out. So I had no bread.

I asked the Indians where they thought I could get some provisions. The Indians said, "Well, up there there is a cabin. There was a trapper who trapped animals, foxes and so on. Now, he may have some provisions in his cabin. We will go there and try to borrow some from him." I said, "Okay," and went with the Indians to that cabin. We found he had some flour which I could bake into something edible.
From Fang-Kuei Li's field notes
Hare Volume I, August 1, 1928. Pages 1 and 2

When the Hare is not far from home (or)
does not want to eat much - because
she is frightened - because she does not

...
From Eyak (Alaska) field notes
1970s
But the trapper was not there. They said, "Just pay him some money, and leave it, and take whatever you want." So I took some flour, that was all I wanted. I had lots of salt, because they keep the eggs on salt. After I got some flour we came back to the tent and I began to bake something. I didn't know how to bake. I couldn't bake bread because I didn't know how to bake bread. What I was trying to do was bake something like the biscuits, but I didn't know how. You have to put some yeast or something, you know, to make your bread--[all laugh]

Mrs. Li: Raise the dough.

Li: I put something in, but it didn't bake. The whole thing became a solid piece of--[all laugh]. But I had to eat it because that was the only thing I could do. So I had very hard biscuits for a while, too hard even to chew. I had to eat it, so I used a knife and sliced them into slices, put that into water to boil. Then I could at least eat it, I had something to eat.

Soon my Hungarian goulash was no more, my eggs were all gone--

Mrs. Li: All the eggs became solid.

Li: The eggs became rock: one piece. You can only keep them so long and then they become solid. It smelled terrible, so we had to throw that away. The only thing I could get then was fish.

The Indians got lots of really good fish, not big. So I asked them, "Every day, would you give me one fish?" It didn't cost anything, because they got hundreds and hundreds of fish every day. So they gave me one fish.

I had to eat one fish every day, so I cut the fish into three parts. In the morning I'd eat the head, at lunch I'd eat the middle, and for supper I ate the end. Fish for dinner, fish for breakfast, fish for lunch. That was okay. The only thing was that I had nothing to cook the fish with; the only thing I had was salt. No ginger, no nothing, except salt.

Mrs. Li: No jiangyou [soy sauce].

Li: [laughing] Of course no jiangyou. So I ate fish every day for two or three weeks. Strictly a fish diet. From that time on, for a year or so after I returned to China, I could not eat fish.

Mrs. Li: And you didn't like eggs for a long time.

Li: For a long time, yes, because they got smelly.
Li: Well, after several weeks of that kind of funny dieting I thought, "I've had enough of this kind of life." It was interesting because that was just above the Arctic Circle, and the sun never sets. The whole day the sun simply dips and goes up in the sky, like this. You have daylight all day, so that if you're not careful you will get into the next day without knowing it. Sunlight all day and night. It was interesting, because in the night you don't see any sun, but after a certain day in fall the sun begins to dip, and you get slightly—something like the afternoon, that dark. Then you see the Northern Lights floating along, like a cloud. It is quite interesting.

So after some weeks up there I figured the time was up for me. I had to take the boat up the MacKenzie River back to Edmonton. That was going against the river, so the boat went very slow. In some places—because by that time the water was low and the current was very fast, and the boat going up the rapids—it couldn't go up. It would go up here and then the water would wash it back, it would go up there and it would wash it back. For a week or so the boat simply went up and came back again. We couldn't do anything, we just stayed there and ate. Finally there was another boat coming down, and they threw a line to the other boat. This boat went up and pulled our boat up the river through the rapids, and then we could go on.

So while we were waiting for the boat to go up there were some other passengers on the boat—one was a dentist, another something, I don't know—so we started playing bridge on the boat. We spent our time playing bridge all day.

Mrs. Li: You knew how to play bridge at that time?

Li: Oh, a long time before. I learned to play bridge from Shanghai to America: two weeks on a boat, nothing else to do except play bridge.

Mrs. Li: Too bad there was no mahjong game on that ship.

Li: Oh, no, mahjong was not fashionable on the boat. It was fashionable on the boat on my way back to Shanghai. [laughs]
When I came back to Chicago to take my final oral examination for the degree, after leaving Harvard, Sapir asked me, "You did a lot of American Indian work, what are you going to do? You've got your degree, what are you going to do?"

I said, "I want to go back to China." He was surprised, but he said, "Well, if you want to go back, that's good. I'll get you a fellowship to go to China." So he got that fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation to send me to China, with all travel expenses paid to China and a monthly allowance, $200-$300 a month, American money. That was probably higher than many professors got, in China. [laughs] "I'll get you a fellowship to go to China." Then he said, "If you find China not suitable to you, you can, still with the fellowship, which provides you with traveling expenses, come back to the United States." It was a very generous grant. So I said, "Okay," and I took it.

But before returning to China I went to Europe for about two or three months. Then, as I told you, I did another summer of American Indian work on the Arctic Coast. After that, in the fall, I went back to China. That was at the end of 1929.

I took a Canadian Pacific Line boat, I think it was called Empress of Britain—or something. There were many Chinese going back to China on that boat too. I was in a regular cabin. The Chinese usually were in the steerage. In the steerage there were a lot of things going on. One of the things was gambling. One time—[laughs] they had a number of coins in there, and everybody guessed, odd or even. Lots of them, of course, earned lots of money, thousands of dollars, and tried to go back to China to give it to the family and so on. But on the way to China some lost all the money they had, so instead of getting off at Hong Kong, they would stay in the boat and come back to work for about
Li: ten years again. That was one of the stories about Chinese laborers. They saved about a thousand dollars, but on their way back to China they gambled all the money away.

Mrs. Li: What did you play in your group?

Li: Well, we didn't play anything. We just went around and looked at the things. There were some friends on the boat, too.

Appointment as Research Fellow in the Academia Sinica

Li: I went to Shanghai. The director of the Academia Sinica, Cai Yuanpei, was told that I was coming back, probably by Y. R. Chao. I had written to Y. R. Chao saying that I was coming back about this time. So when I arrived at Shanghai, Cai Yuanpei sent a research fellow to the boat to meet me. He didn't come himself but he sent a delegate to the boat saying that they made a reservation at the hotel for me and hoped that I could go with him back to the hotel. Well, this was the first time I was back to China after four or five years' studies in America. I was then only twenty-seven years of age; quite a young man.

I went to the hotel and the next day Cai Yuanpei invited me to a dinner at his home. There were quite a number of big shots: Cai Yuanpei, the director of the Academia Sinica; Yang Quan; and also a famous Chinese geologist, Li Siguang. Later on, Fu Sinian came down from Peking and we had a nice talk. They said they were going to offer me a research fellowship at the Academia Sinica in the Institute of History and Philology. I told them that I cannot accept this position because I already have a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation.

They said, "Okay. We'll reserve the position for you but we will not pay you any salary because you have your salary from the Rockefeller Foundation, but we want you to have this nominal position anyway as a research fellow of the Academia Sinica. It would be easier for you to travel in different places in China with an official position. If you have only the Rockefeller Foundation behind you, well, [laughs] what is a Rockefeller Foundation?" So, okay, okay, I said, "I'll accept the position but not salary."
Research on Hainan Island, 1930

Li: From Shanghai I went up north to Peking and met Y. R. Chao there. I met people who were studying Chinese linguistics, Chinese dialects, because Y. R. Chao was always interested in Chinese dialects. After a couple of weeks in Peking, I came back to Shanghai and from Shanghai went to Canton, to the south. In Canton I began to look around to see what I could do there. I even heard some Yao language in Canton.

Then I, all of a sudden, thought that I should go to Hainan Island. It was very difficult to get to Hainan Island in those days, but since I had the money I took a boat from Hong Kong. I went back to Hong Kong, took a boat and got to a port in Hainan, called Haikou. I went there and began to listen to the Chinese Hainan dialect of that area. It struck me that the so-called b and d's are not the same thing as voiced ones. People always thought they were voiced b and d's, but I thought they were not. I thought they were so-called implosive b and d's. Very similar, later on I found out, to the Vietnamese b and d's and, also, very similar to the Thai b and d's. But then I did not know; I knew only that I had never heard these very peculiar phonetic sounds. So I just traveled a little bit along the coast from Haikou to Lingao and south to Lehui. I could not go into the mountains in those days; it was impossible.

So after about a month there, just working around, I came back to Canton. Having found a Hainan speaker, I wanted to make some simple phonetic experiments about their b and d's. So I borrowed some instruments from the medical college of Canton University and I made some very crude instruments out of a cigarette tin box. The tin box I put over my mouth, drilled a hole on the other side, with a rubber tubing connecting it to a so-called rubber tembor, so if I blew with my breath through the tin can the air would go through the tembor. If you blow into it the needle will go up; if it is implosive, the needle will go down. So, in this way, I experimented with the Hainanese implosive consonants. I did turn out to be quite right that the air actually goes in. It's a kind of implosive consonant, no doubt about it.

And with that I made a report to the Academia Sinica saying that I had done some experiments with the b and d's in the Hainan Island Chinese dialect, and that they are not ordinary voice consonants but are implosive consonants. That report was in the report of the Academia Sinica to the government.
Decision to Study Thai, 1930*

After I got through with Hainan Island, I went back to Peking. The whole year was fully wasted doing nothing so I came back to the Academia Sinica. They said, "We'll offer you a research fellow." I said, "All right, I'll accept that." I sent a letter back to the Rockefeller Foundation saying that I had got a job in China; I didn't need the fellowship any more. From that time on, I became a research member of the Academia Sinica and started my research work on linguistics. The Academia Sinica did not make you work on any particular thing; you chose your own, whatever you wanted to study.

Y. R. Chao was working on Chinese, particularly Chinese dialects. I said, "I don't want to study Chinese dialects. There's one person, that's enough, with his assistants and so on." So I had to fool around with other subjects. One of them that I did study was Tibetan. So I started working on Tibetan and I wrote an article on Tibetan at that time.

LaPolla: On the development of the initials?

Li: Yes, Tibetan initials. It was quite a young beginning type of work.

I also fooled around with Chinese, early old Chinese phonology, because Y. R. Chao was not interested in old historical phonology; he was only interested in dialects. I also wrote some articles on Chinese historical phonology and then Tibetan.

Then I felt that I probably should work on some non-Chinese languages in China. There are, of course, several choices. You can choose some Turkish languages, all from Chinese Turkestan, or you can go to Tibet to do Tibetan work, or you can go to various non-Chinese languages in China. One of them, of course, was Guangxi's Tai languages.

Now, at that time, there were some very practical restrictions. It was very difficult for us to go to Chinese Turkestan in those days because of the political--Russian--and some other problems. So that was out. Go to Tibet. That was also very difficult. We could not go to Tibet because, you know,

*The usage is Thai for the Siamese language, and Tai for the language family as a whole or the dialects in China. [Randy LaPolla]
Li: the Dalai Lama was against the Chinese government and so we could not go there. If we did go, we'd have to go to India and from India into Tibet and that's very difficult to travel.

No, the only thing left for me was in Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan and such places. The best place would be Guangxi because that's easy to travel; Guizhou was very difficult to get into; Yunnan, also, was very difficult to get into. Guangxi was, of course, well known for its Tai language but nobody was making any extensive study of the Tai dialects in Guangxi or around that area. I thought probably I should spend some time studying this. But I wanted to know something more about the Tai language which is well known to most scholars and that is of course the Siamese language. A lot of people worked on that. There were lots of written documents. In Guangxi, the Tai language had no written documents. So in order that I could study these languages more efficiently, I said I should go to Thailand to study the Thai language first.

Trip to Thailand to Learn the Thai Language, 1933-1934

Li: I talked to Y. R. Chao. Y. R. Chao was a very, very good and generous fellow. He said, "You want to go to Thailand? Okay. I will provide you with the money."

In those days I think the Academia Sinica was very liberal, very generous. You could study whatever you wanted. And you were also provided with some money, too. That was the generous policy of Y. R. Chao. So I went from, at that time, from Shanghai. You know, to get to Thailand was very difficult, too, because China had no diplomatic relations with Thailand. We could not get a visa to Thailand. So we had to go to Thailand via Singapore and around Singapore take the train going up to Thailand. So I went to Singapore first.

In Singapore there was a Chinese consul general; there was also a Thai consul general. Since they were all diplomatic, you know, officials together in Singapore, the Chinese consul general and the Thai consul general knew each other as diplomatic colleagues. So I went there, trying to contact the Thai consul general through the Chinese consul general, and he says, "Okay, I'll give you a visa. I can stamp your passport. Now you should have no trouble going to Thailand." And that way I got the first visa to Thailand. I took the train from there to some famous place, where there was an inn that was very nice to stay in.
There was a Thai minister staying there, Phya Damrong. Phya Damrong was there because he was an exile from Thailand because Thailand was having political trouble and he was the uncle or somebody of the Thai king. So he was exiled and he was staying there. The Siamese consul told me that Phya Damrong was in that place, "You'd better go there. Perhaps you can see him." So I stopped over and saw Phya Damrong and talked a little bit. He was very, very nice. He asked me to see somebody in Thailand, also a prince. You know, Phya Damrong was also a prince.

After I left him, I took the train to Bangkok. It happened that I also obtained a letter from a Chinese in Shanghai, who had friends in Bangkok because they came from the same district; you know, from the Chaochou, Shantou yidai [area]. So when I got there, I looked up this Chinese friend and he found me a little house, a two-story house, and rented it for me. In those days a house was very inexpensive; something like twenty dollars a month. So I went there and got a house and I procured two teachers: a boy who was also a teacher at some school and then a girl who was also a teacher at some other school.

So I began to study Siamese. Part of the time was for conversation, part of the time was for reading. I began to read very intensively. That is not the rule here; now, you don't read anything, you learn first to speak the language. But I'm still old-fashioned so, aside from learning to speak Thai, I also read Thai, and also read some Thai poetry, and I read some very exotic reading material, as I wanted some very deep stuff on the history of Thailand. They said, "Well, that's too hard for you. History of Thailand." I said, "I don't mind. I'll learn it." So I learned to read texts; I learned to speak Thai, neither of them pretty well but after three months I had a pretty thorough general knowledge of the Thai language.

Research on Guangxi Tai Dialects, 1934

After that I went back to China. The next year I went to Guangxi to study the Tai language there. I surveyed about ten or fifteen Tai dialects in Guangxi and did some more extensive work on two dialects. I collected lots of texts and vocabulary besides phonology and so on. One of them was the Lungchow dialect. Lungchow is a city which is just on the border of Vietnam, so I wrote a monograph on the Longchow dialect. It happened to be in one of the important Tai group of languages in the southwestern part of Guangxi Province.
Li: Later on, I studied a dialect called the Wuming dialect. The Wuming dialect happened to be in another Tai group in Guangxi Province. I wrote a monograph on that. That happened to be one of the so-called Northern Tai dialects. So in that trip I wrote a monograph on this Southwestern Tai dialect and also on a Northern Tai dialect. It happened to be that these were the two important groups of Tai dialects in Guangxi Province, so I fairly covered the whole area in about the two or three months I was there.

Then I went back to Nanking. I think the Academia Sinica from Peking had moved to Nanking because of the Japanese threat to Peking. I started working on the material that I had obtained, such as the monograph on the Lungchow dialect and later on the monograph on the Wuming dialect. All of them were being worked on at the time of the Japanese invasion. This is the Wuming Dialect Report and this is also the Wuming Dialect Report. You see, these two were two different editions. [shows the books]

This edition, Zhongguo Kexueyuan, was published by China when China was lost to the Communists. [laughter] But they, nevertheless, published this manuscript of mine. The manuscript was already finished but not printed, so that they printed it and only last year this fellow gave me this volume. He says, "You probably don't have it yet." [laughs] He gave this to me. It was published in 1953. This was [ruffles through papers] something from the general phonology and the number of Chinese borrowings and so on. The interesting thing was I gathered, besides the texts, quite a number of songs. I collected a fairly large number of songs. This was the pronunciation and then this was the translation, but these songs were also written in their own script.

Chan: They are different from Chinese? This one is.

Li: They are different, highly different from Chinese. It's from Chinese but you know, you can make different kinds of characters.

LaPolla: So they didn't use the Thai writing system?

Li: Thai writing system, yes.

LaPolla: This is for the Taizu [Tai nationality in China] but they didn't use the normal Thai alphabet based on Devanagari. This was their own system based on Chinese characters, right?
Li:

It's very much like the Vietnamese writing.* The same kind of principle but they are different, of course. They are made up of Chinese characters.

At that time too, I began to write papers on Thai linguistics, really small articles.

Translation of Bernhard Karlgren's *Études sur la Phonologie Chinoise*

LaPolla:

When did you work with Luo Xintian [Luo Changpei] and Chao Yuen-Ren in translating Bernhard Karlgren's book on Chinese phonology? Was that just an isolated project or had you later changed back to Chinese phonology?

Li:

That was in 1930, about.

LaPolla:

Nineteen thirty you started?

Li:

More than 1930, about '31 or something like that. This was again Y. R. Chao's idea. Y. R. Chao was interested in Karlgren's *Études sur la Phonologie Chinoise* which was in French. The Chinese students in those days did not read French very easily. They could read English all right, but they could not read French, so Y. R. Chao wanted to get that translated into Chinese. He had corresponded with Karlgren to see if we might translate his book into Chinese. Karlgren agreed but he thought that his book was not really worthwhile translating.

Chao had already started translating a little bit of that, in his leisure time, but then he came to America to become director of Chinese students in Washington, D.C., and he wanted in the first place to get this thing finished. In the second place, we were all very poor. The government did not pay our salaries, so we had no money to live. We discussed the problem with Hu Shi. Hu Shi had control of the American Boxer Indemnity Fund. So we discussed the problem. We said, "We have no salary and we cannot do any work. The government has no money to pay us." He said, "Okay. We will pay you to translate Karlgren's phonology. That is not a salary but is for your work. So we will pay you your salary according to the work you do translating."

* He's referring to the Vietnamese writing system, used before romanization, which was based on Chinese characters.
Li: At that time—Chao Yuen-Ren was not in China, but in America—so I and Luo Changpei, the two of us, were involved with the translation project. Hu Shi paid us to translate it. After a few months, the government situation became better. So we did our first draft of the translation of Karlgren's work. Chao later on came back. Because Chao translated one part, Luo Changpei's friends did another part, and I and Luo Changpei translated the third part, all the terminologies were not quite the same. [laughs] So it had to be made uniform through all the three different parts. Of course, Ding Shengshu was the one who put the whole translation into a readable shape. He was the one who finally made the whole manuscript translatable. Then it was published, largely due to his work. I was then, at that time, fooling around with Tai languages.

LaPolla: Did Huang Kan do actual reconstruction before Karlgren did, or was Karlgren really the first to do actual reconstruction? Some people say Huang Kan did reconstruction of ancient Chinese before Karlgren did, but Karlgren was first, no?

Li: Huang Kan did not do any reconstruction at all, no.*

LaPolla: You mentioned a few of the projects that you had at the Academia Sinica in the early days, but you didn't mention language reform. In the 1920s, wasn't there a lot of language reform going on by Hu Shi and Y. R. Chao and others in terms of establishing Guoyu [national language] and trying to think of ways to simplify the writing system and that kind of work?

Li: No Guoyu, in our institute, Institute of History and Philology, because it is philology [that is emphasized]—At that time, Mr. Chao, Y. R. Chao, was interested in Chinese dialects and he was still interested in Chinese dialects even when he was here. He teaches. So he at that time did one piece of Wuyu, study of the Wu dialects, and he also went to Canton to study the Canton dialects. Also he went to Jiangxi, the Jiangxi dialects, so he surveyed different Chinese dialects. He had with him Luo Changpei, who also worked on Chinese dialects and other assistants and so on.

It was for this reason I lost interest in Chinese dialects. I didn't want to touch Chinese dialects anymore. I don't like Chinese dialects, so I started to work on different languages in China.

* More on reconstruction in Chapter V.
LaPolla: What did you do when you completed your research on the Guangxi Tai dialects in 1934?

Li: After 1933, the institute was in Nanking because of the Japanese threat to Peking. So we moved to Nanking. I continued my work on dialects. In 1937 Yale University offered me a job of visiting professor in the Oriental Studies Department. I accepted that position. They gave me an appointment for three years, but Academia Sinica said, "We can only give you two years of leave." So I accepted for two years and came to the United States. It was 1937 when the Japanese came to attack Shanghai; that was the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War.

In 1937 I brought my wife and my two children, Lindy and Peter—the whole family—to New Haven. It was a very unfortunate year for me because I fully expected Sapir to be at Yale, my old teacher. But unfortunately Sapir got sick. He lived in New York, and had a heart attack, so that he was no longer teaching, for that year anyway.

I was in New Haven two years. I gave a course on Chinese phonology. Of the people who came to take my course (there were very few students who knew anything about Chinese phonology,) there were two students—famous persons—who came. Two professors from Harvard, one was [Serge] Elisséef, director of the Harvard Yenching Institute, the other was Professor Ware, who came every week from Boston to New Haven to come to my class. [laughs] It was very interesting. But really I did very little teaching; that was the only course I taught. Also, I had never taught in China; this was my first teaching position. So I was in New Haven for two years, 1937 to '39. After my two years of leave was through, I went back to China.

From New Haven, across the continent we took our time. We drove. We saw Salt Lake City, Grand Canyon, and came to California to Los Angeles. From Los Angeles, we came up to San Francisco. We took about two or three months to drive all the way to San Francisco.

Mrs. Li: We visited two world's fairs on our way.

Li: At that time there was a world's fair in New York and there was also a world's fair in San Francisco. Why did they have two world's fairs at that time—one in New York and one in San Francisco?
When we reached San Francisco, we took a boat to Hawaii. At that time, Professor Chao was in Hawaii and we visited him and stayed there for about two weeks. He was on the way from Hawaii to Yale University to take up the position I left at Yale. So we had a nice time, swimming and so on, in Hawaii. Hawaii, in those days, there were no high rises. All very flat.

So, after two weeks we took the boat back to Shanghai and he [Y.R. Chao] took the boat—the same day—from Hawaii to San Francisco. We had left our old car in San Francisco. He drove it back to Yale.

We went to Shanghai, because at that time, we could not go to where the Chinese government was located. The Chinese government was now in Chungking and all the coastal provinces were occupied by Japan. So we went to Shanghai because Shanghai was still Zujie [Foreign Concession]. We still could get in there and from there transfer to a boat to Haiphong [Vietnam] and then to Kunming. In Kunming at that time was the Xinan Lian Da [Southwestern Union University], and Academia Sinica—our part. So I went to Kunming. During all the war years—Kunming was bombed and the government was not able to pay us except twenty or thirty dollars a month. At that time Kunming was very expensive, so we moved to Sichuan. We stayed in Sichuan for a couple of years in a small place called Lizhuang and I did some field work. I did some surveys of different languages in Guizhou. So that's where I picked up the material for the Kamsui languages in Guizhou and also some Miao languages.

After two or three years there I went to Chengdu and accepted a visiting teaching job at Yenching University, where I got better paid. Because Yenching, you know, still got money from America. I was there from about 1943 to '45, teaching and also doing research. I also did a good deal of travel.

And then I got an offer from Harvard as a so-called visiting lecturer in 1946, so I decided to go to Harvard. The whole family in 1946 came to Shanghai from Chengdu and we tried to make our way to Harvard. In those days it was difficult to travel because there was no official airline, there were only some airplanes for the government troops. The boats—well, there was...
Li: a longshoreman's strike and no boat came to Shanghai. We were stranded in Shanghai, and I had to go to Harvard. The real reason was I had to be there in order to get my salary, otherwise I wouldn't have money. And we were stuck up in Shanghai.

So we managed to have a navy airplane fly me from Shanghai to Honolulu to San Francisco. The family couldn't take the plane, because they wouldn't allow ladies to take the navy plane, so I came here first and they later on followed when the boat service was resumed. They came to San Francisco on the boat. I first went by airplane to Harvard.

I was at Harvard two years working on the Harvard-Yenching Dictionary. That was not very interesting; that job was very unsuitable for me. I am a linguist, not a dictionary-maker. So after two years at Harvard, I said, "I'm not coming back. I'm going to leave Harvard." And I got, again, an appointment at Yale University for another year, from '48 to '49, as a visiting professor. So I was there again at Yale teaching for one year. I had some very good students. Nicholas Bodman was my first student there.

The University of Washington, 1949-1969

Li: I was hoping to come back to China in 1949. So we drove across to Seattle to go back, but when we reached Seattle the Chinese situation entirely changed. The government was no longer capable and the Communist regime began to take over the whole country so we could not go back in 1949. So we got stuck in Seattle. I took a position as professor of Chinese in Seattle.

Mrs. Li: Also a visiting professor.

Li: No, no, the first year is always a visiting position, and then later on becomes a regular professor.

There was somebody in the university, a dean of the graduate school who knew about me. He asked the head of the department, "So you appointed Professor Li as professor of Chinese? But I know he was a student of American Indian languages. How can he teach this Chinese?" [laughs] So I almost lost my job. [laughter]

Mrs. Li: The head was George Taylor.

Li: Taylor, yes. But the dean was someone else. But, anyway, I got appointed as a full professor of Chinese from 1949 up to '69, a full twenty years. I was in charge of the teaching of Chinese,
Li: the training of Chinese linguistics there. But very few linguists came out of that. Quite a few in Chinese literature came out.

The University of Honolulu, 1969-1977

Li: So 1949 to '69, after twenty years, I had a friend in the University of Honolulu who said, "You'd better come to Honolulu." We thought Honolulu was a very nice place to retire to. So that after twenty years at Seattle, cold and damp weather, I retired from the University of Washington as a professor emeritus.

So we moved to the University of Hawaii in '69. I was teaching at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, and I retired again in 1972. That was when I was seventy years old. I retired again and was made a professor emeritus at the university. I was two emeritus. One in the University of Honolulu; one in the University of Washington.

After I retired, I stayed there for a number of years. Got grants to write and also to visit Thailand several times in order to gather material for my work on Thai linguistics. So I finished my book, Handbook of Comparative Tai, in about 1977.

LaPolla: In '78 you went back to mainland China? That was the first time since the liberation?

Li: Seventy-eight?

Mrs. Li: September of '78. [speaks in Chinese to her husband] "First time to go to China."
Origins and Nature of the Academia Sinica and Some of its Leading Scholars

Cai Yuanpei

LaPolla: Professor Li, could you continue to talk about Cai Yuanpei and some of the other people you knew in the Academia Sinica?

Li: Cai Yuanpei was a well-known Chinese scholar at the end of the Qing Dynasty. He became very progressive and was teaching in schools and so on. Finally, during the Republican period, he became the president of Peking University. He was instrumental in developing Peking University into a first-rate university by inviting all sorts of scholars, such as Hu Shi and many others. For that reason, Peking University became really the most important institution in the early Republican period. The influence is, of course, still very strong even, for instance, in Taiwan.

He was for a short time minister of education and, because of the political situation after Wusui Yundong [May Fourth Movement] and so on, he was not happy with the government in Peking and he left Peking and came to Shanghai. At the time, the government, of course, was in Nanking and the government, since it didn't want to go back to Peking, asked him what did he want to do? I think that was his situation. It goes behind the government policy. He said, "I want to establish some kind of institution to promote research," because in those days all the university professors only taught; they didn't do any research. "I want to emphasize research."

For that reason, he was made the president of the Academia Sinica, which is chiefly a research institute, not teaching. For that reason, he had some very peculiar rules. He said, "People
Li: who work in the different institutes of the Academia Sinica, of course, should not teach. They can only do research." Then a number of institutions, like the Institute of History and Philology, Institute of Physics, Institute of Chemistry, Institute of Geology, and all sorts of things were established by him. The Academia Sinica was probably established about 1928, about that date; I don't know, '28, '27, something like that.

LaPolla: How big actually was Academia Sinica in those days? How many people would you guess were there?

Li: Well, you see there were quite a number of institutes: the Institutes of History and Philology; Institute of Social Science; Institute of Chemistry; Institute of Physics; Institute for Biology, and Institutes of Engineering, one for psychology. I think there were about ten institutes in those days but all the institutes were very small.

For instance, the Institute of History and Philology—one of the biggest institutes—there were only about seven research fellows and that's one of the biggest. The important research fellows of History and Philology were Fu Sinian, Chen Yinque, Chao Yuen-Ren, Li Ji, and Luo Changpei, and me. Of course, you have assistants and other fellows inside. That was the biggest institute and that started out with several important projects. One of them was archeology, the Shang Dynasty excavations, and also some other excavations for the archeology section. Chao Yuan-Ren was studying Chinese dialects and so on.

Later on, of course, in 1937 when Japan invaded China we all went away. In 1937 it happened that I was in America, but the Academia Sinica was moved to Chungking. All the government went to Chungking. Cai Yuanpei didn't want to go to Chungking—he went to Hong Kong and practically hid out there in Hong Kong. In 1939 I passed through Hong Kong and I saw him, but not too long afterwards he died in Hong Kong.

Chan: What was he doing in Hong Kong?

Li: Well, he was doing nothing. He just couldn't do anything in Hong Kong.

LaPolla: Did you mention Luo Changpei just now?

Li: Yes. Luo Changpei at that time was in America. He was teaching in—what is a school in California where Mei Lanfang got his degree?

Mrs. Li: Pomona.
Pomona, yes. Most of the time he was teaching in Pomona for a couple of years. Then he moved and taught at Yale, I think, for a couple of years.

Next was Hu Shi. I did not know Hu Shi until I came back to China in 1929. I was later on working in the Institute of History and Philology with Y. R. Chao, Luo Changpei and so on. At that time I met Hu Shi. I think in a year—I forget exactly what year it was—it was Hu's fortieth birthday, so we all—Y. R. Chao, me, and Luo Changpei, Fu Sinian—all went to Hu's home and gave him a big birthday party. That was the first time I went to Hu's home and met him.

After that, I had several opportunities of meeting Hu Shi. One was in 1937 when I was a visiting professor at Yale University. He was then in America to help the Chinese government on the Japanese war matters. He was asked to give a lecture at Yale University. He came to Yale University and came to my house and lived with us for a couple of days. Later on he went to New York and gave lectures. But then, you know, he had a heart attack, and was seriously ill. So for a time he was not doing anything; he couldn't do anything because of the heart attack. But, later on, he became the Chinese ambassador to Washington, D.C., and lived in the embassy.

Mrs. Li: The Twin Oak Palace.

Li: Once we went to New York and he asked us to live in the embassy. But he himself, he said, "I am not allowed to go upstairs, downstairs. I can only live in the first floor. You go up, [laughs] and live in my bedroom."

Mrs. Li: He said we played Romeo and Juliet. [laughter]

Li: So we saw him again that time. Later on he got well. For some reason or other, I think the government changed its policy and appointed, I think, Sono Ziwen to become the ambassador to Washington—so Hu Shi became a lecturer in different universities: Columbia University, Berkeley, and others—giving lectures. He was able to do that.

Mrs. Li: He worked in the library in Princeton University.

Li: Yes, he worked here, too. He worked in the Princeton Library. It was probably for political reasons since he was doing some general academic lectures.
Li: One meeting in New York, we were discussing the problem of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, "What shall we do about the Academia Sinica?", and so on. At that time, we decided that the Academia Sinica in Taiwan should have all the members of the Academia Sinica meet in Taiwan. We decided on that so that year Hu Shi, Xiao Gongquan, me, and four or five of us all went back to Taiwan to have a meeting of the members of Academia Sinica.

Mrs. Li: Hu Shi became the president of Academia Sinica.

Li: No, not that early.

First Zhu Jiahua was the president. After Zhu Jiahua—Zhu Jiahua was not agreeable to the government and he resigned. Then Hu Shi became the president of Academia Sinica and he went back to Taiwan to take care of the Academia Sinica. He was there several years as president. In one of the summer meetings of the members of the Academia Sinica and other scholars who met in Taiwan, he gave a cocktail party for all the guests and visitors and so on, and he died during that cocktail party.

Mrs. Li: Heart attack.

Li: Yes. Then, of course, you had to get a new president of Academia Sinica and have a meeting of all the members to vote for the new president. The president of Academia Sinica cannot be appointed by the government, by the president, Chiang Kai-shek, for instance. We nominated two or three persons as the president of Academia Sinica and Chiang Kai-shek could only appoint one of the three that were nominated. This had earlier become a rule for the Academia Sinica because we did not want to have the academy be involved in politics. That would be a very sad thing because politicians will appoint anybody to be the president. So that was a long time established tradition—that the government cannot control the academy. They can only make appointments as recommended by the academy.

Mrs. Li: Let me interrupt you. One personal relationship between Hu Shi and us you forgot to say: He was a witness of our wedding.

[speaks in Chinese]

Li: He was the zhenghun ren.

LaPolla: Witness.

Chan: Is he the person who married you?

Li: He's somebody who will be a witness to your marriage, you see. The zhenghun ren, He will witness. So you invite him to the wedding and he will sign your marriage certificate.
Mrs. Li: He pronounced the marriage.

Chan: Do you have the marriage certificate?

Li: That was a long time ago, 1932.

Mrs. Li: I don't have it. We don't have the certificate now.

Li: No, we lost everything.

That was the thing that I remember about Hu Shi. Hu Shi, besides staying in our house in Yale University, also stayed in our house in Seattle. He went to visit us in Seattle. Also, there was a meeting in Seattle about Chinese studies and he and a number of others came to Seattle and he was also there.

Mrs. Li: Fourteen members from Taiwan. He [Hu] was the tuanzhang [group leader].

Li: Some of them lived in our house but I think, also the director of the zhiwuxue, Botany [Institute] lived in our house, and also Yang Liangsheng from Harvard University and a number of others. Well, that was all we can say about Hu Shi.

Yuen Ren Chao

Li: The person that I knew first was Y. R. Chao. Y. R. Chao was teaching at Qinghua College when I was a student there as a premedical student. But I never met him, I didn't know about him, because he was teaching something else. I was studying physics, chemistry, and biology, and all of that, so I really did not know him. He told me later on when I met him that he was teaching at Qinghua.

I've known him, of course, since 1929, when I returned to China after I got through studying here. In 1929 I was appointed as a research fellow of the Academia Sinica. Since 1929, Y. R. Chao was also a research fellow. We were working together from 1929 to 1937. Eight years we were in the same institute, offices facing each other.

And Y. R. Chao wrote a biography of me in the--I do not know the exact title of that book. It was called something like Biography of Phoneticians or Phonologists. It was published in New York or some place like that. I was away at that time, and
Li: Y. R. Chao wrote my biography in that book. You may be able to
find it in the library, but I don't know what the exact title is
called. Something like Biography of Phonologists.

The phonologists of America at that time were all supposed
to be included. I wasn't here when they planned that biography,
but Y. R. Chao wrote my biography for me. The others, they all
wrote the biography themselves.

LaPolla: Was that in English or Chinese?

Li: In English. It was published in America. I think all libraries
should have that book, but I don't know exactly who published it.

So, you see, from 1929 to 1937, eight years, our offices
were facing each other. So we knew each other extremely well.
He was most kind to me. I think all my teachers, either in
America or in China, have always been very nice towards me,
including Y. R. Chao.

In 1937 the Japanese invaded Shanghai, and we all went away.
I came to Yale. I was a visiting professor. And Y. R. Chao in
1937 came to the University of Hawaii, also as a visiting
professor. After 1939 I went back to China and Y. R. Chao came
to Yale to take my place as visiting professor of Yale
University. He was there a few years, two or three years, and
then he went to Harvard. I don't know what his title was, but he
was working for the Harvard-Yenching Institute.

During that time the Second World War was going on, and Y.
R. Chao was in charge of teaching Chinese to all the soldiers,
the GIs. So he was really busy, and that's where he wrote his
Chinese reader, and also the Cantonese reader, in those Second
World War years.

I went back to China in 1939 to the Academia Sinica, and was
doing various field work in China, too. I was very happy because
I was able to take this opportunity to do some more field work.
But in 1946 Y. R. Chao gave notice to Harvard University. He
said he was going to come back to China, but actually he did not.
He recommended me to take his place at Harvard. So in 1946 I
got to Harvard.

But that kind of work at Harvard was writing a dictionary,
which I didn't particularly like, so after two years at Harvard I
went to be visiting professor, again at Yale University. That
was 1948-49, two years. And then I was on my way. I said, "I am
going back to China," in 1949, because the war was over, the
Japanese were defeated and so on.
Y. R. Chao also was trying to go back to China. He came to Berkeley, and Berkeley kept him here, saying, "Better not go home." And of course, who was the professor—?

Li: Boodberg?

Li: Boodberg, yes. Boodberg was trying very hard to keep him here as a professor, and he stayed.

I was going back home to China too, but before I left, [George E.] Taylor and [Franz] Michael from the University of Washington came to New Haven and said they wanted to have me there as a professor of Chinese linguistics. So it ended up that Y. R. Chao ended up in Berkeley, I ended up in Seattle. That was the kind of thing that happened.

So Y. R. Chao is a person whom I knew from my very early days, from 1929, when I first went back to China up till when Y. R. Chao died in Boston. I, of course, know Y. R. Chao's family, Mrs. Chao and his daughters. And most of them, including Y. R. Chao and also my other professors Bloomfield, Sapir, all of them, have been most kind to me. They gave me fellowships and gave me appointments and so on.

Y. R. Chao, of course, at that time in the Academia Sinica was working particularly on Chinese dialects. He wrote his first book about Wu dialects. That was before he even came to Academia Sinica. And later on he studied Jiangxi dialects, Hubei dialects and so on. So he kept on with Chinese dialects for a number of years.

I myself was not interested in dialects, so I tried to fool around with all other things. None Chinese: Tibetan, Thai, and so on.

Well, this is what I know about Y. R. Chao.

LaPolla: What about on a more personal level? What kind of a relationship was it?

Li: It was very personal. My wife, my daughter Lindy, they all know Y. R. Chao, and Mr. Chao's daughter—

Mrs. Li: Iris.

Li: Iris. So we all know each other very well. So it's entirely, both, academically as well as personally.

LaPolla: Did you consider him your teacher or just a friend?
Friend. Just friend. Because, you see, in 1929, when I first went back to China from America I was appointed research fellow, and Y. R. Chao was also research fellow. Same kind of rank, except that he was in charge of the linguistics department and I was not in charge. I was just a research fellow.

Y. R. Chao, academically as well as personally, was always a good friend of mine, including Mrs. Chao, who was not very--

Mrs. Li: Easy to deal with. [all laugh]

Li: Anybody could get scolded by her. I am still very good friends with Iris.

[To Mrs. Li] What happened with Iris, did she send me a bouquet of flowers?

Mrs. Li: Oh, on your birthday.

Li: On my birthday, yes.

Mrs. Li: Last year she was here, we had a party. She brought a big bunch of red roses. This year on his birthday she was not here, but she sent us three dozen long-stemmed roses. Even when she is not here. One of our young friends made the remark, said that "Mrs. Chao is so hard to deal with, any friend she has a criticism of, but never Mr. Li. She said, "Libobo [Uncle Li], how can you do that? Mrs. Chao never said a bad word about you." It's kind of a remark about her.

Fu Sinian

Li: Well, the next one that I met about the same time was Fu Sinian. Fu Sinian had more or less a kind of official position. He was the director of the Institute of History and Philology. So he was really the one who was in charge of the whole institute. Except common academic relationships, not being in the same field, we had very little to talk about except merely as friends. Fu Sinian was, of course, also a very good friend of ours. And later on, of course, Fu Sinian became the president of Taiwan University. But I never went back to Taiwan; I came from Shanghai direct to America.

Chan: Did we hear something about how you weren't happy with Fu Sinian? Or was it his wife?
LaPolla: No, what we had heard was that Mrs. Li and Mrs. Fu were very good friends, but that you and Fu Sinian didn't necessarily get along too well.

Chan: [laughs]

Li: Of course, he in the first place is director of the institute. He is in a very high position. In the second place--

Mrs. Li: Never became very close friend to him, anyway.

Chan: [laughing] Oh, my. Very diplomatic she is!

Li: But Fu Sinian was also very nice. He was much more politically an important person. He was the director of the institute, once also politically he was a so-called Canzhengyuan, political person, and he was also for a time president of Peking University, [Beijing Daxue] and he was also later on the president of Taiwan Daxue [Taiwan University]. So he was too busy to--and I am not a political person, so I didn't talk with him about business.

Ding Shengshu [Ting Sheng-shu]

Li: The next one that I knew was Ding Shengshu--1932 or '31. He was graduating from Peking University and was made a research assistant in the Institute of History. He is probably one of the--very, very well-trained scholars in Chinese philology and literature and linguistics.

At that time I was a research fellow and he was my assistant. He was extremely intelligent and tried to absorb all the modern Chinese, all the linguistics, and so on. And then after a few years he came to America, and stayed a couple of years at Yale University and later on at Harvard University. So he was fairly well trained in Chinese and western linguistics. For instance, he studied Latin in Yale University, and so on. So by the time when he went back to China in 1949--he went to Shanghai and went back to the institute--he was the best-trained in western linguistics as well as in Chinese philology. I think even up to now, he is still the best-trained person, except that now he is sick all the time.

So I would count him as one of the most--. But he is a very peculiar person. He never wanted to write any articles. Never. And he always helped people, and did everything he could to help
others. And, you know, in Peking, I think he wrote something about Chinese grammar, and he had a very high reputation in both Peking and so on.

[Takes out book] This was my--a number of my articles on Archaic Chinese philology.

He was the one who collected this together and published it in Commercial Press in Peking. And he also published something else of mine. I have a very good relationship with Ding Shengshu. He always considered himself as my student, but he really knows more than I do.

Zhou Zumo

Li: The one after that whom I knew in 1934 or '35 was Zhou Zumo. He also was in Peking University, and came to the institute, again, as a research assistant. Just like Ding Shengshu.

Mrs. Li: Can't be '34, it must be '43. Before we came to America?

Li: No. In '34 we were in Nanking. When did we move to Nanking?

Mrs. Li: 1934.

Li: Yes. About that time he came as a research assistant. But he is, you know, a typical Chinese philologist. He has no interest in western linguistics. And he is still like that, you know. He will write things about Chinese Qie Yun, about Chinese linguistic—

Chang Kun [Kun Chang]

LaPolla: You've had a long relationship with Chang Kun. Could you discuss that relationship?

Li: I and Chang Kun? Yes.

LaPolla: He's been your student.

Li: I met Chang Kun for the first time in 1939, I was in Kunming. I was then conducting not a class but a kind of a workshop with a number of students who were interested in linguistics. At that time there were very few Chinese scholars who would do fieldwork. Most of them were of the Chou Fa-Kao type, who knew the Old
Li: Chinese phonology systems, and so on, but few of them actually would go to do fieldwork, you know, to study this. So I had a kind of a class—not exactly a class, it's not a school. Anyway, I said, "Well, you have to learn to record some dialects."

So I got hold of a person in Yunnan. I said, "Now, let's record this language." We began by asking simple words and then learned how to write phonetically that particular word. Then you can begin to make short sentences with different results and so on. There were several students. One of them was Chang Kun; the other was Ma Xuejiang; there were three or four others. They all came to that experimental class. This was one of the Tai languages which I studied. I think I collected a good deal of texts for that language. But these young people, they had never had this kind of experience before so they just learned some of this method.

So after—that was in 1939—Chang Kun came to be my assistant in the Academia Sinica. He followed me first to Sichuan; then later on we went to Guizhou to study, to record, different languages. I was working on the Sui and the Kam dialects. I asked him, "Now you work on the Miao-Yao dialects." So he studied a good deal, a number, of Miao dialects. I studied the Sui-Kam and so on. We were probably in early 1940 or '41. By the time when we were through in that area—not the whole area, we cannot—we were going away from that area south following a river to Guangxi.

At that time we had the news that Japan bombed Hawaii. We felt that it was foolish for Japan to do that, but then it meant almost the end of the Japanese War. So we came out of that. Very soon, of course—1940—I went to Chengdu to teach at the Yanjing University. I took Chang Kun with me. We worked on the—oh, I forgot what language.

LaPolla: Was it Qiang [Ch'iang]?

Li: Qiang and also the—what is it? Some other language over there. Chang Kun came with me. We went up to work on that. I think he still has the material there.

LaPolla: Was it rGyarong [Jiarong]?

Li: rGyarong, yes, the rGyarong language.

Then about 1945, '46, the war ended. The Japanese surrendered. In 1946 I had an appointment from Harvard as a visiting lecturer in Harvard, 1945, '46. So that's about the time the war ended and I came out of Sichuan and came to Shanghai. We were all, of course, extremely poor. We had nothing. [laughs] No money! Everything was all gone and we
Li: sold all our property. So we came to Shanghai. I wanted to go to Harvard, but we had no money, we had no way of going to Harvard because there were no boats going out.

So I went to the American consulate and said, "Now I want to go to Harvard to accept an appointment." There were no boats going to America. "Is there any way?" There was, of course, no air service except the military air service. So I asked the American consulate—it was not exactly consulate, but some people whom I knew from Harvard. One of them was a Chinese scholar, an American, and his wife. He said, "Okay, we will put you on a military navy transport. That's the only thing we have for transportation. We can put you there." I said, "Okay." I said, "I have to go in order to accept an appointment." But my wife and children, they could not go, they had to stay in Shanghai.

So I took the navy transport from Shanghai going from one island to the other, you know, jumping from one island to another. Finally, I got to Hawaii. [laughs] The Hawaiian immigration officer and the Navy Transport Service were not on good terms. He said, "You are navy transport. You should not take other people to America. You bring this Mr. Li here; you take care of him. We won't let him in." [laughs] So I got into the navy yard and they said, "Well, we'll give you a room for the navy people. You just stay there. You can go into the city anywhere you like. We don't worry about you." The immigration officer was, of course, very upset by the navy arrangement so he said, "Well, I won't let him in to the States. You let him in the navy. I won't let him in the States."

So I came out of the navy quarters and got into Hawaii (Honolulu) city and I tried to look for some friends that I knew in the University of Hawaii. I knew one person, a girl, who was teaching there and told her what happened. She says, "That's nonsense. I know the immigration officer quite well. I will take you to the immigration officer." So she took me to the immigration officer and said, "Well, what's the trouble? What's the trouble with him? He has Harvard's appointment and everything." "Okay, let him in." [laughs] So he let me in and the navy got me off from the navy. Then I took another plane and landed in San Francisco. From there, I think there was very little airplane service. I took the, I think, train and came to Boston.

LaPolla: After that, after you left Chengdu and China, when was the next time you saw Chang Kun?

Li: I left China about 1946 and he was then trying to get some way of coming to study in America. I think about 1947 or something like that, he came to study at Yale University. He was taking courses in linguistics at Yale. Yale, at that time, had some very
Li: peculiar rules. One thing is that all linguistic students must study one year of Latin. So Chang Kun had to take one year of Latin. Then he studied Sanskrit with Egerton. Egerton liked him very much, so Egerton took him in as his Sanskrit student. So Chang Kun wrote his dissertation on a Sanskrit text, and got his degree. Then I took him into the University of Washington to teach Chinese there.

LaPolla: How do you feel about his work in general?

Li: Oh, he is very, very conscientious but he has his own point of view. He's a very careful worker. He doesn't do much vague theoretical work.

LaPolla: Is there anything special about the relationship between Chang Kun and Fu Sinian?

Li: Oh, Fu Sinian at that time was still the director of the Institute of History and Philology, but, at that time during the war years, Fu Sinian was very much involved with the government and politics and so on. So Fu Sinian and Chang Kun hardly knew each other much. Fu Sinian, later on, of course, besides the government work, became the president of Peking University. When they all went back to Qinghua [University] he became the president of Peking University. Hu Shi was supposed to be the president of the Peking University, but Hu Shi was in America and not coming back, so Fu Sinian became the acting president of Peking University. Afterwards, very short, Peking was occupied by the Communists and Fu Sinian never got along with the Communists so he moved out and finally came to Taiwan.

LaPolla: After you and Chang Kun went to Seattle together, did you work together or did you do your own thing?

Li: I was in charge of the Chinese teaching and he was one of my instructors in Chinese.

LaPolla: So you were mainly just teaching Chinese?

Li: He's chiefly teaching Chinese but also we had a kind of research project which is something involved with Tibetan and--

Lindy: Inner Asia.

Li: Inner Asia: Tibetan, Mongolian, and so on. So that we have Chang Kun for Tibetan and also--Who does all the Mongolian?

Lindy: Poppe.

LaPolla: Oh, Poppe.
Li: Poppe. There's also a German anthropologist.

Lindy: Paul Kirchhoff.

Li: Kirchhoff. Later on, also, we have another so we were sort of a mixed group on that particular Inner Asia Research project. Finally we did produce one good Tibetan scholar. We sent him to Italy to work with—who was the Italian?

Lindy: You're talking about Terry Wylie.

Li: Yes, but who was the famous Tibetan scholar?* I forgot his name, but we sent him over there and he became a fairly well-known Tibetan scholar. Also one Mongolian teacher here—what is his name?

LaPolla: [James] Bosson?

Li: Bosson, yes. Bosson was studying Mongolian with Poppe and he was here. There was another student studying Mongolian, now is teaching at—what is this city south of here? Big city.

LaPolla: Santa Barbara?

Lindy: UCLA? [University of California at Los Angeles]

Li: UCLA, yes, it is UCLA.

Lindy: You mean Bao Guoyi?

Li: Bao Guoyi, that's right. Bao Guoyi, he's a Mongol. He studied Mongolian with Poppe and he went to UCLA. So Poppe has two or three good Mongolian students. One of them is the one here teaching Mongolian. What is the name?

LaPolla: Professor Bosson.

Li: Bosson, yes.

LaPolla: He's my professor now.

What about after you left and also Chang Kun left Seattle. What kind of relationship did you keep up with Chang Kun?

* Professor Li is referring to Guiseppe Tucci.
Yes. I left in 1969. I had already been teaching at the University of Washington for twenty years already. I thought twenty years was long enough. I wanted to find a place where I could find good weather and a nice place to stay, so I went to the University of Hawaii in 1969. I became a so-called—what do you call it?

LaPolla: Emeritus?

Li: Yes, I became a professor emeritus, and retired from the University of Washington and came to the University of Hawaii. That time, of course, ’69, I was already about something like sixty-seven, sixty-eight years old. But the University of Hawaii accepted me, wanted me to be a professor there teaching Chinese linguistics and something like that. So I was there until I was seventy.

Then the University of Hawaii has a rule that you cannot teach any more than seventy. So I just kept on staying in Hawaii, in the university, without any salary but doing some research work. I, for a time, came to the University of Michigan and received an honorary degree and then I went to Princeton to teach for another half a year and so on. Chang Kun was, of course, most of the time in the University of Washington when I left.

Lindy: Chang Kun was already here at that time.

Li: No, Y. R. Chao retired. I recommended Chang Kun to take up Y. R. Chao’s place, so Chang Kun came here.

Wang Li

Li: Wang Li came back from France later than I did; about a year later. He was teaching at Qinghua University but he was a very profuse writer. He writes books all the time. This is a book [flipping the pages] written by Wang Li. I think it was published in nineteen twenty-something. Yes, about 1924 this book was written. Well, I wrote a preface to it, this book, for him. That’s my preface. He came back to China in 1925, or, no—

Mrs. Li: It cannot be that early.

Li: Oh, no. This was 1935. He came back in about ’33 or ’34, came back teaching at Qinghua and he wrote this book on Chinese Phonology. He asked me to write a preface to this book. This was published in 1934. So I knew him just about ’33 or ’34. Wang Li was a student of Chao Yuan-Ren in Qinghua University.
LaPolla: There was a debate in those days between Wang Li and certain other people, but mostly Wang Li on one side, and then a lot of Zhang Taiyan's students like Huang Kan and Hu Shizhi and these other people, wasn't there?

Li: Well, Huang Kan was one of the old star Chinese scholars, old Chinese scholars. He was professor at Zhongyang Daxue in Nanking. As usual, I think Huang Kan did not agree with Wang Li. He does not agree with any of us anyway. [laughter] There are still some of Huang Kan's students in Taiwan and teaching Chinese phonology. But Huang Kan was, for the older scholars, a brilliant scholar. I think he died very soon in Nanking. He never went to Taiwan. He has not any important books except there's some of his writings, you know, collected by some of his students and relatives. One of his students, of course, is Pan Chonggui. Pan Chonggui, of course, now lives in Taiwan.

I can say, now in China, most of the people teaching in universities are people who studied overseas, not just those in Academia Sinica.

Chan: Wang Li, was he ever associated with Academia Sinica?

Li: No, he never was. In the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica there are several very important persons who are not students from America. One, of course, is Fu Sinian. Fu Sinian studied in England and in Germany. The next one is Chen Yinque. Chen Yinque studied in Germany, too, but he also studied in America. The only ones who were students from America were Chao Yuan-Ren and the other is Li Ji, the two of them, and me. Also, some of them never came out to study: Luo Changpei, a graduate from Peking University. So, as an Institute of History and Philology, it is a mixture of German, English, American students from various areas.

Mrs. Li: And the others didn't study abroad—Shi Zhangru, Dong Yantang?

Li: Yes, Dong Yantang, Gao Quxun, Luo Changpei; they never studied in America.

Qian Mu

Chan: My understanding is that there is a group of people, such as Qian Mu, Tang Junyi, Mo Zongsan, who, it seems, have achieved quite considerably in their field, but they were never admitted to Academia Sinica, even in Taiwan. Now they have this Chinese Culture Institute.
Li: There's a reason. Qian Mu was a well-known person already in those days, but Qian Mu is more or less about Chinese philosophy, Chinese thought. Mo Zongsan and who else was one?

Chan: Tang Junyi.

Li: Tang Junyi. They were philosophers—Chinese philosophy. The Institute of History and Philology does not include philosophy. We don't want to have philosophers in our groups. Mo Zongsan is not—I mean, we do not hold him very highly except he is a philosopher. So they are not connected with our institute because our institute does not have philosophy. You have only history, linguistics, but no philosophy.

Chan: Excuse me [laughs] Qian Mu is quite an important historian.

Mrs. Li: Oh, yes.

Li: Well, it is difficult. Everybody is a historian in China. Everybody is a historian. [laughter]

Chan: Hu Shi has written a history of Chinese philosophy.

Li: Yes, he's written a history of Chinese philosophy.

Chan: So in a way he's a philosopher, too, and he's a part of—

Li: He's not a member of our academy because he's not a historian nor a linguist although he did all sorts of things.

Chan: He's mainly an administrator?

Li: No, he's a philosopher. Hu Shi is a philosopher. No, we don't have philosophers in our institute. We don't have an institute of philosophy. There's no institute of philosophy in Academia Sinica.

Mrs. Li: He was the president.

Li: Oh, president, he can be anything.

Mrs. Li: Doesn't need to be a linguist.

Chan: [laughs] People are puzzled why Qian Mu was never admitted to the Institute of History and Philology. You don't want to admit it to me.

Li: No, he does not do the kind of history that we do. We do history, more or less based on facts. [laughter] No, he is philosophy. He will talk about history from his philosophical
Li: point of view. So very different. He was, of course, made a member of Academia Sinica after he came to Taiwan. But, at first, he was in Hong Kong, head of the institute in Hong Kong.

Mrs. Li: He's a yuanshi [member], but he's not a member of the Institute of History and Philology.

Li: Yauanshi is a member of the academy.

Chan: So he's just not a research fellow there.

Li: No, no. A research fellow is too low for him. You see, he wouldn't accept—He's a yuanshi, a so-called member of the academy, like the American member of the New York Academy of Science, or members of the German Imperial Academy of Science. That's a kind of honorary position, see. He could be—if he wants to—a member of the Research Institute, but that is a much lower position for him, you see. You come to the institute, you come to work or write and so on, and you go home. The next day, you come back. He cannot do it. He is too old to come to the institute and do work. He can only be a member, a so-called member of the academy. It's a kind of honorary position, just like a member of the Academy of Science in New York or—it's a different kind of—

Mrs. Li: They come to attend a meeting every two years.

Li: I met him in Hong Kong and also I met him in Yale University. I was a visiting professor at Yale University. He, also, was visiting at Yale University. So we were very—

Mrs. Li: He had his honorary degree at that time.

Li: He got lots of honorary degrees. He got one from Yale University. He also lectures at Harvard, too. We met each other in Yale University. When we came back from Yale to Seattle, he came to live with us in Seattle in our house.

Mrs. Li: For a week.

Li: More than a week. You go to Vancouver to kan xi, to see the drama. [laughter]

Mrs. Li: He stayed for two weeks.

Li: So we were very, very friendly. But the problem is that he never went to school.

Chan: Yes, I think that's the reason. Very snobbish, Academia Sinica.
Li: No, that's not the reason. He never went to school. Yes, that's not the reason, because those who never went to school, one of them is Dong Zuobin; Dong Zuobin never went to school. So it doesn't make any difference. The problem is he became too important a person by not going to school. See, he did all things himself. Therefore, he does not fit into the University at Berkeley. The highest position is a professor, but he wanted to be higher than a professor. He wouldn't accept a professor of University of California. He wants to be something like honorary research professor, something which you don't have in this university.

Chan: So the fact that he married his student...[laughs]

Li: No, that's later. That had nothing to do with—The lady is very nice, very good, takes care of him. He entirely depends upon his wife now for living because his health is not very good. His eyes—he's almost blind. I do not know how they met, but anyway, his wife worshipped him and she was much younger than him. But, anyway, she married him and they lived in Hong Kong for a number of years.

Mrs. Li: You know she is his student?

Chan: Yes.

Li: Well, she was a student in the sense she listened to his lectures. He was not teaching in any university.

Chan: How should I say? She was a registered student at New Asia College.

Li: That was later.

Chan: No, no, no, not later.

Li: They met in Taiwan.

Chan: No. [laughs]

Mrs. Li: She is from Taiwan, her father, Sun Jia, is a war lord, but she studied in Hong Kong.

Li: I don't know. I don't know the details.

Chan: You don't want to--

Mrs. Li: ...better to not be on the record.

Chan: That's okay. [laughs]
Li: No, I don't know the--
Chan: He has done some quite important research, published extensively, I mean.
Li: Who?
Chan: Mr. Qian.
Li: Oh, he publishes all the time. Yes, he publishes all the time.
Mrs. Li: His wife helps him all the time with his work.
Li: Now, of course, she has to help him because he is almost blind. Mrs. Qian will have to write things out for him.

I think there was some misunderstanding between Qian Mu and Fu Sinian. There was probably some misunderstanding, because Fu Sinian's idea for history is much more matter of fact. His [Qian's] idea of history was some sort of philosophical history. So they did not agree with each other in their point of view. Now that's everywhere: In America, two professors are different on their points of view and because of this reason, if this university appoints this professor, he will not appoint the other professor, you see. So that is the reason why Fu Sinian did not particularly favor Qian Binsi [Qian Mu]. But, later on, of course, Fu Sinian died. He died in Taiwan and then quite some time later, Qian Mu was made a member of the Academia Sinica.

Fu Maoji

Li: Fu Maoji is much later. He was never appointed at the Institute of History and Philology. He was a student in Kunming. When was that? When did we go to Kunming to stay?
Mrs. Li: That was in 1939, we went back to Kunming from America.
Li: Yes, '39. About '39 or '40, at that time. He was then a student. I was getting a Tai speaker, and was collecting texts and so on with him. And I was having all of them, Fu Maoji, Chang Kun [Kun Chang], Ting Sheng-shu, and Ma Xueliang, all of them, with me. All of them were trying to collect Tai texts and grammar and phonetics and so on. So that was very late, 1939, '40.

So Fu Maoji went to Chengdu, at first at Huaxi University. I don't know what exactly happened, but he finally was sent to London to study, and came back. But since then I lost contact
Li: with him until only recent years. He is already now the director of the Minzu Yanjiusuo, Institute of Nationalities. He is the director of that. I don't know what happened before that.

Actually, I never taught him anything except for that session, you know. They all came here, we collected Tai texts and so on, and they all learned to write Tai phonology and so on. But that was about all that I know. Later on he went to England, studied, and what he did I do not know, and what happened in Peking during the Communist regime I do not know. Maybe he is now a high Communist official, I do not know. Except that he still calls me a teacher, and calls himself student.

LaPolla: The main thing that we're interested in is how you feel about these people and their work, and also your relationship with them. Not so much what they're doing, because we can get that elsewhere.

Li: Oh, yes. They went back to Peking and I came to America. And for about twenty years we had no contact with Peking. We don't know what happened in Peking.

But Fu Maoji was very successful in his career, and quite a number of people studied various different languages in his institute, like the many languages in Yunnan. I think his wife is Bai or something like that. So I am out of touch, because for twenty years I couldn't get to Peking. Nobody went to Peking, you know. You had this—Peking and America were against each other.

So I do not know what actually happened, except that now he is doing very good work, and under him a number of people are in non-Chinese languages.

LaPolla: Have you been reading his series in the journal Minzu Yuwen? Fu Maoji for the last year or so has been writing a series of articles about how to do work with the minority peoples in China. I don't know if you've been reading it.

Li: Well, I know he tells how to study languages. I never read his articles. I know that he has a number of articles, but I never had a chance to read them.

But he was a very, very capable person.

LaPolla: Is there anybody else that you feel is important that we may have missed?
Ma Xueliang

Li: Well, about the same time as Fu Maoji was Ma Xueliang. But Ma Xueliang was, of course, a specialist in the Lolo, and he was doing extremely fine work on the Lolo language, texts, and so on. I think he is probably the most distinguished scholar of the Lolo language and texts and so on.

He was my first student which I brought to the Lolo place, and I taught him how to record the Lolo language and so on. He was my first Lolo student. Later on he branched out to other Lolo dialects.

LaPolla: But you yourself never published on the Lolo languages, did you?

Li: No, I did not. I did not write on the Lolo languages. Very often I don't work on these languages which I ask my students to study. I worked with him, but I forgot all that. Ma Xueliang is one I recorded. I told him about some very peculiar phonetics like--

LaPolla: Voiceless nasals--

Li: Some of them. Some of those peculiar phonetics were also found by Matisoff in some other language. That was my first—I told Ma Xueliang that he had some very funny phonetic points here.

Now I understand—Ma Xueliang wrote me—that he is writing a book called Sino-Tibetan Languages.

LaPolla: Yes, it's a survey. They're writing a large survey of Sino-Tibetan languages.

Li: Is it published? I haven't seen it.

LaPolla: I don't think it's out. They've been working on it a while.

Li: I understand his was--

LaPolla: There are a lot of people involved. I think it's mostly Ma Xueliang and Dai Qingxia. Do you know Dai Qingxia?

Li: Well, Ma Xueliang was the chief editor. Lots of other people write different articles on different Sino-Tibetan languages, so there are lots of other people cooperating in that. He asked me to write a—something like a preface or something like that. I did write something but I never saw the book. I don't know whether it was ever published or not.
Chou Fa-kao

LaPolla: Could you please discuss your feelings about Chou Fa-kao and his work?

Li: Yes. Chou Fa-kao was a very good Chinese philologist. He read a good deal of Chinese texts, old texts, and was very familiar with the Chinese Qie Yun system of Chinese phonology. On the other hand, he was not particularly--this is something that is my personal opinion—he was not particularly familiar with linguistic theory. He had sometimes very peculiar ideas. He made several, four or five medials like /u, a, e, i/; all these medials before a vowel and so on. So I think some of his ideas, of course, were not acceptable because I think his theory, linguistic theory, is rather weak in that respect. But his knowledge of Chinese texts and knowledge of the Qie Yun system was fairly good—He had Old Chinese training, that's why he could do a good deal of work on that area.

LaPolla: Is that all you want to say about him? I mean, that's enough, but I'm just saying do you have anything else that you'd like to say about Chou Fa-kao?

Li: Well, I've not much else to say but there you have to know his weak points.

Other Linguists Recalled

William Gedney

Li: Among others, of course, was Bill Gedney. Bill Gedney, as you know, was a Thai scholar. He had his Ph.D. from Yale University and then he was sent to Thailand to study Thai language. He stayed there for years without coming back [laughs]. So that when he got back he had no job. He bought lots of books, you know, and there was no job. But he is a very nice person, very careful worker.

So for a time I tried to get him a job. For instance I tried to ask him to come to the University of Washington to give lectures on some Thai languages, and hoped that he might land himself a job, but that was not to be. Because you have difficulty getting any appointment on Thai languages.
But he was, later on, with the State Department's Language Institute. He was there for some time and then he again went back to Yale. For some time he was fooling around without getting any good appointments. Until finally the University of Michigan appointed him as head of the linguistics department, and there, of course, he was doing fine. But he was mostly doing administrative work, all sorts of linguistics, although he did, off and on, go back to Thailand to get some Thai dialects and so on. He never published anything; that's very unfortunate.

He was a very nice person. He was a very good friend of mine; I tried every way to help him and he tried every way to help me. In the first place, for instance, I think it was through his effort that I got an honorary doctor of letters from the University of Michigan. It was largely Gedney's effort. He was trying to get letters from all over the world, telling them, "You should write something about Mr. Li."

Mrs. Li: He collected twenty-nine recommendations, from twelve countries.

Li: Yes; from people like Y. R. Chao, and [Soren] Egerod, and Karlgren, and also a lot of American Indian scholars. Maybe [laughing] Mary Haas wrote a letter too, I don't know.

Mrs. Li: We have the letters.

Li: I don't know where they are. But anyway, I know Bill; and Bill is a very nice person, helping his students very much. He has some Thai students in Michigan working with him. Now he is retired from Michigan. [to Mrs. Li] You remember him? You saw him this time, in Columbus, Ohio.

Mrs. Li: Oh yes. He is always very charming and sweet.

Jerry Norman

Li: The next one was Jerry Norman. Jerry Norman was on the Min dialects and the reconstruction of older Min dialects. But I don't know anything about Min dialects, and I do not know exactly how his--but I hope that it is quite promising work.

Mrs. Li: Do you have Li Lintai on your list?

Li: No.

LaPolla: Well, we can add people if you think they are important.

Li: He is a linguist.
Dr. William J. Gedney,
Department of Linguistics,
The University of Michigan,
506 E. Liberty Street,
ANN ARBOR
Mich. 48108, USA

Dear Dr. Gedney,

I am quite familiar with the scholarly works of Professor Li Fang-kuei. He is, in my opinion, very well equipped for linguistic research work and he has produced a series of highly valuable papers bearing on languages in Eastern Asia. If some distinction could be conferred on him, it would be highly appropriate - he has extremely well deserved it.

Sincerely yours

(Bernhard Karlgren)
September 18, 1971

Dear William Gedney,

Department of Linguistics
506 E. Liberty St.
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108

I am happy to endorse the proposal of giving an Honorary degree to Fang Kuei Li.

I was his close colleague in Academia Sinica in Nanjing, in fact right across the corridor. The very broad basis of his training and subsequent activities, not only in the main line of Chinese historical phonology, but also in surveying of both languages of China, have made him a most outstanding scholar in this general field.

In view of the above, I support the proposal for awarding an Honorary degree to Fang Kuei Li without reservation.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Mrs. Li: South Coblin must be important.

Li: No, not at this time. You can't have too many.

But Jerry Norman was Y. R. Chao's student, and he was following Chao's line, was interested in Chinese dialects. That's all that I know about him. He was for a time at Princeton, but later on, when I retired from University of Washington, I think, he went to take up Chinese teaching. He is a very good person.

James Matisoff and Paul Benedict: A Critique of the Methodology

Li: The next is Jim Matisoff. I do not know much about his work here, now. Once I was teaching a summer school, about ten or fifteen years ago. Matisoff was still a student; he was Mary Haas's student. That summer I taught in the University of Indiana summer school. I gave a course on Tai languages, and he took my course. That was quite some time ago. So this was the first time I met him. I think he was a very--how would you say it?—I think he was very--seeing lots of things. But he was then just beginning. He probably didn't know much about Tai linguistics; he was just beginning.

And then later on he got into contact with our old friend Paul Benedict. Got into this kind of Sino-Tibetan linguistics. He was very much in favor of promoting Paul then, and ever since that time on, Sino-Tibetan became a well-established field, a study in the American academic world. But I never quite agreed with Paul Benedict on those things. I never quote Paul Benedict.

LaPolla: Is it his methodology you don't agree with?

Li: Yes. I think it is no methodology. It's no methodology, it's just, well—he is very—he reads lots of dictionaries, you know. He reads lots of dictionaries and pulls a lot of words from all dictionaries and so on. But he is probably quite clever, quite a clever person. But methodologically I wouldn't approve. So I never quote him to any of my students. I think you get all wrong from his methodology.

LaPolla: So do you think that Jim Matisoff's methodology is also suspect?

Li: Well, Matisoff was much better trained. Paul Benedict was never trained in linguistics. He was with Schafer working in one of those—you know in those days whenever people got poor, what is it called?
LaPolla: Oh, yes, during the Depression. The make-work, called--

Li: You know, Roosevelt gave a kind of--

LaPolla: Like the WPA [Works Progress Administration]?

Li: Yes. To give them some money so that they can do something. And they were, of course, not on good terms either, Schafer and Benedict.

LaPolla: Oh. Because essentially the way I understood it was that they had this make-work project where they had people putting together all of these languages, and Paul Benedict had worked on it and then never really published it, and Schafer had not published it. Actually I guess it was Schafer who was in charge of the whole project. And then Jim Matisoff was the one who later put it all together into the book, The Sino-Tibetan Conspectus.

Li: No. Matisoff came much too late. [Mrs. Li and Li speak in Chinese] That was in 1933, during the Depression years of Roosevelt. And they gave him this Sino-Tibetan job just to get a living, and so on. Now, Schafer and Benedict, they didn't agree with each other. But Schafer was the director, and Benedict was somebody working under him. So Schafer published a book called something like "Biography--"

LaPolla: Oh, the Bibliography of Sino-Tibetan?

Li: Yes. Because he was the director he had to do that. And Benedict was--I think they are not on good terms. And Benedict, of course, later on studied--what is it called? Medical, something medical.

LaPolla: A psychiatrist, he's a psychiatrist.

Li: Psychiatrist, yes. He went into psychiatry and got pretty well off by getting money as a psychiatrist. But he is still, you know, working on the different languages. He used all the dictionaries, you know, pulls out the words, and gets his--what is his book called?

LaPolla: He had two major ones, Sino-Tibetan, a Conspectus, and Austro-Thai Language and Culture.

Li: But that's later. His first was Matisoff's--and he published it in--

LaPolla: 1972.
Li: Yes. But he was a very studious person. He'd get lots of things together, rightly or wrongly, he'd get something written. [laughs] So somebody must do some hard work.

Chan: So you are basically against the--how would I say it?--the core vocabulary approach? They claim that going to dictionaries and tracing the development of certain words--

Li: You know, Matisoff was very much interested in his work, and was probably instrumental in getting his book published. On the other hand when I look at his book, linguistically, methodologically, it is not something students should imitate. So I never quote his work.

LaPolla: What is it that's weak about that book? Because what he did in that book is just to go through the dictionaries and put the words together and then try to reconstruct a proto-form based on the similarities of the forms.

Li: Yes. They do that all the time, people.

LaPolla: And that's bad?

Li: [laughing] I think.

Chan: He wants to know because he's following the same pattern!

LaPolla: Because I do a lot of that myself, because that's the way I was taught.

Li: Hm. I think all such reconstructions are junk.

Chan: Share your insights with Randy.

LaPolla: I'm very curious myself.

Li: So. Because people who don't know start quoting Benedict everywhere. People say, "Oh, this is this language, and this is that group of languages." I think the way it should probably—if you want to reconstruct anything, you cannot reconstruct it that way. You have to do much more methodological work, and also methodological description of the different languages, which you ought to prepare before you can--. People begin now to quote Benedict like a bible.

LaPolla: That's exactly the way it's treated. Almost like a bible.

Li: Yes. And say, "Well, this is reconstructed like this." How did he reconstruct this? Nobody cares. As long as Benedict has reconstructed this, well, this is the bible. It's terrible. So I never, I never quote him. [all laugh]
Chan: So what do you think it should be--

LaPolla: Yes, compare the way you did your book on comparative Tai and the way Benedict did his book. What would you say are the main differences between the two?

Li: You know, the trouble is that Benedict never studied any language.

LaPolla: You mean never really learned a language.

Li: Going out in the field and studying a language. He never. He never. And he never studied any language except with the dictionaries. He just pulled all the words. That's very easy. I mean, lots of people do that, some of them did pretty good work. They would pull this word, and pull the other language, "Oh, they look quite alike." And soon they will get some related languages all that way.

You can do that. That's easy. So that's what he did. But he has another—only a clever person has really some new ideas that people—. I think Matisoff was partly responsible for sponsoring this type of stuff.

Chan: [to LaPolla] I think you wrote your--

LaPolla: You remember the paper that I showed you that I wrote not long ago? That was based entirely on the Matisoff and Benedict model. But you didn't say anything when I asked you for--

Li: No. I couldn't say anything.

Chan: I think you should say explicitly, for the benefit of the younger generation, the younger linguists. Because my problem, my frustration is I try to take courses from great masters, but they never explicitly tell us what the methodology is.

Li: You know, I am very conservative. Because my comparative linguistics was completely Indo-European. I studied comparative Latin grammar, Old Persian, Sanskrit, Slavic languages. All these were comparative. You know the phonology of each of these languages well; you know how to compare them. So that everything is—if it's wrong, you know at once that you are wrong, you made some mistake. So that all the Indo-European languages--.

As a matter of fact, at that time when I finished my work in Chicago I thought I would be an Indo-European linguist. I could teach Indo-European linguistics in America. You see, I studied Germanic linguistics with Bloomfield, Latin and Greek with Buck, and Slavic and so on. So practically I know at least more than half of the Indo-European languages.
Chan: So what you are saying is that in Sino-Tibetan linguistic studies one should at least have some in-depth knowledge of certain dialects or certain languages, and know its relationship--

Li: You know who gave me this advice?

Chan: Who?

Li: Bloomfield. Bloomfield said, "You want to study some languages, but you know one language well. You can study the language, phonology, language, texts, everything. You can read this thing, or you can even speak this language. That is one of the languages you should know."

LaPolla: So you should always know at least one out of every group?

Li: Yes, of that particular group. That's why I went to Thailand and studied Thai languages and learned to speak Thai. Because I wanted to study Tai languages.

So Bloomfield's advice: He said, "You want to study some language group, know one language well. You can speak it, you can study it, and then the rest of it you can do. You don't have to speak them all, but one of the languages you have to know."

Chan: So you use that language as a reference language, and then you compare, I suppose.

Li: No. When you study one of the languages well, you study that language. You don't do anything else except study that language. You don't compare anything.

Chan: You don't compare?

Li: Then [later] you compare. Because the language you know well enough, you don't have to look at a dictionary. You know that language in your head.

LaPolla: Yes. You see, one of the things that makes Matisoff very different from Benedict is that Matisoff knows many languages. He knows more languages than I can count--European and Asian. Thai, Burmese, Tibetan. He studied, Japanese, Chinese. All of these he has worked on. But still you say that there are some failings in his methodology?

Li: I think that's why he does better work than Benedict.

LaPolla: Oh, that's why he does better work.
LaPolla: What about in terms of the reconstructions that they do? Jim Matisoff often makes formulaic kinds of reconstructions where they are very--

Li: I think he is too smart. I don't quite understand it. Sometimes the reconstruction I don't quite understand, not because I don't know the languages well. But, you see, Matisoff has the tendency of giving a very basic text of that whole group of languages. You may choose several languages as an important base, and then you say, "Now this language is so-and-so," and then you begin to reconstruct languages that belong to this group.

Now, I do not know, because I don't know this material, but he has never published anything except his--

LaPolla: Jim Matisoff has published quite a bit. The Lahu Grammar? Is that the one you're thinking of?

Li: Yes. Anything else?

LaPolla: Oh, he has an interesting book called Variational Semantics in Tibeto-Burman, which is one thing I wanted to ask you about. He brings out the relationships between large semantic fields, how these words actually can be traced into families--

Li: I know. Lahu, and also a number of other Tibeto-Burman languages. The trouble is that I have no way of checking the Tibeto-Burman materials. I don't have the books.

LaPolla: But how do you feel about the idea that--one of his main things, for example, the talk he gave the other day that you went to, when he talks about creating large word families and having somewhat formulaic reconstructions for a whole semantic group, say certain body parts or certain types of things, where it can be traced back to very formulaic types of things.

Li: He has to be a very clever man to do that. What I hope to do when I do anything, is to have everybody know and understand what I am doing. But I don't quite understand what he is trying to do. He is too smart, too smart for me.

Li Rengui

Li: Another one that I knew was Li Rengui. He has his Ph.D. from the University of Hawaii. He was a student of Austronesian languages. I was interested in him because we had at that time, as far as I knew, no Chinese scholar specializing in Austronesian languages. He was doing very nice work. I thought, "We need a
Li: scholar on the mountain people, the Gaoshan Zu. We need somebody to work on these languages in Taiwan." So I wrote a letter to Taiwan Daxue [Taiwan University] saying that, "You need somebody to study the Gaoshan Zu's language, and here is one well-trained, good person. So I advise you that you appoint him in Taiwan Daxue." At the same time I also wrote Ting Pang-hsin that, "You should keep him in the History and Philology Institute to do field work." And that was what he was doing.

He has done a good deal of the Gaoshan Zu's languages. However, things have not gone on as best as I hoped. Because the government—You see, if he wants to do the Gaoshan Zu's languages, he should also be sent away to various Austronesian territories to study. So that he should also go to Malaysia, Malay languages. He should also go to the Philippines, the Philippine languages. But the thing is that the political problem comes in, in the first place. In the second place the government does not want to send them off to places like Malaysia or Philippines. They may not accept them to study, and they don't have the money to send them away. So he kept on working on the Gaoshan Zu in Taiwan alone.

I think this is a very kind of limiting situation for any scholar in Taiwan. If the government does not—they don't know what really you should send them out to do. Now he did something else later, Chinese philology, grammar, and so on. So he is now the director of the Institute of Linguistics in Qinghua University. I hope that he may be able to develop that institute in Qinghua—

Zhang Xianbao

Chan: By hiring Zhang Xianbao or Zhang Guangyu?

Li: I don't know how nice Zhang Xianbao was. I think he was a very—He doesn't want to talk to me. [Chan laughs]

LaPolla: They don't want to talk to you?

Chan: He doesn't.

LaPolla: Why?

Li: For some reason or another. He was here a few days ago. He went to Ohio State for the Sino-Tibetan conference. But he changed his name!

Chan: He changed his name! Why?
Li: Yes, Zhang Guangyu. Oh, he is a terrible, funny person. For instance, last summer I was in Taiwan. I saw him. He didn't talk to me. Then—he only knew, of course, Chang Kun. So he arranged a Chinese dialect study seminar in which Chang Kun was invited to speak. But somehow I think most of them thought that Chang Kun was my student, so they made me give the opening speech of that seminar. I don't know anything about—I told them, "I don't know Chinese dialects. Absolutely nothing."

But this time he was in Columbus, Ohio with the Sino-Tibetan conference. He came here, didn't he? Did you see him?

LaPolla: I didn't see him.

Li: He was here. And he went to—I saw him, he never talked to me. Very funny. He never talked to me.

Mrs. Li: In Qinghua he came to see you.

Li: Yes, in Qinghua when all the meeting was over he never talked to me. But I think Chang Kun said to him that, "You should visit Professor Li." So he came to where I lived. He came here and paid his respects to me.

Mrs. Li: That was the morning we came back to Taipei.

Chan: Well, regardless of his academic achievement, at least—

Li: Do you know him?

LaPolla: Yes, we know him. Not that well, at least I don't know him that well.

Mary Haas

LaPolla: Professor Li, could you tell us about your relationship with Mary Haas?

Li: Yes. When I was studying in Chicago—I left Chicago in 1928—and, at that time, I don't think I had met Mary Haas. I didn't know her. Mary Haas probably was just starting, and she followed Sapir to Yale University in the 1930s. I didn't know her. The only person I knew about that same time when I was studying with Sapir was Harry Hoyer. Harry Hoyer was the only one who was starting to study American Indian linguistics with Sapir. I didn't even know [Morris] Swadesh because Swadesh came later after I left.
LaPolla: So did you know Mary Haas later on, though?

Li: Yes, I did know her later on—very much later on when she came to Berkeley as an instructor of linguistics—something like that. At that time there was no Department of Linguistics. There was an Indic scholar. He was a man from Yale University, a Sanskrit scholar. You know him? Don't you know him? He was here. I think he's still here. Gee, I forgot his name. Emeneau [Murray Barnson].

LaPolla: Emeneau.

Li: Yes. He was visiting here for a long time. Emeneau came from Yale University to be here as a professor of Sanskrit. I think Mary Haas later on came here and I think they put her somewhere in the Department of Oriental Languages. A very unimportant position. She was later teaching Siamese. I met her quite a number of years later. I came from Seattle to Berkeley and looked up Mary Haas. She was teaching a class in Thai. That's probably the first time I met her, at Berkeley.

LaPolla: Do you know about what year that was?

Li: In the 1950s. I don't remember the exact date, but about the fifties. I was teaching at the University of Washington at Seattle and so near that I sometimes came down. At that time, of course, Y. R. Chao was also teaching here. Also, I met one then teaching Chinese language and literature, a White Russian. Don't you know?


Li: Boodberg, yes. Well, Boodberg was here. I asked Boodberg what happened to Mary Haas. He was very proud. He says, "Oh, well, I put her in the Oriental language department. You know, we are quite free in putting people up in different departments." That's what Boodberg said. So she was partly funded by something like linguistics, but was actually teaching Siamese, and probably working, also, on American Indian languages. But that was all because things happened when Mary Haas, you know, divorced Morris Swadesh and married a Thai man. That's where she learned her Thai. She went to Thailand with this Thai husband of hers. They were divorced in Thailand and she came back and began to teach Thai and probably also work on American Indians most of the time.
LaPolla: Professor Li, could you tell us what you feel are your main contributions to the study of linguistics and how these ideas evolved?

Li: What I did was to use mostly Indo-European comparative linguistics, use the method they used, on different groups of languages. One of them is the American Indian languages, the other is Chinese, and the third is the Tai languages. Because of the different structure of these different languages, you have to adopt different kinds of methods. But, in general, the principle of Indo-European comparative linguistics is more or less still the same. So that's about all the--. That was done in the 1928-29, about '30, those years. So that's about all I did with--.

LaPolla: You said the principle's the same. Could you explain what that principle is? You said the principle is the same but that the method is somewhat different. Could you explain what the principle is and how the method was different?

Li: Since all these groups of languages are different, both phonetically and morphologically, even though you use the same principle of Indo-European linguistics you have to adopt slightly different techniques, different things you want to do.

For instance, the first language I tried my hand on was the American Indian languages. Particularly the phonology part of it--you can very easily adopt the Indo-European method and find out what the older stages of the sounds are and what it appeared as in the modern American Indian languages. The morphology is very different, of course; you cannot quite easily adopt the
Li: Indo-European morphology to any of the American Indian or even the Sino-Tibetan languages, so for that you have to work out your own methods and ways of doing things.

LaPolla: When you say the Indo-European method, what exactly do you mean?

Li: I mean that the Indo-European method is largely the comparative method.

LaPolla: Textual comparative?

Li: Yes. Even with the first American Indian languages which have no history, but if you look at the things as they are and how they came to be that way, you can use the comparative method and find out. Like some Latin sounds. Actually if you compare them with Greek or with Sanskrit, they were originally some other kind of sounds.

With this American Indian language you can do the same thing. That is, if you know one group of American Indian languages and you know some other related groups, you can find out—at least try to figure out—what the original phonology was and how it changed into the present, this particular language which you are working at.

That is really the thing I did with my first American Indian language, but that of course, as I said, is the old Indo-European comparative method. The things began to differ. People later on working on linguistics, more or less do not care about the comparative historical method. They only want the descriptive method. So you find a different kind of description later on.

LaPolla: Don't you need descriptive before you can do historical?

Li: For a time, I think there was some argument that people would use to analyze a language's, say, phonology, entirely by the descriptive method. That is, you don't care what it's original sound was. This was later on when the so-called descriptive method became the most prevalent thinking in linguistics. In the earlier Indo-European method, the thinking was historical, mostly historical.

LaPolla: In doing comparative work, you were saying you compared languages in the same family. What criteria do you use for determining which languages are related and which aren't? For example, the Chinese feel that Thai is related to Chinese, but a lot of western linguists—and I think you, yourself—feel that Thai is not necessarily related to Chinese. What are the criteria you use for deciding whether or not you can do that kind of comparative work?
We're still at a very primitive stage of trying to relate some languages which so far still give us trouble in how to relate them.

There are several ways people begin to relate these languages. One, of course, is on certain phonetic similarities. For instance, Chinese has a system of tones but many other languages also have similar tones. People may take this as being probably related because they have the same system of tones. On the other hand, there are people who say, "Why, this is something entirely different. It has nothing [else in common]," and will not connect them together.

So you can see the use of this kind of evidence—tone is one of them, but there are also other phonetic features—so that people will say, "Well, these two are related because they are the same kind of tone system, same kind of consonants and vowel system, therefore they must be related because otherwise they wouldn't be so similar." Now others will say, "Well, this is something overall, all languages will have these things. It doesn't mean anything, that they are related." So you have different kinds of conclusions you can draw by using different kinds of—using the same kind of evidence but you can have different kind of conclusions.

For instance, say, the Thai language has a kind of a tone system very much like Chinese. Well, what do you say about this? That they're related because they have the same kind of tone system and developed more or less in the same way? People will say, "Well, there must be some reason for this kind of similarity. They may be, therefore, basically related languages." Others will say, "Well, this kind of phonetic change would happen in any old language. They do not mean any definite, basic relationships." So that you have different kinds of—But none of them, I think, is quite sure.

If they have, for instance, the same kind of tone system, one conclusion would be they must be more or less related because they have the same tone system, the same kind of development. The other will say, "Well, this kind of development is all over eastern Asia. It doesn't mean anything." So you have different kinds of conclusions because of this kind of idea you have.

LaPolla: What do you say?

Li: It's difficult. I don't quite conclude that certain languages are definitely related but you do have certain groups of languages that have the same type of phonetic similarities. Now it could be concluded that they are related or you may say they are not necessarily related. On the other hand, you could say that this group of languages has certain similarities, therefore
we group them together because of these similarities. Whether these similarities meant basically genetic relationship or not genetic, that's another conclusion which people will draw differently.

So that, for instance, if you took Thai, the tone system of the Thai language is very similar to the Chinese tone system. Similarly, the Miao-Yao tone system is also very similar to Thai and also to Chinese. On the other hand, languages like Tibetan have a very different tone system—different from the Chinese, different from the Thai, different from the Miao-Yao. And yet people would say, "Tibetan is related genetically with Chinese," and, on the other hand, "Miao-Yao and Thai are not related to Chinese." Most of these arguments, one way or the other, were because of this kind of notion of what kind of similarity would constitute a kind of genetic relationship.

LaPolla: That was kind of my question: What is it to you that's most basic in doing these comparisons?

Li: Eventually, I think, you have to take several types of criteria to decide whether they are genetically related or not genetically related. The genetically related languages may have many similar characteristics but a non-genetically related language may not have so many similar characteristics. But it also may have similar characteristics, but in that they are not necessarily genetically related.

So, for a long time in the Asiatic languages, there was lots of trouble about the relationship of languages because of the influence of—particularly the most civilized languages tend to influence the other group of languages. So that, for a long time, Korean was so much influenced by Chinese vocabulary and even phonetically so that lots of people will think, "Oh, Korean is related with Chinese." Similarly you can go to Japanese and say, "Japanese has lots of things in common to Chinese." But then some people will say, "Well, these are borrowed from Chinese." Then you also have Vietnamese, which has lots of things similar to Chinese.

At first when the people were trying to classify the languages in Asia, they would take some of these phonetic similarities and put them together and say, "this is related to—" say, "Vietnamese is related with Chinese," and so on. But soon they found out that this kind of criteria may not mean what we thought it meant. So for some time people thought—at least because of both political and national sentiment people thought—.

The Japanese for a long time thought that Korean was linguistically related with the Japanese. Of course, the Koreans would not believe so [laughs] because of political relationships.
Then the Koreans were supposed to be related with the Manchus. I don't know what the notions were. There were not so many nationalistic things against the Koreans being related with the Manchus, so for a long time the Manchus and various Manchurian tribes beside the Manchu tribes became the important element. The power of the Manchu grew and it began to have different troops all united with the Manchus. For a time, also, even the Manchus got somehow related with the Mongolians.

So that, you see, many of these things are both sometimes political, sometimes linguistic, sometimes [laughs] various things. There are still many tribes in northern Manchuria, and exactly how they have been related to the Manchus or with that group of languages we do not know yet. Some of them, well, they say, "This is a Mongolian tribe." The other will say, "No. This is a Manchurian tribe."

So I think, for me, I am not so much interested in trying to relate one language with another group of languages. I am rather more interested in finding out what the structure of that particular group is. When you have done one language and you've done another and so on, then the similarity or the dissimilarity will come out eventually. It isn't worth the trouble to do that very early before you know all the related languages.

LaPolla: How important is grammar? Aside from phonology, do you ever use grammar in comparative work?

Li: Well, grammar you do use. But, of course, it depends on what do you mean by grammar?

LaPolla: The lexical structure and also the sentence structure.

Li: Some of them, of course. Suppose you are interested in the sentence structure. You will find the Chinese grammatical structure is subject, verb, object, this kind of order. Now, if you look at the Manchu you find subject, object, verb. The verb is at the end of the sentence. On the other hand, if you look at Tibetan, it is subject, object, verb. It is like Manchu, not like Chinese. People will think Tibetan is related with Chinese, but grammatically it looks more like Manchu. Manchu also looks very closely like Mongolian. Mongolian is more like Turkish and all that group of languages.

So, I am not interested in trying to relate this language with another. I want to know how this looked like; whether you want to relate them or not, that's a third question. You may relate them or you may not relate them until you begin to—. You have many Siberian languages. I think—I don't know, I have never read many good grammatical descriptions of many of the Siberian dialects, languages. I don't know because I never
studied them. I don't have any materials. They're mostly written in Russian, I guess. [laughs] Some languages some people say, "It's related with Chinese." I don't know what it was. But, for instance, an Italian linguist would think some languages in Siberia are related with Chinese. Other people, of course, will not accept this kind of theory.

So if you are interested in this type of question, some of them, of course, are quite clear: "This is related with--." I asked some of the Mongolists and the Turkish people, "Is Mongolian related with Turkish?" Grammatically they are very much alike in many ways, and there are even some words that are supposed to be--. Well, many people think they are related languages. Professor [Nicholas] Poppe would say that they are probably not related. [laughs] So, you see, this kind of problem will come up to very strange--.

Now, for instance, there's a language like Hungarian. How is Hungarian related with the other languages? And then Finnish--Hungarian and Finnish, supposed to be related. How these are related with the other, like the Turkish and Mongolian, I don't know. The Hungarian people always thought they were related with some languages in Central Asia and they are still trying to look for their own people in Central Asia [laughs] or something like that.

**Methodology**

LaPolla: Could we talk a little bit more about methodology? Could you talk about, for example, the methodology you used in doing your comparisons and reconstructions in this book, *The Handbook of Comparative Tai*? Also how it differed from the work you did in this book, *Shangguyin Yanjiu*, because this is working on Ancient Chinese and this is working on Ancient Tai and it seems like the methodology may have been different.

Li: Yes. The difference in methodology is largely a difference in the kind of material you have. The method—how to make use of this kind of material—would also differ.

For instance, if you are talking about Old Chinese, Old Chinese has a system of writing which gives you some material to work on. The Tai languages only have written language very late, about the thirteenth, fourteenth century, so that before that you have nothing you can depend on as far as written material is concerned. So with the Tai languages, you entirely depend on the modern dialects and using a purely comparative method. With the Chinese method, however, you can make use of certain dialect
Li: possibilities, but you have also early written records which you have to reckon with. Lots of American or some other Chinese people who talk about Old Chinese reconstruction will say, "Well, since we can do reconstruction of older languages without any old material, why should we worry about Chinese? We can reconstruct Old Chinese without even looking at Chinese characters." The characters, of course, are a nuisance to worry about. Many scholars, except Chinese scholars, don't like to have characters. [laughter] If you can get rid of characters, fine.

LaPolla: Could you speak more in detail about the methodology you used in making the reconstructions for Comparative Tai?

Li: Yes. This is really a very simple method. You get a group of—let's say, we are reconstructing the initial consonants. You'll find in one language there are, say, thirty to thirty-five consonants. In another group you may maybe have twenty-five or twenty-one and so on. But then you compare the words of this group of languages with the other group and so on. Then you find some of them will correspond to one sound in the other language and some of them will correspond to another sound. So that you find that although this only has one sound in this language, it corresponds to two or even sometimes three different sounds. It may point out that you are having three different consonants in the original language.

That's the way the comparative method goes. If you find that this sound corresponds to this sound, that's one consonant. This sound—same sound—but corresponds to another consonant, then this could be another sound. In other words, this one sound may go back to two proto-sounds. You can carefully examine this kind of correspondences and get a number of proto-sounds. It may not be quite correct, the result you get, but this is as much as you can do.

LaPolla: What about in cases when you have two different consonants? For example, in both of these books you sometimes reconstruct consonant clusters. When do you know when to have two separate things and when to have a consonant cluster?

Li: Well, the consonant clusters are quite plain since we do not talk about historical material for the Tai languages, which is all we know at present. You will find certain sounds correspond to one simple certain sound, but others, this sound corresponds to something else. So that you have to conclude that this sound must correspond to another group of sounds.

Now the difference may be very peculiar. For instance, in one language the initial consonant is, say, "p". But in the other language, the consonant is, say, "t". Now the "p" and the "t", if they initially correspond quite nicely, you say, "Well,
what was the original sound? How come the "p" becomes "t" and "t" becomes "p"? See? So you begin to figure out all those kinds of peculiar correspondences and you may come to the conclusion that a "p" corresponds to "t" because a "p" is a cluster. It's a "pl". Now "pl", because of the influence of the "l", the "pl" becomes a "t" in the other language. So, in this case, you begin to reconstruct a certain amount of different groups of consonants. You get the so-called consonant groups. I did that with a number of Tai languages.

We do the same thing also with Chinese, too, but the method you use would be different because we don't have so many dialects that are of that period for our use. But we do have a certain writing system which shows the same kind of peculiarity. You may find, for instance, a word using this kind of writing system now pronounced with an "h". [Here he means the phonetic element of a Chinese character --editor.] The same kind of writing system used in this particular type of word is pronounced like an "m". Now this is strange because why should some words spelled with this thing be pronounced with an "h", and some words spelled with the same thing be pronounced like an "m"? See?

So that you begin to reconstruct something. It cannot be an "m", it cannot be an "h"; it must be something different from both "h" and "m", and you get this special development in the different dialects. So you begin to figure out what kind of consonants you have in Old Chinese so you have this kind of different thing. Then you can begin to see that there are some systematic things happening in your reconstruction.

For instance, if there is a word which you now pronounce with a "t" and another word which has the same kind of so-called radical, but is pronounced now as an "l", so that that "t" and "l" must have some kind of relationship because they use the same kind of writing system, or so-called radical.

Then you begin to figure out in this way how it compares with the other languages, with the other consonants, so that you begin to form a kind of systematic thing. In that way, if your system becomes much more reasonable and phonetically agreeable to the general change of sounds, you can have then a new system for Chinese or for any other language.

The difference between Tai and Chinese is that [with] Tai you have many modern dialects to work at. You feel more comfortable in constructing a system. But Chinese is a little bit difficult because we are working with Old Chinese and we do not have dialect material. But we do have certain related things to that. We can also create certain special systems to represent
Li: the Old Chinese sound system. So I think they are both the same. Of course, in all cases you cannot be sure that what you did was 100 percent right. Some of them may be wrong.

Even though I feel that what I reconstruct may not be 100 percent right, I think you can make use of that and if you have other material that you can use, you still can improve on your system.

LaPolla: You have a good background in phonetics, but to what extent do you use phonetic possibility or probabilities that certain sounds are more likely to change to other sounds than the other way around? For example, "k" to "t" is more common than "n" to "k". How much of that kind of knowledge do you use in doing your reconstructions? Is that very important?

Li: I don't feel there is any general principle in which you can solve this problem. We know from the Indo-European type of consonants—that is, say, Indo-European has a labial, but suddenly in some other language, some Indo-European language, this is pronounced as a dental. Well, some of them, of course, have some other way of explaining it. The other say, "Well, there is no explanation. This language simply produced a labial as a dental." So I think the Indo-European, proto-Indo-European "bh" sounds in Latin becomes pronounced as a "d". You cannot do anything about this except "that's the trouble of this Latin," [laughs] you say. Similarly the Germanic languages would have the same kind of funny changes that occur.

Sometimes, of course, you may try to explain some of them away on phonetic grounds but in most cases when there are troublesome things you cannot reconstruct it. For instance, the instrumental ending in Indo-European, in say Sanskrit, has a "b", "bis". That's the instrumental. But in Germanic it has an "m", "mis". So why? People, "They are close enough," but why they are different, no way. That's the way the Germanic languages and Slavic languages have a nasal "m". That is, Sanskrit and Latin and so on have "b". None of us can explain why this difference occurred.

LaPolla: So that means you're saying that when you're writing historical phonological rules, you don't necessarily always have to have a conditioning environment?

Li: Well, in many cases, you find out the conditions for such kind of differences, changes. But in some cases you cannot, you cannot.

LaPolla: So does that mean you couldn't write a system of rules, an internally logically system?

Li: You can write the rules but the rules have no particular reason.
LaPolla: Oh, I see. It's just a way of talking about it.

Li: Yes, that's the way of saying, "Here you have--.

LaPolla: In your own work, for example, on the *Handbook of Comparative Tai*, what kind of time depth do you feel the reconstructions have? When you're working from just modern dialects and you're reconstructing back, what kind of time depths does that reconstruction have?

Li: That's particularly difficult. Now you have this group of languages and you divide this group of languages about which it is possible to say, "Wow this is one group. This is a northern group. This is another group, a southern group." You can classify them into two or three different groups. There was no particular reason how they were—what the time depth was. But naturally, if they are divided into these groups, they must require some time to get into these three different groups. So that it cannot be done in a year or two. It may be if they are close enough, it could be a hundred years, two hundred years. But if they are far apart, it may take hundreds of years. So that there's no great certainty that you can say how long ago it happened.

But, on the other hand, you can in general find that these groups of languages are different in many ways. One of them is that the phonetic sounds of these correspondence words are sometimes quite different. You can also find out certain words are used in this group of languages but not used in the other group of languages. All of these together will give you some idea of how far apart these groups of dialects are. But still there was—no, I don't think there is—any definite way of counting the years. Is this a hundred years or two hundred years or so?

LaPolla: So you don't believe in glotto-chronology or any of these other methods for figuring out time depth? You know about glotto-chronology, the Swadesh list and glotto-chronology. You don't have much faith in that?

Li: That's another way of counting. You can try it with any of these languages and see how much you can get. [laughs] I don't feel very comfortable about this.

LaPolla: Would you say that the depth would be in hundreds of years or in thousands of years? The time depth, for example, on the Thai dialects? In hundreds or thousands of years?

Li: I think if you find some very divergent linguistic structures between two languages and yet, also, certain very definite similarities between these two languages, then you may feel that
Li: they are related but they are much further related. On the other hand, you may find out certain differences, minor differences and so on, and yet they don't seem to be different for a long time. So that you may feel that the time depth may be very late. But then this kind of thing is a kind of, your kind of feelings. I feel they cannot be too far apart [laughing] or I feel they must be very long apart.

Even in Indo-European, which is one of the best known comparatively studied, there are some people who think the Slavic languages are more closely related with the—what is the name of that group of languages? Is it between the Slavic and the Germanic languages? Then you come to Germanic and then you find, for instance, there is the Celtic languages which were originally all over Germany. Then when the Germanic languages came in they drove the Celtic languages into the corner. Partly they were settled in the northern part of France—I don't know how you call this kind of languages in France but they were Celtic languages. Then the most farther apart is the Welsh language in England, the upper west part of England, and then further on into Irish, which is also a Celtic language. So that the Celtic languages, which originally occupied all of Germany, now are pushed into the western part of France, western part of England and into Ireland, Irish. So that you have the movement of the people begin to push.

Now, of course, it happened that with the Indo-European languages it is fortunate that you have a very old written tradition, say mostly from Latin. The European languages, people, settlements, were written by the Latin people like, let's say, Caesar's writing. Caesar wrote about Germania, Galia, other countries like that. For instance, talking about Galia, that was still, of course, the old people of France. The Galia were a Celtic group. Then the Germania, the Germanic groups. So that there are lots of written materials by Latin authors, particularly important Latin generals like Caesar. So in many places in Germany, for instance, in the famous dome, it was originally a Celtic settlement. Also a number of city names were originally Latin because all that part of the country was occupied by the Latin people so that you have Latin names for particular cities.

Now all of these, of course, both historical and so on, begin to tell you exactly how some places were occupied by the Celtic people. Others were occupied presumably by Latin garrisons, Latin and so on. So that various things like this—some of them you are pretty certain, but others, of course, you are not so certain. Northern Germany, for instance, the Berlin area now, of course, has become the center of the northern German
country, but originally the Berlin area was not occupied by the Germanic people but occupied by some related to the Slavic group of people.

Systems of Rules

LaPolla: Can I ask you—we mentioned before about the system of rules. When you write your system of rules, do you feel it's important to keep the rules in the linear order that they apply in a linear order historically or do you think historically rules don't necessarily have to be linear, kind of on the model of William Wang's model of competing changes or changes that can happen to different parts of the lexicon at different periods?

For example, Matthew Chen. I don't know if you've seen Matthew Chen's reconstruction from Middle Chinese to Modern Chinese, where he has his order of rules? He has this in a kind of a generative fashion, but the rules are not really linear. Do you feel that rules should be linear or it's not that important, or how do you feel about that?

Li: I don't quite believe Matthew Chen's theory.

LaPolla: So you think that his reconstruction or his rules for deriving Modern Chinese from Middle Chinese is not valid because of it's non-linearity? Or for what reason?

Li: I don't quite understand what your question--.

LaPolla: My question is mainly, do you think that in doing historical reconstruction that rules must be linear, there must be one after the other and you cannot have different rules applying to different parts of the lexicon at the same time?

Li: I think it's a very interesting theory if theories like that can be formulated and can be definitely applied. It would be very interesting, an interesting rule, interesting story. But I don't think things can be so simple. If it is that simple—it may work for some and a certain period, say, of fifteenth or sixteenth century or fifteen to the twentieth century for the Chinese dialect; it may work that way. But for another group of languages, it may not. The rules may not be that simple. I don't believe it.

LaPolla: You don't believe which one? That they're not linear, or you don't believe that they are linear?

Li: How do you mean linear?
LaPolla: By linear I just mean one happens after the other and not that they happen at the same time. That's what I mean. For example, if you say linear, I just mean that rule A has to happen before rule B, whereas some people say that rule A and B can be applying at the same time but just in different parts of the lexicon. That's what I mean in the difference between linear and non-linear rules. There's no ordering necessary or there is a certain amount of ordering but not very strict ordering.

Li: Personally, I don't see what's the use of it. The use of this kind of rule.

LaPolla: It's an important distinction if, for example, you wanted to try to use computers to model historical change.

Li: My feeling is as Franz Boas made it out—that the languages are really different. So that you do not make all the languages look alike, like some of the modern theorists. "The language is produced by the human mind. Human mind only get the same thing, the same kind of brain," and so on.

But in the early days, of course, when the people were working on different languages—particularly the American Indian languages, they are very different from the Indo-European type of languages like English, French, German. So I think Boas made a point: "Do not make the languages look alike."

Now, of course, the theory may change. Say, "All languages are alike." [laughs] So the ideas of philosophical development, in regard to language and so on, are different from period to period. Boas was, at that time, interested in studying the American Indian languages. For that reason, he said, "Do not make the American Indian languages look all alike. Each has its own characteristics." That's why he had this point of view, that you don't make them look alike. Philosophically, people would say, "Well, maybe your analysis makes them look different, but philosophically I feel that they are all the same." See? So that the later period when people more or less became mentalistically inclined, they began to see that different languages may look very different, but they are really quite the same. So a different—I don't know what Chomsky's ideas about language were. It may be he has different ways of trying to make something different into something the same.

LaPolla: So does that mean that you don't necessarily support the search for universals of language?

Li: Well, universals of languages is another matter. There are certain things that all languages possess. For instance, all languages have consonants and vowels. The consonants and vowels are two different things. You may call this a linguistic
universal. Also there may be other things. That is, you can select things from one group of languages and select another thing from another group of languages and find out—well, if you find this language has vowels and consonants and the other language has also vowels and consonants, then that becomes the universal. All languages will have vowels and consonants—that is a universal rule of language.

Also you can have other various syntactic rules, morphological rules and so on. I do not know how many universals you can figure out among the languages. How many of them? How many do they find out in universals?

LaPolla: Oh, I don't know if they count them in terms of the number but many linguists are involved in trying to find them.

Chan: Yes, they do. But those that can be stated, I think there were a settled number.

Li: Well, there was, of course, this man in Stanford. What is his name?

LaPolla: Ferguson? Not Ferguson.

Li: The universals was the other one.

LaPolla: Greenberg.

Li: Greenberg, yes. Greenberg was the one who talked about universals quite often. Now Greenberg, of course, is quite a peculiar fellow. At first, Greenberg was an anthropologist. I think he studied in Northwestern University with an anthropologist. Then I think he did some African languages and so on. Then he fooled around with different ideas.

The first time, I don't quite remember now, he began to use the idea that some languages had certain, very striking similarities. So if you say, "This language has vowels and consonants. The other language has also vowels and consonants. Then this is a kind of universal rule for languages." I think he started out from that. His teacher was an anthropologist, not a linguist. For some time, he was not quite successful because I think for a time he was teaching at Columbia University, also in the anthropology department. He was not accepted as a linguist. But, later on, he began to talk about universals and so on, and finally landed in Stanford.

He's still at Stanford. He's a very nice fellow, very nice fellow. He did go through some very hard times because people don't quite accept his funny thing. But his universals, of course, fit somebody's new linguistic theory and appeared to begin to—.
LaPolla: Can we get back to our original question? Out of the work that you've done in your life, what work do you feel is your major contribution if there is one? Or do you feel that they're all equally important? Is it the Comparative Tai, or is it, say, the Archaic Chinese reconstructions, or is it the American Indian work? What do you feel is your most important work or are they all equally important to you?

Li: I really don't have anything very important in any linguistic field at all. [laughter]

I fooled around with all sorts of linguistic groups, as you can see. I was interested first in Old Chinese. But I began to improve my methods and made use of more material because I studied a little bit more about Chinese. My knowledge of Chinese, of course, is still very simple. [laughter]

I also fooled around with Tibetan in the 1930s. So I tried to find out, a language like Tibetan as it is, what can I do about the written Tibetan language, what phonetic changes have happened in the Tibetan language? So I, about 1930, '31, wrote a simple article on the influence of certain prefixes on certain consonants in Tibetan. This was, of course, a very beginning, a trying to find out what phonetic processes have been going on in the Tibetan language. But my knowledge of Tibetan was very simple.

After I got through with Tibetan I began to work on the Tai languages. One of the most important things when you change fields, the first thing is that you have to have lots of material. The time when I began my Tai studies people only knew about Siamese but all the Tai dialects were unknown. So I began first by collecting Tai dialect material. When you collect enough material for one dialect, then you get a little book. So then you get another little book because you do another dialect. So it takes a few years just to do the very simple thing. For that reason, I collected a lot of dialects, but I only wrote about two or three monographs on some dialects. Then I began to compare the dialects that I collected and also the dialects that other people had collected and they formed the basic material of the Comparative Tai book.

That's why I find that there are several important things. The first, for instance, if you have material for one dialect, then you find that people, like the missionaries and other people, also have written about another dialect and so on. You begin to find out that some of these materials are not
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by Fang-kuei Li

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An Outline of Chinese Linguistics

Fang-kuei Li

Chapter I Introduction

Introduction

The Chinese language is of interest to the West for several reasons. In the first place, it is spoken by the largest speech community in the world. Although the exact number of the Chinese speaking population can not be given, the census of the Chinese living far less reliable than in the Western countries, a rough estimate, however, can be made.

According to the Chinese Year Book of 1937, the Chinese speaking population may be said to be around 400 millions. 1 This, of course, includes speakers of dialects very different from that of Peking, which is the standard official language (generally known to the West as the Northern Mandarin).

1) This figure does not include Chinese speaking populations outside of China, which amounted to at least several millions and most of which speak dialects of the Southeastern sea coast. Nor does it include population in China which speak non-Chinese languages, such as Mongol, Tungus, Turkish, Tibetan, Lolo, Tai, Miao, etc. They amount to over 25 millions.
A man from Peking cannot be understood in the southeastern
littoral region, but he can be understood without much
difficulty throughout Northern China and in a great portion
of Central and Southwestern China. If we consider intelligibility as the essential element to constitute a speech com-
munity, speakers of the various mutually intelligible dialects,
with Peking as the standard, may be estimated to be some-
where between 250 to 250 millions. They form still the largest
speech community in the world.

Whatever practical value may be attached to the
number of speakers of a language, a man's interest in
studying a language is not always ruled by practical
motives. He is, perhaps, more interested in the amount
of literature in that language, and hence in the part it
has played or is playing in the civilization of the world.
In this respect Chinese is no less a suitable subject
of study. For those who are interested in the records of
human activity, which are practically uninterrupted
for a period of over three thousand years, in the development
of human institutions, of philosophy, and the evolution of
ideas, in poetry, letters, letters, and art, the Chinese
dependable, phonetically not dependable. Sometimes semantically also not dependable. Secondly, there are also many later linguists, who want to make important contributions to this group of languages, would give you a list of words. Maybe hundreds, sometimes even a thousand. On the other hand, you find that for this group of languages you do not have any text. The whole complete language which may form the language, you don't have them. I studied Tai language. I collected about one thousand words; that's all that I did. I don't have to worry about any other thing.

So that I think if you use material from different people you'll find some people, like the missionaries, collect a lot of things. They collect all sorts of texts, but their phonetics is very bad. You have to be careful about that. Then they have the new linguistics who only give you a number of words, no text, and so on and you don't know exactly what this particular word means in this language or how to use this word in this language. So you get all sorts of different kinds of angles for different dialects' studies. That's why I used about ten or twenty Tai languages and would make a long list of that. I can only make use of it because of certain peculiar things. So you need good phonetic transcriptions of that language. You also need connected texts of this language so you know exactly what that particular word means.

Sometimes, you see, different languages would give the same etymological word with a different meaning. It's very peculiar. Once I asked a Tai informant, I said something about putting salt into it. I said, "How does it taste?" "Oh," he said, "It tastes sweet." I was surprised because I don't think salt has anything [laughs] sweet. But, you see, in that area salt is hard to get and if you put any salt into food, it tastes fine. But the word they used was "sweet," so I was quite surprised to hear him say that the salt is sweet.

Now if I make a record, say, "This word means 'sweet'," I find the other languages also say that this word means 'salty'. [laughs] So you can have lots of difficult problems by using words. Simply the words. I say, "Give me what it means." Because he will give you only one meaning in that particular situation. So I began to want the words, I want also to have texts in order to be sure that the word means what it means. What do you say it means.

LaPolla: What about the use of loan words? How do you distinguish loan words and then, also, how do you know something is a loan word? How old a loan does it have to be before you can use it in comparative work?
Yes, this is one of the difficult points. Suppose this word is found in all the languages you've worked with. Now is that the original word in this language or is it borrowed into all these dialects? Particularly difficult is that if you suspect that this group of languages is related, say, to Chinese, then this Chinese word got into all these dialects. Now, is this a native word for this group of languages or is this all borrowed from Chinese? So if they are all their own words, then this language becomes related with Chinese but if they are all borrowed from Chinese then this is not related with Chinese at all. So you have very different kinds of conclusion depending on how you judge. But the point is that you will find that these kinds of words may all be related but some of them, of course, become quite definitely borrowed from another.

But, however, there are still words which I'm not sure what to interpret. For instance, the word for a kind of bird is "goose" or something like that. But Chinese call it a "yan." It's a kind of migratory birds from Canada to South America and other. In the summer they'll go up north to Canada and so on, but this is a kind of a bird. Now Chinese is "yan." Now in the Thai language it's "han" with an "h". In various ways this can be related to the Chinese word "yan." That is, the Siamese "han" is developed from a voiceless nasal. Is this a Thai word, or is this a word borrowed from Chinese? Well, you don't know. If this is related with Chinese then Thai could be related with Chinese. [laughs] If not, then did the Chinese learn from the Thai or the Thai learn from the Chinese? This kind of point has been taken up by many other people. People, those who think that Thai is not a Sino-Tibetan language, say it must be borrowed from Sino-Tibetan. Or the Sino-Tibetan must have borrowed from the Thai. I think it's a very troublesome problem.

I am, in the first place, not interested in trying to relate two different languages. I'm interested to know at the moment what this language is, what it's structure is. I'm not interested to know that this language is particularly related with another language. I think the time may come near because I think in China they collected something like eighty or ninety different languages, which I have never heard before. Things like that may eventually turn out to be very useful for-. So I don't come to the rapid conclusion that--.

But still, of course, people like to speculate. Particularly there are people who say, "Well, the Tai people are related to the Miao-Yao people." Once you make that statement, whether it is valid or not valid, then people begin to say, "Well, Mr. So-and-So said this. Since we do not know what the Miao-Yao people belong to, we might just well say that they belong together with the Tai." And it becomes the kind of theory that this is a group of languages which is Miao-Yao-Tai. Things like that.
So I'm very conservative. I don't want to say, for instance, that Chinese belongs to the Indo-European language. [laughs] If I did that, it would at once make a noise. All the linguists will begin to say, "Well, now something happened!" [laughs] But they are interested in things. For instance, there are words like the word for honey. Now [in] Chinese it is a "mi." The Indo-European word is "maidu." It looks very much alike. Is it a Chinese word which got into Indo-European, or did Indo-European words get into Chinese, or are Chinese and Indo-European related words?

This is one. There are other words, like the word for dog. The Chinese is "quan," "*kun." Indo-European words for dog—I don't remember what is the Sanskrit word—but in English or in Germanic it's "hund." So they may be correctly related words. Did Chinese learn from the Indo-European, or Indo-European learn from Chinese or are Chinese and Indo-European related words?

There are also other words which people have pointed out very early, are possibly related words. People began not to take seriously this kind of similarity, although early, you know, students began to be interested in these kind of words. There are some peculiar relationships between Slavic languages with the Indic languages, particularly of the—what is it, the language of—in Central Asia? It's called Indic languages. It's something very close vocabulary wise.

Related languages may turn out to produce certain peculiarly similar things. Also I think Swadesh tends to think all languages are related. That is, why not? [laughter] So this kind of speculation and so on is very interesting. We can argue about it and so on, but I don't want to write a book on that. [laughter]

Loan Words

LaPolla: Just one last question—we really should end this, but one last question. You say as far as the question of these loan words you aren't that interested in showing genetic relationship or not, but do you use these loan words in internal reconstruction? Do you use loan words—like how old does a loan word have to be before you can use it within a group for reconstruction?

* Kun is the reconstructed form.
Li: Yes. This, of course, becomes a very complicated problem. There are many words in any group of languages that may be borrowed from other languages. The Germanic languages have a number of words probably borrowed from some native words, not in Germanic but from other languages, so that you never can tell that if the Chinese has ten thousand words, that they're all native Chinese. Maybe all the languages that Chinese borrowed from all died out. So it's difficult to really trace the word that belongs to the original group. See, all the Germanic words are not necessarily all Germanic. They could be some other. So what we call Chinese may not be really Chinese. See, like I say the word for honey, "mi." It may be this word is from some other language.

But we tend to mix everything up. We tend to put emphasis on words. But there are other things which we take into consideration, such as syntax, and so on. You may come to other conclusions. So that's why I usually talk about these things for fun, but I never take it seriously. It's not something that I can convince myself about. You see, the word for the numerals is again one very interesting thing. The Chinese word "jiu," nine, Thai has "kao," which is phonetically very close to Chinese "jiu," and Tibetan is "ku." You see again. So all three words are related. Now people believe that Tibetan and Chinese are related. The Tibetan "ku" and Chinese "jiu" are related words. But the Thai has "kao," "Well, Thai is not a Sino-Tibetan word. It was borrowed from--" [laughs] It's things like that.

People, once you have some idea fixed, then you begin to have a new interpretation of such things. It's very interesting to see how people make use of this kind of thing and make a big theory out of it, just like I did of the Chinese and Indo-European being related. If I write a book on the relationship between Indo-European and Chinese, then soon there will be a group of people who will either follow me up or attack me. [laughter]

LaPolla: Great. Thank you very much. I think we'll stop here for today.

Analyzing Bernhard Karlgren's Work

LaPolla: Professor Li, how do you feel about Karlgren's reconstructions, and how do you feel that your method differed from his?

Li: For that you have to see his reconstructions of certain periods. I do not know whether he would even call it, at least part of it, as reconstructions. Because for the language of so-called Ancient Chinese, about six hundred A.D., there are enough Chinese
phonetic notes so that I don't know whether you would call it reconstruction or not. I think Karlgren even did not feel it was a kind of reconstruction.

For instance, the consonants. The sixth century consonants were well known in Chinese phonology, such as jian, xi, etc. These are velars, dentals, labials, and so on, so that you wouldn't call that reconstruction, although somewhat you have to put that, the Chinese says bang, pang, bing, ming. It's apparently labials and you give it a writing, whether it is a /p/, aspirated /ph/, /b/. But I think Karlgren would not call that even as reconstruction, just as simply him putting the Chinese terminology into a kind of phonetic script. So for that it's something different.

But, of course, there are some, the consonants, are much easier to put into phonetic symbols, such as the labials. Well, labials, you have /p/, aspirated /ph/, voiced /b/ and so on. It's easy. But the difficulty, of course, is the vowel system of that period. However, it is not too difficult because they are already classified into rhyme groups; this belongs to one rhyme and the other to another rhyme and so on. So you can use that.

If you called this reconstruction for the Ancient Chinese period, then the problem is not too serious because the Chinese phonologist already has certain phonetic, enough, information. For instance, the labials: well, there's a /b, p, ph/, and so on; if there are velars, they've got a /g, k, kh, g/, and so on; and dentals--so you have very little reconstruction to do. The more difficult problem is about Archaic Chinese. So the problem of reconstruction--you called that reconstruction. I think Karlgren did not call that reconstruction--for the sixth century A.D. language, that is Ancient Chinese. He called it Ancient Chinese; somebody called it Middle Chinese. But the problem becomes more difficult with the Archaic Chinese; that is about the fourth century B.C. That's the time of the Zhou [Dynasty]. That, of course, is more difficult and there, that's where we most differ in reconstruction.

I differ from him in many ways. This was the paper [takes out paper] which I wrote for the so-called Archaic Chinese, both the vowels and the consonants. I have here all the consonants and vowels. [flips through papers] This was a paper published in Keightley's "The Origins of Chinese Civilization." It shows quite a difference that I have with Karlgren's system. For instance, the consonants are easier to reconstruct. There are very few problems. The problems were, of course, with the vowels. Mine, of course, has a very simple system. You can see here [points out]: I have only four vowels and the regular number of consonants and so on, so that you have to look at this
Li: to see why I differ from Karlgren's reconstructions of so-called Archaic Chinese. Karlgren called it Archaic Chinese; many other people called it Old Chinese.

Of course, there are a lot of people who have different kinds of reconstructions, particularly for the Old Chinese period. Others, such as Professor Bodman, who doesn't know much Chinese but he knows a good deal of Sino-Tibetan languages. He's more influenced by Sino-Tibetan group of languages and used that to reflect on old Archaic Chinese reconstructions. So that there are still some, quite some, differences of opinion on that. I don't feel that it is a problem that we hope to solve fully immediately, but, in general, there's a good deal of agreement. There are also some, quite a bit of, disagreement.

For instance, my theory is that there were only four vowels in Archaic Chinese, two high vowels, /i/ and /u/, one middle vowel, schwa, /ə/, and one low vowel, /a/. So, /i, u, ə, a/; these are the four vowels that I assume for Archaic Chinese. Take, for example, Bodman's. He says, /i, u, ə, o, a/. He kept two low vowels, /a/ and /o/. Now that is because of his Tibetan-Burman influence on his reconstruction. According to me, of course, using Chinese material there was no /e/ and /o/ for Archaic Chinese. There may have in the earlier period, but by the time of the Old Chinese period, this would disappear if there was this kind of-- So there are still a good deal of problems in the Archaic Chinese period.

On the Nature of Ancient and Archaic Chinese

LaPolla: Well, do you feel that Archaic Chinese and Ancient Chinese are part of the same system? Or are they two separate phonological systems? Two separate language systems.

Li: What do you mean?

LaPolla: Some people, like Karlgren; in a sense his reconstructions assume that Ancient Chinese and Archaic Chinese are one line. Other linguists say--for example, Chang Kun [Kun Chang] or some others--that it's really not one straight line in development between Archaic Chinese and Ancient Chinese. How do you feel about that?

Li: Well, it's difficult to say about such things. Archaic Chinese must have developed later into Ancient Chinese. How they developed and what dialects were influenced in this kind of development is difficult to say. You cannot say that Ancient Chinese, that is Middle Chinese, came out of nowhere and Archaic
Li: Chinese went nowhere. It's difficult to have a theory. The other thing is that you can try to work out some kind of phonetic rules. Archaic Chinese may become Ancient Chinese. Now, if you can do that, some people will think, well, that is the way it developed, Archaic Chinese into Ancient Chinese. Others may have a different opinion about this. But you cannot say they are not related.

LaPolla: I didn't mean to say that they weren't related, but part of it, I think, is also that some people feel that Ancient Chinese or the body of material that we work with, mostly Qie Yun, in Ancient Chinese, is really not a single language but kind of a conglomeration of many different dialects at the same time.

Li: I think it is a serious question and I think this is a useless question to ask because Ancient Chinese, as we know it, has come from a kind of dictionary, so-called rhyme dictionary. Now a dictionary of a language cannot be a simple dialect. You take a look at English, the English dictionary. Let's say the Modern English dictionary. The words collected in a Modern English dictionary are not one single dialect. There are all sorts of dialects in England collected into a Modern English dictionary.

We know there are quite a number of Scotch words in Modern English. There are also other, Southern English, or some other dialects of English that were collected into this. So that any dictionary, you cannot assume that it is a simple dialect. There may be lots of other things that got into your dictionary. I feel that you have to look at the Chinese Qie Yun from that angle, not think Qie Yun is one single dialect. So my feeling of the people who assume that the Qie Yun is one single dialect is probably, maybe, that Chinese scholars may have that point of view. But I don't believe that that's the--.

We know probably in the Qie Yun period there are lots of words--. You see, there are so many double readings in Qie Yun. Double readings may be all right because even in English words are pronounced in one way and then the same word is pronounced in another way, but the Chinese dictionary of the Qie Yun period has so many, many different readings. Now this comes about is another question, but it does not make us feel that this Qie Yun is one language or two languages or three languages. Because a dictionary, a highly developed literary language like this, often has many dialect words in it. You can see that in English. Lots of words pronounced in one way while other words are pronounced in some other way. That comes from Scotch, a Scotch word, that got into Modern English.

We have the same kind of thing. We do not feel that Chinese would be different in that particular respect. Therefore, we say the Qie Yun language is not one language, it's four of them, but
so is English. English is not one language. You see, you get all sorts of things in English. So is Chinese, not one language. You get all sorts of things into the Qie Yun language, so it's I think quite a useless thing to say we get a Modern English dictionary. I say, "What language is that? What one language is that? Does it have Scotch words; does it have southern English words; does it have middle, so-called, London-type English words?" It's kind of mixed, all sorts of things. Now I do not feel that the Chinese Qie Yun should be much different from English.

LaPolla: What about the Shijing then? What about the Shijing, that most of the Archaic reconstructions are based on? Some people, for example, Jeffrey Riegel, who just finished a translation of the Shijing, claims that it's one uniform language. That it was the court language, that the original folk songs and whatnot that the Shijing is made of were edited to be a consistent single language. Do you feel that that's valid or not? Because if the Shijing is not a single language either, then that kind of throws into doubt a lot of reconstruction work.

Li: Well, you have different theories. What we have are the so-called, aside from some historical records, mostly from the Shijing, from the poems of that period. Now we do not know whether these poems were actually poems from different dialects or poems collected from different dialects, but more or less normalized into a literary dialect. So my feeling is when I read these poems—it's a rhyming, it's a—it seems to have been quite normalized. It is no longer of two different or, according to the periods where these poems come from, ten or fifteen dialects. It is a problem which we can never solve, quite, but possibly. But if you look at the rhyming system and so on, they must have been normalized.

On Consonant Clusters in Archaic Chinese

LaPolla: In your book you talked a bit about consonant clusters in Archaic Chinese. How do you feel about the possibility that some of those clusters could have arisen from prefixes as in Tibeto-Burman? Do you think Chinese ever had prefixes or just stable consonant clusters?

Li: For so-called Ancient Chinese we have no evidence of that. But for Archaic Chinese it is quite possible. There are consonants, so-called consonant clusters. For instance, there are indications that you may have, at least, one character, say, which is now pronounced with a /k/. The same kind of character with some other different kind of radical is pronounced as an
Li: /s/. Now what? How do you reconcile the /k/ with an /s/? You may have different theories. The /k/ and /s/ could come from an /sk/. So you can have different interpretations of this type of thing.

This book [takes out Shangguin Yanjiu--Studies of Archiac Chinese Phonology] I have in it some theories about this type of explanation but, of course, it is still very--

LaPolla: The main part of my question, though, is do you feel that these were stable clusters if they were clusters? Or was there a system of prefixes that could have been the cause of these different pronunciations for the same phonetic element?

Li: On some of them, of course, you can feel the semantic relationship of this type of thing. One thing is, for instance, like "wang": to die, to go, to disappear--"wang". Now there is also a word meaning similarly to die, it is "sang". Now "wang" and "sang" are semantically related words. An /s/ and a /w/ could be some kind of prefix that make the "wang" into "sang". There are many other such things like that you cannot quite neglect and yet you have no, at the moment, satisfactory theory to do that. Mei Tsu-lin recently wrote something about the *s- prefix in Old Chinese. Then some words with the *s- prefix mean some kind of causative--.

LaPolla: Tibeto-Burman has that, too, as you know.

Li: Well, that was suggested long ago by Karadi. It's a famous book. I don't recall the title of the book. It was written, of course, in German. I don't remember the title of it. I read it about fifty years ago. But, anyway, he studied Tibetan as well as Chinese. But in Tibetan it becomes very plain that the s- is a causative, see? The Tibetan, you look at the dictionary, you can see the--. But s-, while it is, in many cases, a causative prefix, s- is not the only causative. You may have others. But the others are not so easy to identify. So you may have certain indications of that. Now Mei Tsu-lin finds a kind of *s- in Chinese that seems like a causative. So that is, I think, very interesting. It shows a good deal of important relationship between Tibetan and Chinese.

On the Reconstruction of Proto-Dialects

LaPolla: Can I ask you, how do you feel about reconstructing Proto-dialects of Chinese and their use in the reconstruction of Ancient Chinese? Most reconstructive work, like you've said, hasn't really been that much in terms of reconstruction. It's
been more just assigning sounds to the traditional categories. But what about people like Jerry Norman who are going back and using modern dialects to reconstruct proto-dialects and then using those proto-dialects to reconstruct Ancient Chinese? How do you feel about that?

Li: I know nothing about Archaic Chinese dialects.

LaPolla: No, no. I'm not talking about Archaic Chinese dialects. Well, in a sense, that's what it would be: It would be reconstructing a proto, say Proto-Min or Proto-Jin or Proto-whatever dialect, as a first step towards an eventual reconstructing using the normal Indo-European method on Chinese.

Li: The trouble is if you use the Min dialect like Norman, the words you can reconstruct from the Min dialects are so little that you cannot go back to Archaic Chinese. So the thing is that you can create a system of Archaic Chinese and try to make it develop into early Min dialect, that's possible. But if you start from the Min dialect and go back, that's impossible. I feel it's impossible.

LaPolla: So do you think there's validity, though, in doing proto-dialect reconstruction just for its own sake?

Li: Well, you can do the proto-dialects, say the Min dialect. Min's the only one that everybody's interested in, about something like that. But the thing is, you can reconstruct back to the Min, early Proto-Min, but you don't know how early it can be.

On Dialect Work and the Tai-Yue/Min Connection

Li: Personally I am not a dialectologist. I don't have much confidence in many dialectologists. [laughs]

LaPolla: Talking about that, how do you feel about the general direction of Chinese philology or phonology now? Or the direction that it's been taking for the last few years and the direction it will take?

Li: I am not particularly interested in Chinese dialects, but there are lots of other people who are interested in Chinese dialects. The first one who was interested in Chinese dialects was Y. R. Chao. Y. R. Chao was probably one of the earliest ones in the 1920s. He already had worked on the Wu dialect, on the Cantonese dialect, and also other dialects. But after Y. R. Chao's work on these dialects, I gave up Chinese dialects. The reason why I did is that you have to do a lot of work on the dialects. You have
Li: to go to this dialect, that dialect, then, all the Wu dialects come together. You then get an earlier Proto-Wu dialect and so on; and then another group of dialects, and so on. Now that can be helpful in trying to get a general idea of the changing of Chinese dialects from one period to another. It's all right to do one particular dialect, but, as a whole [dialect group], what happened is something very, very difficult to do [reconstruct]. Of course I'm not interested in that; I'm only interested in the dialects. That's another question, how much you want to be interested in that. I, myself, was not interested in Chinese dialects so I don't care what dialect that was.

LaPolla: What about the interplay, for example, between some of the southern Chinese dialects and the Tai languages, like say Cantonese or Minnan [Southern Fujian] with the Tai languages? There seems to have been somewhat of an interplay back and forth.

Li: There are certain so-called phonetic similarities like Cantonese or some Tai dialect. That is something; that's another question. That is, you have certain similarities of phonetics among languages of a close geographical area.

That happened, of course, even in American Indian languages. Although people would say the Northwest American Indian languages have some very peculiar phonetics different from other American Indian languages, such as in the central area, which is much simpler. See, all the areas of Washington, even Canada, had some very complicated phonetic sounds. There's for instance dentals, aspirated dentals, glottalized dentals and so on. But in the central area in America the phonetics become very simple. There's no such kind of funny sounds. For instance, the central dialect would have a consonant like /I/, /Ia/, and then a voiceless /I/, /klIa/, and a dental plus a velar such as /klIa/ and then glottalized like /?Ia/, so on. That's all over in this Northwest American Indian language. But none of these sounds appeared in the central dialect. So you have a spread of certain phonetics in a certain geographic area.

Now let's talk about Cantonese. Cantonese, of course, is very near to the Tai languages, and so on. So there must be--there could be--certain phonetic influences in this area. It may mean something; it may not mean anything. We do not know. So Cantonese may be particularly close to the Tai languages, but they're further up north. There are lots of other Tai languages which are different from Cantonese. [laughs] But they are Tai languages, you can see, right away. So there are certain phonetic similarities on geographical grounds. They may not have any historical reasons for them to appear.
VI OVERVIEW OF PROFESSOR LI'S FAMILY AND CAREER

The Family*

LaPolla: The last part that we'd like to talk about is about your family. We've pretty much covered most of the academic stuff, unless you feel that there's something more that you'd like to talk about.

Li: My family?

LaPolla: Yes.

Li: Yes, I probably can tell you.

LaPolla: When you were young your mother and father in a sense split up when your father went back to Shanxi and your mother took you to Peking, or first to Baoding and then took you to Peking. How do you feel that that splitting up of your family affected you, if it affected you at all?

Li: In what way?

Lindy: You need your hearing aid, Daddy.

Li: Yes, I don't have any. I don't know where they are.

Li: My father went back to Shanxi and retired as a country gentleman. My mother found that that was not the way for the children in Shanxi Province so she remained in Peking and sent us to school.

LaPolla: But after that you didn't mention having any contact with your father. Did you have contact with your father after that?

Li: Yes. By the time when I was already in the University, Qinghua University studying, my father came back to Peking. He was not in good health, so he came back to Peking and lived with us but was very, very sick, and also not too long after, he died. He died in Peking.

LaPolla: Had you stayed in touch with him all those years?

Li: We were in Peking.

LaPolla: No, before that. Between the time that you split up in Baoding until the time that you were in college, did you stay in touch with him?

Li: I was always in Peking.

LaPolla: I know, but did you stay in touch with your father?

Li: My father stayed in Shanxi all the time.

LaPolla: Okay, let's go to another question. Could you discuss how you met and married Mrs. Li?

Li: Yes, I was in Peking at that time. I was a research fellow in the Academia Sinica. I was only about twenty-nine years old. My wife's family knows my family, too. So when I came back, we met each other and for some time she stayed in the Western Hills, you know, for the summer. Sometimes I went up to the Hills to see her.

LaPolla: How did you meet?

Li: Well, mostly the family.

LaPolla: Oh, introduction?

Li: Yes. Her brother and sister-in-law and--

Lindy: Your sister, Gu-Gu.*

*"Gu-Gu" refers to Professor Li's sister, Li Yi.
Li: Well, she was not in Peking at that time. Only a very short time.

Lindy: She was a friend of Da Jiuma?*

Li: Yes, she knows Da Jiuma, that's right. Somehow we got acquainted when I was only twenty-nine years old, just got back from America. There were lots of people making matches for me. That's very simple because there were lots of people who were trying to match me with young beautiful girls.

Lindy: Including Mrs. Chao.

Li: Yes. [laughter]

One of them was Mrs. Chao's niece. She was a very pretty young girl and Mrs. Chao wanted a match-up. But apparently I did not get too much interested. Then there's also Ding Wenjiang. Ding Wenjiang also [had] a niece and was trying to match me up, but again it didn't seem to match. Then, of course, I knew my wife already at that time. Then the famous Liang Sicheng, Liang Qichao's son and his wife were already married and were up in the Western Hills. Wang's family also went up to the Hills.

Mrs. Li: Wang Yintai's family.

Li: So when we were both meeting in the mountains, the Liang family suddenly spread out the news, "Mr. Li now has a girl friend." [laughter]

Lapolla: Can you discuss your children?

Li: Children, oh. She's my oldest child. [points to Lindy] After we got married in Peking—and, at that time, Peking was pretty dangerous because the Japanese were infiltrating into Peking—so we all came to Shanghai to stay. She was born in Shanghai in 1933.

Lindy: Thirty-three, when you were in Thailand.

Li: No, no. After you were born I went to Thailand. Yes, I then studied Thai, Thai language and so on. I was there about three months in Thailand and came back. I began immediately to do field work on the Tai dialects in Guangxi.

Lindy: Were you pleased that I was born?

* "Da Jiuma" refers to Mrs. Li's sister-in-law, Wang Yinsong.
Li: You were about, I think, one year or a little bit less than a year old when I was in Thailand.

Mrs. Li: No, eight months old.

Li: Yes, I saw your pictures she sent me to Thailand. Then, the next year, when I came back we moved to Nanking and there Peter was born, right?

Mrs. Li: Nineteen thirty-five.

Li: Nineteen thirty-five, Peter was born. Nineteen thirty-seven I received an appointment from Yale University as a visiting professor. That was the time when the Japanese invaded China. And '37 I came back to Shanghai, took a boat and landed in Seattle.

Mrs. Li: In Seattle? We land in Seattle, right.

Li: Yes. From Seattle we took the railway to New Haven. There we stayed two years, '37 to '39. After '39 I went back to Shanghai again but then China was a pretty wrecked place by the Japanese. Japanese already occupied Nanking, occupied even Hankou and the government moved to Chungking. Nineteen thirty-nine I went back. I had to go back from the boat to Hong Kong, from Hong Kong to Vietnam, from Vietnam take the—what is it?

LaPolla: Train.

Li: Take the train and go to Kunming.

Lindy: Were you ever concerned about our education?

Li: About your education? Oh, no. Too young to be educated.

Lindy: We were six, seven, eight years old.

Li: No, not in Kunming. But after Kunming we moved to Lizhuang. Lizhuang, well, there were some young ladies who are teaching all of you certain things like, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and so on. Then, after that, we all moved to Chengdu. There you went to school. Is that right? You went to school.

LaPolla: And your last child? When and where was your last child born?

Mrs. Li: Nineteen forty-nine, Annie was born.

Li: That was when we were already in this country. We were here until '39, we went back to China, and then in '46 we came to Harvard. Forty-six to '47, '47-'48; '48-'49. I again taught at
Li: Yale University for another year. Then we were on the way back to China again. We had an old Ford.
Lindy: Forty-nine? We were on the way to Seattle.
Li: Yes. We had a car, an old car. We drove all the way from New Haven to Michigan.
Mrs. Li: Ann Arbor, Michigan.
Li: From Michigan after one summer. We taught at Michigan for one summer. Annie was born in Ann Arbor. Then we drove to Seattle. At that time, of course, the Chinese situation was very bad again. The Communists began to take over and we did not know what we could do because the situation was very poor, so when we reached Seattle they said, "Well, you'd better come here and teach Chinese." So I accepted the position to take care of the Chinese program at that time and we stayed there. A couple of years later Chang Kun came to teach. Then, from the middle of 1949 I taught until '69, when I retired. As I say, I wanted to have a nice place to stay while I retired, so I went to Hawaii. I was there for two or three years.
Mrs. Li: Four years.
Li: Four years.
LaPolla: How do you feel about the way your children turned out?
[laughter]
Li: My children turned out?* Well, some of them are—[points to Lindy] She's pretty smart. The smartest of all my three children. My son is very hard working. He took a long time to get his Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. My youngest daughter was most American. She doesn't want to study at all. So she stayed in Seattle and learned—what is it?
Mrs. Li: Computer.
Li: Computer and working in the computer center at the university.
Mrs. Li: She managed to graduate from the University of Washington.

* Lindy Li Mark, professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies, California State University, Hayward. Peter Li, professor of Chinese Language and Literature, Rutgers University. Annie D. Li, computer technician, University of Washington.
Honorary Degrees

Mrs. Li: You didn't mention your honorary degrees. In 1972 you got your honorary degree from Michigan.

Li: In 1972 the University of Michigan gave me the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. This [points to the citation] was from the University of Michigan. [long pause] But they don't give you those dates—[laughs]. Let me see if there is—"Datum Ex meritus cum recitatis..." [laughs] The sixteenth of May.

Chan: [Brief discussion with Mrs. Li in Chinese] This is a very nice wording. I think it suits you very well.

Li: Ah. It's a citation.

Chan: It suits you real well: "Firm and yet subtle analysis."

Mrs. Li: The citation was even translated into Chinese by my brother, Hsu Daolin. When they offered you a [honorary] degree in Michigan you had twenty-nine recommendation letters.

Li: Oh, I don't know how many.

Mrs. Li: Twenty-nine.

Li: When they give you an honorary degree they want to have recommendations from people in your field. So they got twenty-nine letters from all over the world—

Mrs. Li: From eleven countries.

Li: From Denmark, from England, mostly from the United States. From Professor Chao, from the University of Chicago—oh, different people, to recommend that "he is worthy of this honorary degree."

Mrs. Li: The university gave all those letters to us?

Li: I gave them to the University of Honolulu. Because Honolulu was trying to justify me as Professor Emeritus. They took those letters, and they may still be in the files of the department. They have to present reasons why they wanted to give me Professor Emeritus in the University of Hawaii, because I only taught there three or four years; that's too short to be a professor emeritus.

Chan: I see.

Li: So I gave them the letters.

Mrs. Li: When was the one from Chinese University in Hong Kong?
Li: Hong Kong, that was 1976.

**Hobbies**

LaPolla: One last question. Could you just discuss your hobbies, your painting, the Kunqu and the other things that you do?

Li: Oh, that's interesting. Painting. I learned how to paint when I was still in China when I was in my early twenties. For a time I was for some reason or another, out of school and I just kept on painting. This is one result of that painting.

Lindy: Did Nai Nai ever teach you?**

Li: No, she didn't teach me but she was a painter. She painted very well, but after she got married and had children she never painted again.

Lindy: You never saw her paint?

Li: No, never saw her paint.

Lindy: I saw her paint.

Li: Where?

Lindy: In Li Zhuang. Once she painted while we were in Li Zhuang.

Li: I don't remember that.

Lindy: You don't remember that?

Li: She never painted.

Lindy: She never painted in your presence?

Li: No.


** "Nai Nai" refers to Professor Li's mother, He Ying.
LaPolla: Did you work always in watercolors? Or did you also use oils?

Li: Oil? Oh, mostly watercolor. I never used oil. It's difficult to use oil in China.

LaPolla: How about Kunqu? Have you had a very long—?

Li: Yes. Kunqu was a very curious thing because that was when we were in Chengdu?

Mrs. Li: Oh, you learned from Da Ge first.*

Li: What, that's nothing. [laughs]

Mrs. Li: From 1943 until '45.

Li: Yes, I was in Chengdu and that was the time when the Japanese were bombing Chungking, even bombing Chengdu all the time. We had nothing, nothing to amuse ourselves, so she [meaning his wife] knows how to sing Kunqu and I learned how to play the flute.

Lindy: There was a group of people that sang there.

Li: Yes, it was a good group of people who knew how to sing, teach. Chang Chunho was also there at that time. I did not know Kunqu at all, but I just listened to them singing. I did not know how to play a flute. I then met one person.

Mrs. Li: Great artist.

Li: He is a good artist now in Peking, Wu Zuoren. I asked him. Now he knew how to play flute. I said, "How do you play the flute?" He said, "Well, this is do-re-mi-fa-so," and so. He taught me how to.

Mrs. Li: Only once.

Li: Yes, he taught me only once. Then he left and I began to learn to play the flute but the trouble is that I never made a sound out of it, it was just absolutely soundless. [laughs] They always poked fun at me. They said, "My father plays the flute but no sounds come out."

* "Da Ge" refers to Hsu Ying's eldest brother who is an expert in singing Kunqu and playing the flute.
Mrs. Li: But he turns music books.

Li: But although I don't make any sounds, I still read the notes, you know. I follow the notes but no sound comes out. Anyway, I turn the page and keep on playing. After about a week, then sounds begin to come out of the flute. [laughter]

Lindy: Do you remember some of the people that we sang with?

Li: One was Chang Chungho and there's another one called Li.

Mrs. Li: Li Siqun, Li Mengxiong.

Li: Li Mengxiong is a professor in Sichuan University. He knows how to play well.

Mrs. Li: His wife was Shi Pu. Both professors in the English Department.

Li: Yes. Then who else?

Mrs. Li: Wu Yuseng, Liao Suyun.

Li: [Chinese phrase] Wu Yuseng didn't participate much.

Mrs. Li: He participated every time. He's a great teacher of English literature.

Lindy: Lin Tao and Du Rong were there.

Li: Yes, Lin Tao was there. Lin Tao and his wife.

Mrs. Li: That's a professor in Peking University.

Lindy: Those include Shen Fuwen and his wife, too.

Mrs. Li: Yes, artists, great artists.

Lindy: Fuwen is the lacquer artist.

Mrs. Li: Liao Suyun. Liao Suyun was a great student of Hong Dou Guangzhu. He's a celebrity too. He is a prince of the Qing Dynasty.

LaPolla: Do you have any other hobbies besides these two? Besides painting and Kunqu, do you have other hobbies?

Li: As a student, or when I was in the middle school and also in the university, I used to play tennis. Occasionally play basketball, but that's not my favorite.

Mrs. Li: He plays Weiqi—"Go."
Lindy: You were very good at ti jianzi, I remember.*

Li: No, ti jianzi, that's something they never see around here.

Mrs. Li: And he has a good habit now, da majiang—playing mahjong.

LaPolla: Okay, that pretty much covers it so we'll call it quits for now. Thank you very much.

* "ti jianzi" is keeping a shuttlecock up in the air with your feet, similar to the sport hackeysack here, though here they use a beanbag.
INTERVIEW DATES -- Fang-Kuei Li

July 15, 1986
July 23, 1986
August 23, 1986
September 20, 1986
September 27, 1986
October 3, 1986
October 25, 1986
November 29, 1986
December 6, 1986

Tapes have been deposited in the Microforms Division of The Bancroft Library.
### APPENDIX

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The inevitable finally came. It was not, however, completely unexpected. After having been in the hospital on and off for forty-four days, initially because of a stroke and later complicated by other medical problems, our father, Fang-kuei Li (b. 1902), passed away peacefully on the morning of August 21st at 1:45 AM in the Kaiser Hospital in Redwood City, California. He had just passed his 85th birthday on August 20th, and the 21st was his and Mom’s 55th wedding anniversary.

He lived a full life of eighty-five years and enjoyed every bit of it. His distinguished career in linguistics spans over 60 years and two continents. We think he accomplished most of what he wished and had no regrets. In fact we felt that he actually wanted to go even before the end came because he knew that he was seriously ill. He was mentally clear up to the end even though his speech was impaired.

Fang-kuei Li was one of those rare individuals who was blessed. Although he was born in a time of turmoil in the history of modern China, he was extremely lucky and enjoyed the best of four worlds, the old and the new, the East and the West. He did very well at Qinghua College in China and was selected to study in the United States in 1924 at the age of twenty-two. He spent two years at the University of Michigan as an undergraduate where he earned his BA in linguistics. Then he spent two more years as a graduate student at the University of Chicago where he earned his MA in 1927 and Ph.D. in 1928. In these three years from 1926 to 1928 he earned three degrees.

While at Chicago, he studied with such luminaries as Edward Sapir, Leonard Bloomfield, and Carl Darling Buck who dominated the linguistic field at the time. He studied Indo-European linguistics with Bloomfield and Buck and learned field method of studying living languages with Sapir. But ultimately it was Sapir who had the most influence on him. As he recalled in 1984 "He (Sapir) kept constantly throwing me books. He would give me a book and say, 'Well, you read this dictionary.' After two weeks, he would say, 'How about the dictionary you were supposed to read?' And then other books and so on, so that I read a tremendous amount of things ...." Sapir had the young Fang-kuei read works on Chinese phonology, Vietnamese, some Thai texts and readers, a Tibetan grammar and dictionary. These areas of linguistics were later to occupy father’s talents for the next sixty some years.

In 1927 he went to the Hupa Valley in California to practice field methods with Edward Sapir. After a few weeks he was told to go out on his own and search out the Mattole Indians and record their language. He found the last two surviving Mattole Indians and made the only linguistic record of that language (by hand of course, since tape recorders were not available in those days). Other North American Indian languages he worked on include Sarcee, Wailaki, Hare, Eeyak, and Chipewyan. This accomplishment earned him the unique reputation of being one of the very few Chinese linguists, if not the only one, who knew American Indian languages.
After returning to China in 1929, Fang-kuei Li was immediately invited to join the newly formed Academia Sinica, the most prestigious research institution in China. For the next seventeen years, he was to work steadily in applying what he had learned to the study of Chinese linguistics. He pioneered descriptive linguistics of non-written languages of China's ethnic minorities in Southwest China. His comparative study of Thai dialects in both China and Thailand was one of his most significant contributions. In 1985 he was honored by Chulalongkorn University and received by Her Royal Highness, Princess Kalayaní-watana of Thailand.

His application of the methods of historical linguistics to the reconstruction of Archaic Chinese was another of his major accomplishments. Finally, the area of Sino-Tibetan linguistics also occupied much of his time and energy — again yielding important results. In all he authored some nine books and scores of articles.

Back to America in 1946, father taught at Harvard and Yale, eventually settling at the University of Washington in Seattle where he taught for twenty years retiring in 1969. From Seattle he moved to Honolulu, Hawaii where he continued to teach for five more years at the University of Hawaii retiring a second time in 1974.

Aside from his distinguished academic career, he had a warm and happy family life. He had a wide range of interests which enriched his daily life. He was a talented artist, skilled in both traditional Chinese painting and Western water colors. He learned to play the Chinese flute very well and enjoyed singing and teaching Kunqu musical drama. He also enjoyed mahjong and bridge. On the evening of July 6th, he happily attended the American debut of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera troupe in San Francisco. On the following morning he suffered a stroke from which he never recovered.

His passing marked the end of a golden era of the Academia Sinica. He was the last of that original handful of scholars who formed the backbone of the organization and their single-minded devotion to scholarship left a solid record of accomplishments that have withstood the test of time.

He was always a kind, modest, and unassuming man. He rarely criticized others but was critical of himself. In the spirit of his unassuming nature, a simple farewell service was held on August 24th in Oakland, California attended only by family and close friends.

Lindy Peter Annie

Thank you very much.

Hon. Li & Family
CURRICULUM VITAE

FANG-KUEI LI, PhD, DLitt, LLD
1902-1987

Date and place of birth: August 20, 1902, Canton, China
Married: Ying Hsu; Children: Lindy Li Mark, Peter Li, Annie D. Li

EDUCATION

1924 Graduated Tsing Hua College, Peking, China
1926 B.A. Linguistics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
1927 M.A. Linguistics, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
1928 PhD. Linguistics, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
1929-30 Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, Chinese Linguistics

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

1930 to present Research Fellow, Academia Sinica, Peking and Taipei
1937-39 Visiting Professor, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
1942-45 Visiting Professor, Yen Ching University, Chengdu
1946-48 Visiting Fellow, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
1948-49 Visiting Professor, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
1949-69 Professor, University of Washington, Seattle
   Retired Professor Emeritus 1969
1969-72 Professor, University of Hawaii, Manoa, Hawaii
   Retired Professor Emeritus 1972
1973 Visiting Professor, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey

HONORS

1972 Honorary DLitt, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
1976 Honorary LLD, Chinese University of Hong Kong
1985 Plaque for Outstanding Achievements and Dedication to the Field of Historical and Comparative Tai Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

MEMBERSHIPS

Linguistic Society of America, Life Member; Vice President 1949-50
International Journal of American Linguistics, Associate Editor
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FANG-KUEI LI
Works from 1930-1987
compiled by Lindy Li Mark

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1985


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Addendum

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Kun Chang, compplier

Ting Pang-hsin, compiler
The two books, *Golden Anniversary* (1984) and *Sorrows of a Blade of Grass* (1978 and 1987) are collections of essays by my mother Hsu Ying Li. They will be deposited in The Bancroft Library in conjunction with the oral history of Fang-Kuei Li.

Since my father tended to be reticent about personal matters, these books serve to fill out details about his family and social life. Some of the essays, in Chinese, have been published in newspapers and magazines; others appear for the first time. Included in both books are essays and commentaries, in English, by members of the Li and Hsu families and their friends.

In *Golden Anniversary*, written shortly after my parents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary, in 1982, my mother reminisces about their life together. In March, 1982, my father, age 80, underwent coronary bypass surgery, and my mother, then 72, underwent surgery for colon cancer. A few months later, well again, they celebrated their golden anniversary in Honolulu, with a dinner party for one hundred guests.

Included in the book are accounts of that celebration, as well as of places around the world where they attended academic meetings and enjoyed vacations on the side.

My mother is a lively raconteur and writer. Her reports of the meetings and the prominent scholars they met might ultimately be of historical interest.

*Sorrows of a Blade of Grass* (*Cun Cao Bei*), alludes to a Tang poem in which parental nurturance is likened to the sun’s rays that bring life to a blade of grass — a debt that can never be repaid. In the Chinese section of the book are essays primarily about my mother’s own family, biographies of her mother Hsia Hsuan, her father, Hsu Shucheng, recollections of her brothers, and of her marriage to Fang-Kuei Li.

In the English section are essays by Joan Stanley-Baker (*Hsiao-hu*), my mother’s niece, who wrote "Grandmother in Ko-Lo-Shan" about her grandmother, (my mother’s mother) and "Letter to Baba", about her father, Dau-Lin Hsu, (my mother’s brother). Barbara Schuchardt, Joan Stanley-Baker’s mother, wrote "The Years in Rome (Summer 1938 to Summer 1941)."

As I write this introduction to these books three weeks after the passing of my father, I expect that the final chapter of his life’s story will most likely flow from my mother’s pen, in time.

Lindy Li Mark

11 September 1987
Oakland, California
RETURN TO CHINA 1978
by Lindy Li Mark

We had been cut off completely from relatives and acquaintances in China since 1949. In the years after Nixon’s rapprochement with China, many people had visited China. But my father never once mentioned that he would like to see his homeland. He was adamantly against the Communist regime because of its interference with academic freedom.

Dad’s close ties with the Academia Sinica in Taipei also made him ambivalent about China. Having been cut off from the mainland contingent for over thirty years, he had been very active in the institution in Taiwan. As one of the founding fellows of the Academia Sinica, he periodically went to Taiwan to do research, teach, and participate in meetings. The Taiwan Academia was also generous to him, providing him with housing, air travel, and salary whenever he worked in Taiwan. Although he loved Beijing where he went to school, worked, and married, and the rest of China, where he spent many years doing field work in the then bandit-infested back country, the hostility between Taiwan and China made him feel uncomfortable about going to China.

In 1978 Dad received two letters directly from the People’s Republic of China. One was from his older sister Irene Yi Li, pathologist, then eighty years old. We had had no news of her since 1949. The second letter was from a former student, Professor Zhou Dafu. Zhou was also about seventy years old, a retired member of the linguistic institute of the Academy of Social Sciences. He urged my father to visit China.

These two letters from China, and perhaps his own advanced age made the trip, if it were to be undertaken at all, seem more urgent. Thus it was on August 19 that I joined my parents in Hong Kong to accompany them back to China.

By 1978, China fever was approaching its first peak, and tourism was just being accepted by the PRC as an adjunct to economic development. Getting the travel permit to enter China was, however, anything but predictable. Our application to enter China had been held up for quite a few days. In the meantime, we visited friends and shopped in sweltering Hong Kong.

After several days’ delay, our travel permits were arranged. We arrived in Beijing on the evening of August 25. We were met by two drivers and two official escorts from the China Travel Service. They were somewhat surprised by our paltry baggage — most visitors arrive with mountains of gifts for relatives. It was already quite dark and we were driven to the Minzu Fandian, Ethnic Nationalities Hotel on Changan West Road.

The next morning we were briefed by cadres of the China Travel Service that we were “guests of the nation.” The significance of this became clear only when we were about to leave China: namely, all our hotel and domestic travel bills were underwritten by the China Travel Service. Later,
the Institute of Ethnic Nationalities, as our official hosts, also paid a share.

Our official escorts said that Dad would have been received by Premier Hua Guofeng, but he was in Yugoslavia on state visit. It was just as well. Dad insisted from the beginning, that we were traveling as private individuals and desired no political protocols. The one time that a government official called on us at the hotel, Dad was so cool that I was afraid we might be thrown out of the country. Dad only asked to see his schoolmates, colleagues, students, old friends, and relatives. He only asked to visit old home sites, schools, the university, and historical landmarks.

We stayed in Beijing from August 25 to September 10. For Dad and Mom it was happy and at the same time sad to visit places that they knew so well so many years ago. Gradually, as friends and relatives were notified, they came from far and wide to see us. Apparently, it was fairly easy to ask for a leave of absence if one had relatives visiting from abroad.

On our first day in Beijing, our escorts suggested that we do some sightseeing while they searched out the whereabouts of our relatives. The first stop was the Palace Museum—that is, the Forbidden City. That was just fine with me. I left Beijing before age two, and had no recollection of this place.

As we drove along Changan Road in daylight, Mom and Dad began to notice and remark on all the changes—the walls of the inner city had disappeared; the arches (pailo) were gone; there were no chestnut vendors, or any vendor stalls on the streets.

The escort assigned to us was from Canton and not very knowledgeable about Beijing. As we walked through the tunneled gates of Tiananmen into the Palace Museum grounds, the escort, Mr. Liang began to explain the history of the Forbidden City. But it soon became obvious that Dad knew much more about the place than he did. So the escort directed his Marxist interpretation to me. Dad would interrupt his speech about the exploitation by the ruling class to tell me about some historical incident or architectural feature, or some mythology or folklore associated with a building. In no time there gathered behind us a crowd of native Chinese sightseers listening attentively to every word my parents said. We walked the entire length of the Forbidden City, through the great audience halls, through the living quarters, and came out in the royal garden at the extreme north.

After lunch and a rest, we hired a car to try to find our relatives. Since Mr. Liang was nowhere to be found, we left without him. The driver insisted that he didn't know any of the streets that Dad named, and furthermore he was only supposed to take people to government buildings and sightseeing spots. Dad directed the grumbling driver down one narrow lane after another until we found the house of Fifth Uncle Ho, Dad's cousin. They were, of course, taken completely by surprise and overjoyed. The small courtyard and the lane outside were jammed full of curious onlookers. When the initial excitement passed, Uncle Ho dispatched his sons to telegram and
telephone Aunt Irene and other relatives. Then the two septuagenarians settled down to reminisce about their school days.

From Uncle He we learned that Aunt Irene had left their house just two days ago to return to Tianjin. The small room across the courtyard where Dad and he used to do brush painting now housed the ashes of Dad's older brother and Uncle He's older sister. Once again, Dad and Mom fell silent.

After making a date to meet again later, we left the Ho family to their interrupted dinner. We drove to Sweetwater Well Street and looked in on Dad's old home. The compound comprised over 150 rooms divided into scores of courtyards. It had been built by my great grandfather a hundred years earlier. In 1978 it housed a primary school for 300 children.

We then went to North-Pond Street where my mother's house stands, also a compound of many courtyards. The gatekeeper allowed us in to look around. The carved rosewood doors Mother knew so well had been removed and lay rotting in a pile. It had become a lumber storage yard for the city.

Returning to the hotel that evening, our escort reported no success in locating our relatives. To his amazement and perhaps dismay, we had run all around town and found them ourselves. Thereafter he never let us out of sight, and whomever we sought was promptly produced.

Our twelve days in Beijing were filled with sightseeing, receiving relatives, and shopping for them as they arrived from far and wide. They generally ate with us at the hotel. While the food was not particularly good, it also was not very expensive in terms of U.S. dollars. However, eating in a hotel was a rare treat that they hadn't enjoyed for three decades. Native Chinese were not allowed to enter hotels unless they were visiting someone staying there, and the latter had to sign their admission slip.

Dad's classmates and former students, now professors and directors of this and that, also came to call. They treated us to lavish banquets with delicacies that we hadn't tasted for a long time. Among our distinguished hosts were Dr. Zhou Peiyuan, physicist and president of Beijing University; Liu Yangqiao, executive secretary of the Academy of Social Sciences; Luo Qingchang, vice secretary of the People's Congress. We were not able to escape official invitations entirely. Eventually we learned that whenever taxis suddenly became scarce and we could not leave the hotel, an invitation that we could not refuse was on the way.

During our stay in Beijing, Dad gave two lectures on Chinese linguistics (September 6 and 7). According to my mother's recollection, it was an unprecedented event. Although I am not sure of the record, this was said to be the first scholarly presentation by an academician from abroad. Moreover, it was in the Chinese language, about the Chinese language. The audience was initially limited to teachers of Chinese language and linguistics at Beijing University and the Institute of Ethnic Nationalities. But during the lecture, Ma Xueliang, director of linguistics at the Institute kept coming and going, much to Mother's annoyance. As it turned out, so many people had asked to be allowed to attend that Dad's lecture was
interrupted twice to move to larger rooms. Finally, P.A. speakers had to be set up outside for the people standing there. The second lecture was scheduled in an auditorium, on Sunday. Since I had arranged to visit the archeological site at Zhoukaotian, I was not present at these lectures.

We left Beijing on September 6 by train to go to Xian via Tachai, the peasant village celebrated as the model of self-reliance during the Cultural Revolution. By 1978, its political glamor had dimmed, but Dad's ancestral home was close by and he wanted to see it. Unfortunately, the rain had washed out the road to Tachai and we were not able to go.

We spent three days in Xian. First, we had a bird's eye view of the city atop the drum tower, then we went to the Great Goose Tower. We visited the Ci-En monastery where Tripitaka translated Buddhist scripture from Sanskrit. We visited the Forest of Monuments, Beilin, the library carved in stone. On following days, we visited the Tang tombs, the summer palace of the Tang emperor, the neolithic village site of Ban-po, and other historical monuments. The road to the terra cotta army site was washed out, so we did not get to it.

After Xian, I had to return to the States, and Dad and Mom went on to Loyang and visited the Lon Buddhist caves. They spent several days in Nanking visiting with Dad's classmate Zhang Yuzhe (1902-1986), director of the institute of astronomy there. In Nanking my parents attended a Kun opera performance, the first since before World War II. Kun opera is their favorite Chinese musical art; Mother sings and Dad used to play the flute. Dad immediately became a fan of Zhang Jiqing, the prima donna of the Jiangsu Provincial Kun Opera Troupe. From there they went to Shanghai and saw Dr. Zhu Henian, retired director of the military medical service there. Together they went to visit old haunts in Suzhou and Hangzhou.

From Hangzhou, Dad and Mom went to Canton where Dad gave another lecture at Zhongsan University. After the lecture they were again besieged by old acquaintances who wanted to visit and chat. Mother was especially touched by the two daughters of the late historian Chen Yinqing. They broke down in tears in Mother's arms: their own parents had passed away during the Cultural Revolution. It was late at night when they took their leave. Since the hotel taxis refused to take native fares even if hotel guests paid for the ride, Dad got in the car and personally saw them home.

Dad and Mom left Canton on September 23, winding up and emotion-filled homecoming. Mother's journal for September 24 reads:

...checked in again at the Yale guest house (Chinese University of Hong Kong). Had dinner in the dormitory cafeteria, the sauteed shredded bean curd was quite greasy. Bathed and slept deeply. Back in the free world of Hong Kong again.

3 October 1987
Oakland, California
RETURN TO CHINA, 1983

by Lindy Li Mark

Ever since 1978, there had been talk of a repeat visit to China for scholarly exchange. However, Dad had a heart condition and underwent bypass surgery in March of 1982. In the same month, Mother also had surgery for cancer of the colon. Miraculously, both recovered to celebrate their golden anniversary in August 1982, and had their doctors' blessing to go to Taipei for the annual meeting of the Academia Sinica in December. From Taipei they took side trips to Hong Kong to give a lecture at the Chinese University, and to Thailand. After these public appearances the news spread that F. K. Li was well and active again.

In 1983, Dad returned to China for the second and last time. What had started out as a scholarly exchange expanded into our family's quest for its roots. It came about in this way.

In the spring of that year Professor Lin Tao of Beijing University visited Berkeley and met with me informally to discuss the possibility of inviting Dad to China for a series of lectures on linguistics. He wanted to be sure that Dad and Mom were both in good health and that in case of an emergency the family would not hold the host institutions responsible. I assured them that both were in good health and that we would be responsible for their well-being. Moreover, if necessary I would accompany them. This pleased him.

A few months later, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Institute of Ethnic Nationalities issued a joint invitation. My husband, Dr. John Mark, and I immediately made plans to accompany them. My brother Peter and his wife Marjory would meet us in Beijing. Peter Li, professor of Asian languages and literature at Rutgers University, New Jersey, would be in China to establish exchange relations with Harbin University. My youngest sister Annie (Seattle, Washington) would also take vacation leave and join us en route in Tokyo. The understanding with the host institutions was that they would make arrangements for lodging and travel for the whole family, that Mom and Dad would be their guests, but that other family members would travel at their own expense.

August 14 - September 1: Beijing

We arrived in Beijing on August 14 and were greeted by members of the Academy of Social Sciences and staff from their office of external affairs. Chinese institutions all have such offices called waishi chu, whose business is to take care of visitors, fetching people from airports, arranging for hotels, travel, and so forth. The two sons of Fifth Uncle Ho came to the
airport to meet us, but we could barely exchange greetings before being whisked off by our official hosts. We were lodged at the Yanshan Guest House in the northwest section of Beijing, a few blocks from the Friendship Hotel.

After a day of rest, the staff of the office of external affairs briefed us about our stay. They planned a tight schedule of lectures and seminars for Dad, some sightseeing, and several official functions, including a luncheon the following Sunday at Fangshan, Imperial Kitchen, a restaurant styling itself after the cuisine of the Qing dynasty court. Then, we were to be sent off to our next destination, Nanning, the provincial capital of Guangxi Autonomous Region in southwestern China.

The one short week of time alloted was very disappointing, for we had planned to stay after the official exchange to go sightseeing, visit relatives, and old haunts. Dad showed his displeasure by saying nothing, not even a perfunctory thanks for their troubles. Privately he fumed: "So they think they can get rid of me whenever they want, do they?"

To save the situation I met with the staff and insisted that Dad have only one official function each day and be able to rest and relax and do whatever he wished for the rest of the day. I also issued an invitation to the staff to have buffet brunch at the Jian Guo Hotel the next Sunday. They all vociferously declined, saying that arrangements for travel had been made and could not be changed. "We'll see about that," I thought to myself, for brunch at the Jian Guo was not taken lightly by Chinese natives.

The Jian Guo Hotel is the most famous hotel in Beijing, built by our architect cousin the late Clement Chen, Jr. of Hillsborough, California. The Sunday brunch there is not unusual by international standards, but it is the only one in Beijing and a rare treat for local residents. Chinese natives were still not allowed to enter any tourist hotel unless invited by foreign guests, namely, those who can pay in foreign exchange currency. Clement Chen had told me half jokingly that if we ever had trouble with the bureaucracy, just take them to brunch at his hotel.

The next day, the staff came to call again, bringing with them their supervisor. They had some trouble finalizing their arrangements, they said. Fangshan was mistakenly booked by another party that Sunday and our official luncheon had to be delayed for a week. I pretended to be delighted, reissuing the invitation for Sunday brunch. Although the supervisor declined, the expression on all the others' faces clearly indicated eager acceptance. Finally I invited the supervisor too, and just as I was about to give up he accepted for them all. Upon leaving, they indicated that they would have to call all over the country to rearrange our itinerary. But there seemed to be no more difficulties.

Dad was not pleased with my efforts on our behalf and refused to attend the brunch. Everyone who came had a splendid time and enjoyed loitering about the lobby before and after the meal.
Dad gave two lectures at the Institute for Ethnic Nationalities and took part in a seminar (see 1987 #104 of bibliography). Since the rest of us went sightseeing, and Mother only kept brief notes of academic events, I did not know the topics of all of his lectures. From conversations with others I gathered that his talks during this trip revolved around three topics: the reconstruction of the ancient Chinese language, comparative Tai, and the Old Tibetan inscriptions. Since he was free to choose his own topics he generally matched his lectures to the audience he expected. There was some academic dispute: One day he came back grumbling that Li Rong and the latter's students did not attend his lecture on ancient Chinese. Obviously, who came to his lectures mattered very much to him.

August 20 was Dad's eighty-first birthday. Two huge cream cakes were delivered, and a stream of students and friends came to call. I was frankly annoyed that they came so early in the morning. Dad sternly explained to me that the proper protocol was for juniors to call and kowtow in the morning before the celebrant was out of bed. Something in his voice seemed to indicate that we had been lacking in respect all these years in America. Surely he was joking, I thought, but maybe not.

Mr. Liangfu Guo of the Commercial Press came and delivered $924 Renminbi (the Chinese dollar) in royalties for pirating Dad's Archaic Chinese (1971 #75, pirated 1980). Dad was clearly delighted that this slender volume, albeit illegally printed, had gone through two printings, and that 10,600 copies, priced at 67c RMB had been sold. Were there, we wondered, 500 people in the rest of the world who would read this very technical book on historical linguistics?

There were the usual, unavoidable rounds of official dinners. The most elaborate was held in one of the private dining rooms of the Great Hall of the People, and hosted by Zhou Peiyuan, president of the Academy of Sciences. Zhou Peiyuan, a physicist, was a classmate of Dad's at Qinghua College. The dinner was served around a huge table about ten feet in diameter. Although there was an eight-foot turntable in the center with twelve different appetizers, we were served individually by attendants stationed at compass points. Each entree was placed in the center to be admired before being removed, and a delicate portion delivered to each plate. There were fifteen courses.

Despite its formality, this was the most enjoyable of the official dinners, since Dr. Zhou and Dad actually had something to say to each other. Mrs. Zhou and Mother conversed about old times. The other guests were also members of the Academy whom we knew, so the conversation flowed smoothly without awkward silences.

On August 29 we were officially received at the Great Hall of the People by Xu Deheng, one of the many vice chairs of Renda Changwei Hui, the People's Congressional Advisory Committee. Xu, then ninety-three years old, had been a professor of social sciences. One of his official duties was to receive visiting VIPs. This reception was a press event with photographers and TV crew. Dad went up and shook Xu's hand, followed by mother and then
all of the rest of us, one by one. We were then seated on large sofas placed too far apart for conversation. Since both the elderly statesman and scholar wore hearing aids, it is safe to say that neither heard what the other said. The press release in the People's Daily read in part, "Vice Chairman Xu Deheng welcomed Professor Li to lecture and visit his relatives in China. He [Xu] also asked Professor Li to convey his good wishes to colleagues and classmates in Taiwan."

Later that week, I received a letter from Nova, Y. R. Chao's second daughter. She had seen us on TV in Changsha, Hunan Province. Since China had only one TV channel, we had been seen all over the country on that evening's news, right after King Hussein of Jordan, the other official VIP of the day.

The two-week sojourn in Beijing was most enjoyable. In addition to the public lectures and official receptions, Dad had many private meetings and discussions. Many of his students journeyed from far and wide to visit him; many younger scholars felt privileged just to sit at the feet of the author of Archaic Chinese, the bible of Chinese historical linguistics. Overall, Dad was pleased with the development of linguistics in China. As a neutral discipline, linguistics did not suffer too much political censorship. He did not, however, agree with the policy of developing writing systems for non-written ethnic languages. While not averse to bilingualism, he felt that there were other priorities for research and for the government.

Because Dad was on a low-salt diet, we were often invited to dine at the homes of prominent people such as professor Fu Maoji, then director of the linguistic institute. Professor Fu's wife is a member of the Bai ethnic nationality. Naturally there was an after-dinner discussion about the Bai language. The master comedian Hou Baolin -- the Bob Hope of China -- also invited us to his home for dinner and treated us to an informal performance of the dialects of China. Hou Baolin considers himself a linguist because the play on Chinese dialects is a standard set piece in xiangsheng, "crosstalk", a genre of stand-up comedy.

One day Dad invited Fifth Uncle He's whole family on a sentimental journey to Fragrant Hill. Dad was very fond of this cousin with his stubborn pride. Fifth Uncle supported four children and two elder maiden sisters on his high school teacher's salary. All the other relatives asked Dad for money or gifts, directly or indirectly, but Fifth Uncle never indicated that he was in want of anything. Dad also took the family to the Friendship store and bought gifts for everyone. Only Fifth Uncle did not want anything.

As our cavalcade of three taxis headed toward the northern suburbs, the two octogenarians pointed to the roads they had walked together and the places where they had rested or fished. They sighed when the summit loomed in sight, recalling when it had taken them an entire day to scale it. Now they couldn't even make it to the cable car station to ride the modern contraption to the top in fifteen minutes. The highlight for the Ho family was dining at the Pei-designed Fragrant Hill Hotel. This was a large
complex of modernistic buildings with oyster-white walls and grey tile roofs, actually a Hangzhou or central-China style architecture. Even though Uncle He's younger son worked at the hotel as a clerk, his family was not allowed to enter the hotel unless overseas visitors invited them. Although we would have preferred to take the cable car to the summit, Dad patiently spent the afternoon posing for photographs in every corner of the hotel. That was the last time that Dad and Uncle He saw each other.

Our final night in Beijing was spent at the Northern Kun Opera's production of Changsheng Dian, (The Palace of Eternal Life), the tragic love story of the Tang Emperor Ming Huang and his consort Yang Yuhuan. Mother and Dad knew this opera well and could sing many of its arias. Since we had to leave Beijing before the formal opening, we settled for the dress rehearsal. Actually, it was better this way. We sat almost eye to eye with the performers, and could catch every nuance of the singing and acting. The opera had been heavily revised, but it was an enjoyable performance nonetheless.

September 2 - 15: Nanning, Guilin, Chengdu

Our next destination was in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Autonomous Region, homeland of the Zhuang people, the largest ethnic nationality in southwestern China. Dad's first linguistic fieldwork on non-Han language in China was the study of the Zhuang language, done in a small market town, Longzhou (Lungchow), near the North Vietnam border (see 1940 #14).

Guangxi is linguistically complex indeed. Walking about town, I found most vendors to be bilingual: They spoke Cantonese to customers, and Guangxi Chinese, which resembles Sichuan dialect, among themselves. Since I spent many years in Sichuan I better understood the latter. There were also scores of ethnic groups all speaking different languages. Dad told us that in the old days each ethnic group wore its distinctive style of dress and headgear. Now, all wore the same olive drab Mao jackets.

We were taken to visit the new ethnological museum and treated to dinner. The next day, Dad gave a lecture at the Institute of Ethnic Nationalities. In the afternoon, John, my sister Annie, and I left for Guilin by train; Annie wanted to ride the train once before leaving China. Dad and Mother spent a leisurely day around town and flew to Guilin the next morning.

We arrived in Guilin the same day. The front gate of the Lake Rong Hotel (Hotel Lake Hibiscus) was decked out with red banners, lanterns, and honor guard — to welcome King Hussein! We entered by the back gate. The hotel was a large garden complex with several buildings, art gallery, auditorium, dining rooms, on a lake. It was originally built as the residence in exile for Prince Sihanouk.
We spent the first day on a boat going up the Li River to view the karst formations which are mirrored in the river. Our hosts went through a great deal of trouble to get reservations on the lead boat so that we could enjoy the reflections in the mirror-smooth water unrippled by the wake of other boats. But when Dad saw the double-decked sightseeing steamer, he stammered, "What? Is this any way to enjoy the scenery of the Li River?"

He had thought we were going by bamboo raft, the way he went fifty years ago. We still have a small black-and-white -- now brown -- snapshot of him perched on a typical local craft, giant bamboos delicately turned up at both ends and lashed together into a floating platform.

We had a table at the head of the boat with a fine view of the river and mountains on either side. There were many rafts on the river, some with cormorants diving from the bow, some piled high with water plants plucked from the river bottom by boys and girls diving from their bow. The water plants were for feeding pigs, we were told. We arrived at Yangshuo early in the afternoon and returned to Guilin by bus. On the way back, Annie shouted in excitement as she caught sight of a herd of water buffalo playing in the shallows of the river. Only their backs glistened above the water as they tossed and sprayed like a school of small whales. The car came to a screeching stop as she jumped out to take pictures.

Another day was spent sightseeing the various peaks and grottoes within Guilin city. Dad took command by setting the itinerary, but he rested in the entrance pavilion while we hiked up hills and down caves. Dad's favorite was the Beilin, or Forest of Stele, where the calligraphy of famous artists had been carved on the cliffs and grotto walls. We bought several sets of rubbings.

Dad took satisfaction in the fact that he could bring his children, especially his youngest American-born daughter, to the homeland that he knew so well. Indeed, I was amazed by the prodigious amount of geography and local history he knew about every place we visited. The next day, Annie flew back to Shanghai to return to America, having exhausted her vacation time. We waited for the plane which would fly us to Chengdu, Sichuan Province. The day was very hot and humid. The airport at Chengdu was fogged in, so all incoming planes were held up at their points of origin. Dad stood in front of the electric fan for the better half of the day. I thought he was going to faint. Finally, we took off for Chengdu.

We had lived in Chengdu between 1942 and 1945. Dad taught at Yanjing University and I attended a regular school for the first time in my life, beginning with the fourth grade. Our hosts were the Academy of Social Sciences of Sichuan and the Institute of Ethnic Nationalities. There were quite a few native Tibetans at this institute and they came to call at the hotel in their native costume, loose-fitting coats cinched tightly at the waist with one arm unsleeved.

When out walking and looking for our old house, I saw an announcement of epic singing that evening. I asked if tickets could be obtained. That evening we went to the performance at an old-fashioned tea house. The
audience sat at tables on creaky bamboo chairs. Cups of piping hot tea were set before us as the singers and instrumental ensemble gathered on a small platform. The waiters still carried huge copper tea kettles with arching spouts that allowed them to pour piping hot water into the tea cups from two feet away.

While in Chengdu, Dad gave a lecture on the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription of 821-22 A.D. This lecture was not about linguistics: rather, it dealt with his reinterpretation of Sino-Tibetan political relations as the result of his translations. Although these inscriptions had been previously translated by other scholars, the linguistic approach which Dad and W. South Coblin used resulted in some significant differences. The new translation was published in 1987 shortly before Dad passed away.

We spent several days visiting the streets where we had lived and could barely recognize them. Chengdu was a big city to me then, but now the streets seemed narrow and cramped. Shaanxi Street was still the same cobblestone roadway. In 1943 Dad came home from a field trip with a bear cub, given to him by native hunters. I still remember how his rickshaw came into the courtyard loaded with his baggage, his precious notes, and baby bear between his knees. Neighborhood children thronged the yard all wanting to play with it. We tethered him to a tree in our yard for several months. One morning while I fed him, he barely missed my face with a powerful swipe of his paw that shredded my book bag. We donated him to the local zoo.

Another unforgettable incident took place when we lived on Shaanxi Street. Dad and I were coming home one stormy night in a rickshaw. Lightning and thunder crashed all around as the rain drummed on the canvas tarp that covered the front of the vehicle. I cowered between Dad's knees, held my ears, and buried my face in his breast, crying all the time that I wanted to go home. Dad said calmly: "Now don't be afraid. I'll teach you a German song." That seemed like the last thing I needed, and I screamed in protest. But Dad just started to sing, over and over, one verse after another. By the time we arrived home father and daughter were lustily singing at the top of their lungs:

In einem kühl en Grund,
Da geht ein Mühlenrad,
Meine Liebste ist verschwunden,
Die dort gewohnt hat.

By 1983 the street was lined with sewing machine stands. In the newly liberalized economy, it had become the tailoring district.

From Chengdu we visited Qingcheng Mountain, one of the ten great Daoist mountain retreats. A winding foot path led to the summit through evergreen forests. The resting pavilions along the path were built of unhewn logs and roofed with thick bark. To our dismay, our guides proudly proclaimed that new pavilions are about to be built of cement and tile.
The next tourist attraction was the water channels of Dujiang Yan, built around 168 AD. This ingenious hydraulic project diverted the water as it emerged from its mountain source into a man-made channel, narrower and deeper. The increased water velocity kept the channel free of sedimentation. Water from the channels had irrigated the Chengdu plain for two thousand years, making it one of the richest regions of China.

The Dujiang Yan was spanned by a suspension bridge made of boards with only handrails and netting on either side. Visitors mounted it to view the rapids and there were the usual mischievous children jumping up and down to make the adults nervous. Dad told us that years ago the "bridge" consisted of nothing but two woven bamboo cables, one anchored three feet higher than the other. To cross, you held the upper cable under the arm as you would hang on to a ski rope tow. Then, placing one foot in front of the other, you inched along the lower cable as if walking a tightrope. One stormy day when Dad had just crossed over, a strong gust blew the cables apart and a man was caught stretched between them. He did not have the strength to pull the upper cable toward him while his feet barely touched the lower cable. After shouting for help for some time, someone crept out and tied his hands and feet to the two cables until the storm died down the next day and he was rescued.

September 16 - 25: Chongqing, Yangzi Gorges, Shanghai

From Chengdu we flew to Chongqing on September 14. There we would take a boat trip down the Yangzi River through the Three Gorges region. Chongqing is hilly, the only city where not a single bicycle is in sight. Entrances of abandoned air raid shelters dug into the hillside, now spiderwebbed, are recognizable remnants of World War II. The elegant hotel where we stayed, Renmin Binguan, The People's Hotel, was remodeled from the wartime headquarters of Chiang Kai-Shek.

We visited the Sichuan School of Fine Arts and its director, Mr. Shen Fuwen. Mr. Shen is the foremost lacquerware artist, responsible for developing this traditional craft into a contemporary fine art. He and his wife, fellow Kun opera devotees, belonged to the same music circle in Chengdu. Our visit was hurried; our boat was to leave the next day.

The Yangzi River was low at this time of year. Boats going upriver still had to be towed, harnessed to humans. The narrow towing path along the river was now paved. It used to be packed earth which became slippery when wet, letting the current sometimes drag teams of men into the river. On the morning of September 16, we walked down two hundred steps to the water's edge, then over a stretch of pontoon gangplank to get to the steamer. Lisa Lu, the Chinese-American film actress was among our shipmates.

The boat trip took two days. The first day's journey brought us through the upper Yangzi valley. At daybreak we left Baidi, a town at the
entrance to the gorge section made famous by the Tang dynasty poet Li Po (or
Li Bai). The river makes thirty-three hairpin turns through mountains that
rise steeply on either side. At every turn the scene changes. Bamboo rods
sticking out of the water marked underwater rocks and sandbars. Smaller
crafts simply shot over the rapids — and looked like a lot more fun than
traveling by steamer!

Dad had never traveled this route before and wanted to see the famous
gorges before a proposed dam project changed the landscape. The steep
hillsides bore many scars of slash-and-burn cultivation, but the lower banks
were lush with rice paddies and groves of giant bamboo. Every mountain peak
has a legend or a historical event linked with it. One section is known as
the cliff of thirteen stallions. If the viewer can identify all of the
stallions, formed by shadows and rock coloration, he or she is said to be
very lucky. Usually, however, the boat shoots by too fast to count them.
Most people pose their cameras before entering this section and then try to
identify the horses when they get home.

Just before arriving at Wuhan, the river broadens and the skies darken
with the industrial pollutants of Hankou, Hanyang, and Wuhan. This tri-city
area was the farthest point of the Yangzi River navigable by ocean steamer.
It became south China's center for heavy industry before water
transportation was superseded by railroads.

Our host institution in Wuhan was the South Central Polytechnic
Institute. In emulation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology it had
a newly established curriculum in the humanities. One of its directors, Yan
Xuequn, wanted to establish a linguistics program, and was among those
instrumental in arranging Dad's visit. Dad gave two lectures on historical
linguistics. I was asked to report on anthropology.

Lisa Lu invited us to a special performance of Han opera by a famous
local actress, Chen Bohua. Since our schedule was so full, she had to make
several attempts before we got her messages. Dad was very appreciative of
the trouble she took to share this special event with us.

John and I now left Wuhan for America, so I have no firsthand
information about the rest of Dad and Mother's stay in China. According to
Mother's journal, they flew to Shanghai on September 25 where Dad gave a
lecture at Fudan University. They again met their old friend, Dr. Zhu
Henian, retired director of the military hospital in Shanghai, and his wife.
Together they went to Hangzhou and spent a day on West Lake. In Shanghai,
they also met the grand master of Kun opera, Yu Zhenfei, who had them sing
together with his students, and went to the opera.

From Shanghai they went to Nanjing (Nanking) where they were reunited
with Professor Zhang Yuzhe, the late director of the Institute of Astronomy
of the Academy of Sciences, and his wife. Both Dr. Zhu and Professor Zhang,
like Fifth Uncle Ho, were Dad's buddies from college days. When Dad was
with them, they joked and laughed like college kids. In their chosen
professions they spliced the spirit of Chinese traditional learning onto
Western science and humanities. Now in their eighties, very few could completely relax in their presence.

Dad and Mother returned to Beijing on November 6 where they spent a month as guests of Beijing University. During that month, they explored every corner of the Beijing they had known. They saw many friends who were bypassed earlier. Mother's journal was full of names of persons and place-names. Dad never kept a journal, but from their remarks to each other, it is quite clear that for Dad as well as for Mother this month was the real homecoming.

Afterword

Although this was their last trip to China, Mom and Dad traveled frequently to Taiwan where Dad lectured at the Academia Sinica. In August 1985 they went to Bangkok as guests of the Chulalongkorn University and were received by Thailand's Princess Kalayani Watana. My father was proud of the special plaque of honor presented to him by the university for his work on Comparative Tai.

We hoped that this oral history could have been completed by August 20, 1987, in time for Dad's eighty-fifth birthday celebration. But a stroke on July 7 left him disphasic, and no further interviews were possible. His oral history cannot be complete without an account of these return trips to China, trips which brought a life devoted to Chinese linguistics and linguistics in China full circle. Unfortunately, what is written here does not reflect his thoughts about these events, only my perceptions. Dad meticulously saved all his field notes, now yellow and brittle with age, but he never wrote down what he did, how he felt, or what were his personal thoughts. Although he may have appeared to be unfeeling or unexpressive, he had a most tolerant and forgiving nature. For example, sometime after his death, Mrs. Chung-ho Frankel, the artist-calligrapher, wrote to me, quoting a passage from his letter from forty-three years ago: "Regret that I cannot do the painting for you on that paper. My daughter found it in my desk and cut it up for her art project...only a small strip left." Not until 1987 did I realize that I had cut up a collector's piece of antique art paper.

Aside from his scholarship, Dad was a man of many talents, although very few people knew how many. Kun opera friends knew him as an accomplished flutist, interpretive singer, and teacher; artist friends knew him as a talented watercolor painter in both the Western and classical Chinese styles. When I first began to learn the game of kicking the shuttle cock (a feathered Chinese version of hackeysack), he turned out to be the best teacher for my gang and delighted in demonstrating many fancy maneuvers. With adult friends, he was not above enjoying eight rounds of mahjong or a couple rubbers of bridge, roundly beating tournament players.

As his daughter, I came to take his scholarly stature and many talents for granted. To me, he will always be remembered as a most patient, tolerant father. His comforting presence will ever ride out life's stormy moments with me, singing German folk songs.

22 September 1988
Taipei, Taiwan
缅怀李方桂先生

本刊记者

当代国际著名语言学家、在中国语言学发展史上做出巨大贡献的李方桂先生于1987年8月21日凌晨1时45分在美国加利福尼亚州奥克兰因病医治无效，不幸与世长辞，享年85岁。

民族语文杂志社、中国语文杂志社、语文建设杂志社、中央民族学院学报1987年9月5日在北京中国社会科学院民族研究所学术报告厅联合召开悼念李方桂先生座谈会。学术报告厅正面墙壁上悬挂方桂先生遗像，巨幅横标写着“悼念李方桂教授座谈会”，会场庄严肃穆。座谈会伊始，全体起立向方桂先生遗像默哀三分钟，缅怀他在语言学方面不可磨灭的成就和培养人才的功绩。中国民族语言学会会长、《民族语文》主编傅懋𪟝教授主持座谈会并致悼词。国家语委副主任王均教授介绍李方桂先生的生平。中国社会科学院文学研究所所长陈家麟教授介绍方桂先生生前经过及在美国举行悼念活动的情况。在会上发言的还有王静如、马学良、周有光、司公scoped林奈、吴宗济、陆俭明、喻世长等。大家都为大家失去这位誉满海内外、诲人不倦的一代语言学大师而深感悲痛。

方桂先生与赵元任先生、罗常培先生一起创建了我国现代语言学，是中国语言学科的三大奠基人之一。方桂先生又是以现代语言学理论和方法研究中国少数民族语言的拓荒者。他在古藏语、中国音韵学和侗台语历史比较语言学、美洲印第安语方面，进行慎重的研究，卓有创见，取得了举世闻名的成就。

方桂先生原籍山西省昔阳县，1902年8月20日生于广州。1919年毕业于北京师范大学附中，1924年毕业于清华大学中文系。同年考取公费赴美国学习，入密歇根大学预科。由于教授拉丁文、德文、法文，在英语语言学老师摩尔的影响下，他对语言学产生了浓厚的兴趣，插人大学三改读语言学。他的导师是著名语言学家萨丕尔和布龙菲尔德。1926年至1928年，他在三年之中连得三个学位：1926年获密歇根大学文学硕士学位，1927年获芝加哥大学硕士学位，1928年获芝加哥大学语言学博士学位。1929年回国任中央研究院历史语言研究所研究员。1937年赴美，任耶鲁大学访问教授。1939年回国，仍在中央研究院任职。1943年任成都燕京大学访问教授。1946年赴美，任哈佛大学访问教授。1948年转任耶鲁大学访问教授，同年当选为中央研究院院士。1949年任西雅图华盛顿大学访问教授，1950年任教授，并当选为美国语言学会副会长。从1952年起，一直被聘任为美国语言学会国际杂志的副主编。1969年退役

民族语文 1987年第5期
休，任荣誉教授。后转任夏威夷大学教授。1972年第二次退休后，普林斯顿大学和夏威夷大学又聘他为荣誉教授。1972年他的母校密歇根大学授予他荣誉文学博士。1976年香港中文大学授予荣誉法学博士。1985年泰国朱拉隆功大学为表彰他在台语历史比较语言学方面的杰出贡献，献给他荣誉银盾。

李方桂教授热爱祖国，关心国内语言学科的发展，1978年和1983年两度来华，曾任中国社会科学院语言研究所、语言研究所、中央民族学院，北京大学和山西、广西、云南、四川、湖北、江苏、上海等省、市、自治区访问讲学，受到热烈欢迎。

方桂先生的学术成就可以用大体上四个字来概括。他在语言学的研究上视野广阔，其硕士、博士论文都是研究美国印第安语的，李方桂的印第安语著作，至今在美国仍然是最重要的参考书。从1929年之后的八年间，他从事汉语音韵学、汉语方言学、台语和古藏语的研究。1932年，同赵元任、罗常培合作翻译瑞典高本汉的《中国音韵学研究》一书。1933年去泰国进行泰语的研究。其后调查研究了广西壮语和贵州的侗水语支多种语言，研究工作的领域十分广。他研究工作的另一侧面是精，有深度。先生著述宏富，洋洋数百万言，据不完全的统计，共出版了8部专著和80多篇论文。在台语研究方面方桂先生是举世公认的权威，在汉语音韵学、印第安语和古藏语研究方面，他的著作都是第一流的。

方桂先生十分重视对语言学人才的启迪和培育，在六十年的科研和执教中，勤勤恳恳、循循善诱，他不但对学生教学识，而且还教怎样做一个好学者，他要求学生要多学几种语言，搞语言研究工作。研究面要广，只研究一种语言，今研究一组有关的语言，可以看出更多的演变过程上的真一层的线索。在资料的使用上，要求严格。他严于律己，不怕生活艰苦，曾数次带领学生去实地调查，掌握第一手资料。对学生提出的疑难问题，他总是一一剖析，直到弄通为止，不愧为一代宗师。著名语言学家谭同和、张琨、周法高、傅懋勤、马学良、邢公畹、高华年、丁邦新、李壬癸、严楠等都曾受教于李先生，国外很多著名学者，特别是泰语学者，多出自他的门下。李先生虽然长期在美国任教，并已入美籍，但是对故土的眷恋之情溢于言表，以赏心的形式每年在家中举行一次聚会，联系和团结我国部分访美学者和文学艺术家。

参加悼念座谈会的还有胡适、刘公、宋庆、侯精一、李行健、陈士林、道布、欧阳觉亚、徐琳、梁敏、何汝芬、毛宗武、戴庆厦、王伯熙、罗安柱、李耀宗、费锦昌、格桑居冠、倪大白、周耀文、罗承芬、罗美珍、但国干、史有为、张均如、张春德、王天习、杨权、曹翠云、陈庆、李乐毅等四十余位语言学家。他们无不认为方言先生学术上的业绩既是世界的，也是中国的。星陨光犹在，花落香更浓。特别是方桂先生开创了中国少数民族语言研究的某些领域，值得永远纪念。
Memory of Professor Li Fang-Kuei
by Wu Xiaoling
From Zhongguo Ywen, 1988.1

슨桂仰天高，转蓬行地远
——悼念李方桂先生

吴晓玲

今年，我应美国加州大学柏克莱分校的邀请，参加该校历史系和东亚语言学系联合召开的“目连戏曲与中国民俗”的国际学术会议，同行应邀的还有北方昆曲剧院的洪雪飞和韩建京。

我们于 8 月 5 日启程，当天抵达柏克莱市，出乎我们意料之外的是，听到的第一个信息竟是李方桂先生由于脑血栓病危的噩耗。他是李先生的私淑弟子。洪雪飞和韩建成则敬仰李先生的戏曲声韵学的造诣，也鉴于李先生在 1983 年返国讲学期间曾经接连两天去看他们排练《长生殿》，所以带他出席首演的礼仪，想当面亲聆李先生的教益。不想医院不单谢绝探视，并且连送天然花也不允许放进病房。这个情况增加了我们的焦虑心境，只有默祷天人共佑，李先生早日康复，我们能够向他致哀。

想不到的是，李先生刚刚度过他的八十五岁诞辰，便于 21 日凌晨逝世。我们只能在 24 日的追悼会上瞻仰他的遗容了。

我最难过的是，去年 10 月我在柏克莱分校东亚语言学系客座一年期满返国的前夕曾与李先生约好，他今年 9 月间到他阔别七十余年的家乡——山西省朔县李家沟去圆成他的思亲故土之梦。为此，我在第三次燕京过海之前还特意告诉了山西省里和朋友们，请他们做一些必要的准备和安排。30 日，我到奥克兰市李先生的湖滨寓所向徐断师母辞行，她拿着朔县李县的邀请函相送，深感忧虑。我回到北京以后，又收到徐断同志的信，详述了省里拟定的接待计划；然而，一切都结束了。李先生泉下有知，也只能令威移鹤，魂驰太行，俯瞰旧居无恙，河山更新，当会感慨万千。

我是在三十年代的昆明见到李方桂的，作为我国语言学界的大家，那时他辞去美国大学教授职，毅然返国任中央研究院历史语言研究所研究员，从事云南各民族的语源与研究工作。语言学研究所在昆明东南郊龙场镇的响应寺里，我住在宝台山上的北京大学文科研究所里典守西南联合大学中国语言文学系为避免日机轰炸而隐蔽的善本图书，得以朝夕承教。四十年代，李方桂代表我国参加印度在古城婆罗摩学之的第九届国际东方学会议，他那时正在诗人泰戈尔创建的国际大学中国学院任教，也参加了会议，李先生一见面便对我诵读了《摩诃婆罗多》史诗里《那罗传》的名句，使我惊诧他的梵文造诣。会后，我去巡礼佛教圣迹八水圣塔；李先生到国际大学小住，都由我的恋人石真同作伴参观。1982 年 2 月末我第一次访美在夏威夷听到赵元任先生去世的消息，不由得不想到李先生的踪迹，欣悉李先生正在当地卜居，我甫序行书，便登门问候，恰值晚间有燕京大学校友会聚会，李先生于抗战期间曾客座成都该校，我也在 1933 年到 1935 年在北平该校读过两年，李先生带我去参加，会见许多学友。滞留檀香山约两周，几乎无日不于李先生奉风之中。我送给李先生一幅和同为林兄写“寿”字条幅祝他长年，他很喜欢。他在 1983 年重访北京时，点名要见宝林，还品尝了一次“千家菜”。1985 年 10 月至 1986 年 9 月，我第二次到美国任加州大学柏克莱分校的亨利·卢斯讲座时，李先生已

唐·杜甫《八月十五夜月》第二首
北京四家语文刊物召开座谈会悼念李方桂教授

1987年9月5日，民族语文杂志社、中国语文杂志社、语文建设杂志社和中央民族学院报编辑部在京联合召开座谈会，悼念悼念国际著名美籍华裔语言学家李方桂教授。李方桂教授是1987年8月21日在美国加利福尼亚州奥克兰市去世的，终年85岁。

座谈会由中国民族语言学会会长、《民族语文》主编傅懋𪟝教授主持，国家语委副主任王均教授介绍了李方桂先生的生平，吴晓玲教授介绍了美国悼念李方桂先生的情况，马学良、邢公畹、周有光、吴宗济、陆俭明等教授先后发言回忆李方桂先生。参加座谈会的还有王静如、林焘、陈士林、喻世长、照那斯图、刘坚、胡崇、侯精一、孙竹等四十余人。

李方桂先生原籍山西省昔阳县，1902年8月20日生于广州。1915年进北京师范大学附中学习，1919年进清华学校预科。1924年赴美留学。1926年获密歇根大学学士学位，1927年获芝加哥大学硕士学位，1928年获芝加哥大学语言学博士学位。在美国大学，他攻读语言学得到了美国著名语言学家萨丕尔、布龙菲尔德和伯克的指导，使他们那里获取了普通语言学的洞察力，严格的比较语言学的方法和印欧语言学的知识。1928年，李先生去哈佛大学做了半年研究工作，1929年回国，任中央研究院历史语言研究所研究员。在此后的八年间，李先生从事汉语语音学、汉语音韵学、侗台语、壮语及蒙古语的研究，并和赵元任、罗常培合作翻译改编了瑞典高本汉的《中国音韵学研究》。1937年作为耶鲁大学访问教授赴美两年，回国后仍在中央研究院任职，对一些少数民族语言进行了调查研究。1943年，李方桂在成都任燕京大学访问教授，1946年再次赴美，先后任哈佛大学和耶鲁大学访问教授，同时当选为中国科学院院士。1949年至1950年，李方桂在康奈尔大学做访问教授转为正式教授，并当选为美国语言学会副会长。1952年以后，他一直在美国语言学国际杂志《JIAL》任主编。1969年退休，任荣誉教授，后任复旦大学教授，1972年再次退休，被美国一些大学聘为荣誉教授。

李方桂先生身居美国，但他热爱祖国，曾于1978年和1983年两次回国访问，作了精采的学术演讲。座谈会上，傅懋𪟝先生用“体大思精”四个字总结了李先生的学术成就。大家一致认为，李方桂教授是中国语言学的奠基人之一，是我国少数民族语言研究的开拓者。他在台语研究方面是公认的权威，在美洲印第安语、蒙古语、中国音韵学等方面的研究成果也是卓有成效的。他一生中写了九本专著和八十多篇论文，为世界语言学作出了卓越的贡献。他的逝世，是我国语言学和世界语言学的重大损失。 (本刊记者)
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In Memoriam
Hsu Ying Li (1910-1993).

Our Mother left us quickly and suddenly on the morning of April 28, 1993 in a car accident in Oakland, California. This tragedy took us completely by surprise. We were, and still are, in shock and disbelief. Three days before, she had just attended the wedding of her nephew in Los Angeles, going and returning there by car, driving with Lindy. On Tuesday, she drove from Oakland to Hayward and back, sang Chinese opera and played mahjong with friends. On Wednesday morning, the 28th, she was in high spirits as she drove to pick up a friend, stopped by Oakland Chinatown for some baozi, and then it happened. The accident occurred at 9:40 a.m. and Mother never regained consciousness.

Life is not planned but not completely undetermined. Mother always knew how she wanted to leave this world, quick and sudden, no lingering, no suffering. She often said that "drop dead" was not a curse but a blessing. Our Mother was always loving and caring, unsparing in her concern to those around her. She radiated good cheer, comfort and warmth wherever she went. Mother never wanted people to worry about her.

Mom, we'll always remember you as being active, in good spirits, and on the go. We'll always remember you as if you've just gone on an errand and "will be right back."

We wish we could thank all of you individually, you who have telephoned, sent messages, flowers, gifts, even travelled from as far as Taipei, Hawaii, Denver, Columbus Ohio, N. Dakota just to bid her final farewell on May 2, 1993. Let us all remember the good times we shared with her.

Lindy Li Mark, Peter Li, Annie D Li
six grandchildren, one great granddaughter

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF A VERY FULL LIFE

Hsu Ying was born in Tokyo, Japan, where her father General Hsu Shuzheng was studying military science. She was born on March 24 when cherry blossoms were in bloom. Therefore, she was given the name Ying , "cherry." Hsu Ying lived half her life in China and half in America; half within the Chinese tradition and half in the modern Western tradition. And she absorbed the best in both cultures. She always knew the appropriate thing to do on any occasion anywhere in the world. Her poise and ingenious confidence made everyone around her feel at home.

There were many milestones in Hsu Ying's life. Only a few will be mentioned here. 1) In 1932 she married Fang-Kuei Li, a young man just returned from the United States with a PhD in linguistics from the University of Chicago. Coming from a conservative Chinese family, to marry an impecunious scholar trained in an obscure field was a bold step indeed. She never regretted it.

2) In 1949 Hsu Ying and Fang-Kuei made the decision not to return to China after Dad's teaching appointments at Harvard and Yale expired. The family suffered through the war with Japan and the civil war. When mainland China fell to the Communists, Hsu Ying decided that this was not the time to go back. Foremost on
her mind was the education and future of the children, Lindy, Peter, and baby Annie. Fortunately Fang-Kuei accepted an appointment at the University of Washington in Seattle. This was a happy decision as she played hostess to some of the most distinguished names in linguistics and anthropology. Single-handedly, she served Chinese dinners to thirty or forty guests with seeming ease. In 1954, she had what was probably the first TV cooking show in Seattle.

3) In 1967 Mother completed her first book, His Favorite, a cookbook of home recipes complete with guidelines on how to host a home cooked Chinese dinner in America. In 1975 she completed her second book, in Chinese, Sorrows of a Blade of Grass, in which she painstakingly recorded the lives of her mother, father and brother. In 1983 Mother's third book Golden Anniversary was published. This book chronicled her fifty years' as mate and mother of a family in war and peace, in China and America, and globe trotting with her by now world renowned linguist husband. Hsu Ying and Fang-Kuei Li celebrated their golden anniversary in 1982 in Honolulu.

In 1993, Hsu Ying worked hard to complete her late husband's biography and family history. It has been accepted for publication by the Commercial Press in Beijing.

4) In August of 1991, Hsu Ying Li fulfilled her last filial duty: restoring and dedicating the mausoleum of her father General Hsu Shuzheng. General Hsu had many political enemies and was assassinated in 1925. He had been maligned by historians and politicians ever since, but Hsu Ying's faith in her father's political visions never wavered. Only of late has his role in early republican China been recognized and his name vindicated. She spent several years negotiating with the government of the PRC, not to mention the monies spent and several arduous trips taken to China. Finally on August 30, 1991, Hsu Ying Li led her children and grandchildren to Liquan village on the outskirts of Xuzhou. There amidst blazing fire crackers and billowing incense, she knelt in filial supplication. Today a ring of saplings and a pair of life-size granite stallions guard her father's resting place.

5) In September of 1992, Hsu Ying Li chauffeured a Chinese woman, who did not have a driver's license, to a movie audition. The casting director took one look at the pair and asked Hsu Ying to read for a part instead. She, while looking over the script of the Joy Luck Club, which had been translated into Chinese from the English, suggested some revisions of the lines. The upshot was that she was cast as one of two match makers in the film. Although it was a small role, her knowledge of old Chinese wedding customs made her the cultural consultant on the set. As could be expected the entire film crew was much taken by this 83 year old ingenue.

Having completed her last project, Hsu Ying fulfilled all of her worldly obligations. She was taken from us abruptly without suffering, without dread or tearful goodbyes.

A long time friend, the late Chiang Fu-Tsung wrote in the preface to her book Golden Anniversary:

....from the traditional perspective,....[Hsu Ying] has fulfilled all her obligations of being a filial daughter, dutiful wife and mother; from the 20th century perspective, she has modernized all the traditional virtues to fit our present times.
Ning-Ping Chan

Born in Ningbo, China, she was raised in Hong Kong where she went to New Asia College. With a B.A. in Philosophy/History from Chinese University of Hong Kong, an M.A. in Oriental Languages and a Ph.D. in Linguistics from U.C. Berkeley, she worked as Professor Yuen-Ren Chao's Research Assistant from 1972-1982 at U.C. Berkeley and has taught variously at University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Contra Costa College, and U.C. Berkeley. She is currently a full-time feature film producer for a northern California-based production corporation. In between movies, she intends to continue linguistic field work in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia as she has been doing since June 1985.
Randy J. LaPolla

Born and raised on Long Island, N. Y., he also attended the State University of N.Y. at Stony Brook, where he received a B.A. in Asian Studies and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics. He spent three years in China, first teaching in Hunan and Shanghai, then doing two years of research in Sino-Tibetan Linguistics at Beijing University. Since 1983 he has been a graduate student in the Dept. of Linguistics of U.C. Berkeley, where he picked up a second M.A., in Theoretical Linguistics, and is now working on his PhD. While at UCB, he has also taught Chinese (in the Dept. of Oriental Languages) and Linguistics, and is currently a Research Assistant on the Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus Project headed by James A. Matisoff. Aside from strict Sino-Tibetan Linguistics (which would not necessarily include the Tai languages), he has also worked extensively with many of the Tai languages, especially those studied by Prof. Fang-kuei Li.
Malca Chall

Graduated from Reed College in 1942 with a B.A. degree, and from the State University of Iowa in 1943 with an M.A. degree in Political Science.


Active in community affairs as a director and past president of the League of Women Voters of the Hayward Area specializing in state and local government; on county-wide committees in the field of mental health; on election campaign committees for school tax and bond measures, and candidates for school board and state legislature.

Employed in 1967 by the Regional Oral History Office interviewing in fields of agriculture and water resources. Project director, Suffragists Project, California Women Political Leaders Project, and Land-Use Planning Project, and the Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program Project.