

*In Memoriam***Li Shaoming, 1933–2009**

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Professor Li Shaoming, researcher at the Sichuan Institute for Nationalities Research, specially appointed advisor and expert to the State Council, and Sichuan's most honoured and revered ethnologist, died on 20 August 2009 in Chengdu. Professor Li's experience of the full, tortuous course of development of ethnological and anthropological research in the PRC can serve as a microcosm of the uneven history of Chinese ethnology since 1949.

Li Shaoming was born in 1933 to a family of the Tujia ethnic group from Xiushan county in today's Chongqing Municipality. His early family experience – his father was a military commander and civil administrator in the minority areas of what is now Western Sichuan at the end of the Qing and beginning of the Republic – was formative for him as he became a member of the first cohort of ethnological students and researchers trained in the New China. In 1950, immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic, Li entered the Anthropology Division of the Sociology Department of missionary-run West China University, where he was educated in the Anglo-American tradition of anthropology. In the educational reforms of 1952, his department was absorbed into the History Department of Sichuan University, where he was trained in traditional Chinese historical methods, something ordinarily not available to anthropology students. He was then transferred to the Ethnic Questions Class at the newly established Southwest Nationalities Institute, where he studied Marxist theory and Soviet-school ethnology. These three scholarly inheritances – Western anthropology, Soviet-derived Marxist ethnology and traditional Chinese historiography – shaped Professor Li's intellectual outlook and output during his whole scholarly career. Another formative influence was practical. While he was a student, he participated in ethnological field research in minority areas in Sichuan. After completing his studies in 1954, he was sent to work in minority areas, and in 1956 he joined the massive national project of social and historical investigations, and participated in the democratic reforms that revolutionized the social and economic systems of Southwest China minority peoples. He was 23 years old at the time. His notes from that period in a clear and fluid hand are still preserved in the archives of the Sichuan Nationalities Research Institute where he spent his later career.

Li Shaoming's career was severely disturbed by the Cultural Revolution, like so many Chinese intellectuals. It was not really interrupted, however, because even during those turbulent times Li found occasional opportunities for productive work. At the beginning in 1966 he was a target because of his "bad class background," and joined the Rebel Faction, though he was not a particular

activist. In 1968, with other employees of the Sichuan Nationalities Affairs Commission, he was sent to a 7 May cadre school in Miyi county, a mountainous area in the far south of Sichuan, where he managed to do informal fieldwork in Yi and Dai communities and to research the history of the Salian *tusi* local ruler. Later on, because of his background and his participation in the Rebel Faction, he was formally investigated, but was cleared of any charges. During the final years of the Cultural Revolution, he worked for the Nationalities Department of the Revolutionary Committee and then for the Nationalities Commission again, primarily in the area of marketing ethnic commodities. During this period, his mission to purchase native goods resulted in his first visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region, a visit that he later joked was “using public funds for private benefit,” namely an opportunity for short-term fieldwork.

As soon as China embarked upon reform and opening in the late 1970s, Li turned his attention to what he saw as the primary deficiency of Chinese ethnology: its lack of a systematic basis and the paucity of available ethnographic data. He used his base at the Sichuan Nationalities Research Institute to build a new Chinese ethnology on sound theoretical and ethnographic foundations, a project that involved his own scholarship, scholarly institution building, and practical application of his scholarly knowledge.

*Selected Essays of Li Shaoming on Ethnology* and *Ethnology* are the two works that best represent Li's ethnological project. About half of the over 150 *Selected Essays* concern the Southwest, reflecting the demand during the time they were written to contribute to the grand project of ethnic identification. Through thorough investigation and verification, Professor Li sorted out the historical relations of Southwestern ethnic groups from pre-Qin times to the present, weaving the historiography of such diverse groups as the Qiang, Di, Ba, Shu, Ran, Rong, Qiong, Ze, Bo, Pu, Yi, Sou, the two Cuan, and Moxie into a single narrative that has become the standard model for ethnologists and ethnohistorians of the Southwest. This work combined the theory and methodology of Marxism and the Soviet School of Ethnology with the methods of traditional Chinese historiography to formulate a template for research. For example, his articles in *Selected Essays* on the history of the “Slave Society” of the Yi (Nuosu) of Liangshan, along with his later edited volume on *The Slave Society of the Yi of Liangshan*, managed to settle long-running and contentious disputes about the nature of that society, and served as a partial basis for the democratic reforms undertaken by the state in the Liangshan area.

*Ethnology* is representative of the effort, led by Li, to establish and apply a system of Chinese Marxist ethnology. The pressures of both time and politics when undertaking large-scale, nationwide ethnological research meant that earlier ethnologists had little opportunity to establish, as Professor Li said, a “Chinese School of Ethnology,” and relied instead on the application of Western or Soviet models. Professor Li was probably the first Chinese ethnologist to recognize this deficiency, and set out to remedy it. *Ethnology* proposed an integrated system including objects of research, basic concepts, theoretical system, basic

methods, and applications, divided into “theoretical ethnology,” “descriptive ethnology” and “applied ethnology.” This system combined concepts taken from Soviet ethnology, such as the definition of ethnic groups, and delineation of economic and cultural spheres, with those from Western ethnological and anthropological schools including functionalism, structuralism and neo-evolutionism. It also borrowed elements from an older generation of Chinese ethnologists, including the emphasis on historical sources, and lessons learned from the large-scale ethnological projects undertaken at the beginning of the PRC. Under the intellectual conditions of the early reform and opening period, when scholars were attempting to de-politicize scholarship while retaining the still-prescribed Marxist framework, this work had enormous influence, and became a basic text in many university courses.

In addition to these seminal, field-building works, Professor Li’s rich trove of scholarly publications included over 200 articles in national, international and provincial journals. In addition to the foundational works described above, his single-authored books include, *The History of the Qiang; The Tujia of Xishui in Eastern Sichuan; Collected Essays on the Ethnohistory of Ba and Shu*; and *The Historical Ethnic Cultures of the Tibetan-Yi Corridor*. Important edited volumes include *Cultural Ethnoarchaeology of Ba and Shu; Sanxingdui and Ba-Shu Culture; Collected Essays on Primitive Religion of China’s Nationalities—Tujia Volume; Research on Perfecting the Regional Autonomy Laws for Minority Areas*; and *The History of the Tujia*. He received 11 prizes for his work from the Sichuan Provincial Government.

Since the early 20th century, ethnology and anthropology in China have been explicitly applied sciences, serving various projects of state- and nation-building. Professor Li’s work was no exception; he placed great emphasis on applied ethnology. The series of applied ethnological research projects that he headed, particularly in Tibetan and Yi areas, have become important examples for the practical service that ethnology can perform. After the earthquake of 12 May 2008, Li, ignoring his own illness, travelled to many places to work on the preservation of Qiang culture and the reconstruction of Qiang architecture. The efforts that he headed in writing “A Basic Plan for the Qiang Ecological Preservation Experimental District” and “A Basic Plan for the Rescue Preservation and Reconstruction of Intangible Cultural Heritage after the Sichuan Earthquake” have already become fundamental principles for post-disaster cultural preservation.

Professor Li was also a consummate leader in national scholarly organization and in evaluation of proposed projects. He was a founder, president and vice-president of many national and regional study associations, including the Chinese Ethnological Association, the Chinese Ethnohistorical Association, the Chinese Historical Association, and the Southwest China Association for Ethnological Research. He was also an active participant in international exchange, and visited universities and scholarly organizations in the USA, Russia, Norway, Kazakhstan, throughout East and Southeast Asia, Taiwan,

Hong Kong and Macau, cultivating a large number of academic friends in all these areas. He also undertook painstaking work bringing together scholars from ethnology, anthropology, sociology, history and other fields, and thus gained a reputation as a tireless academic activist. He was elected a member of the Nationalities Commission of the sixth Sichuan People's Congress, and a member of the Standing Committee of the eighth People's Congress.

In addition to his activities in research and scholarly organization, Professor Li was an adjunct professor at Sichuan University, Southwest University for Nationalities, Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, and Yunnan University, where he trained a large number of students, who have gone on to influential careers, most notably Shi Shuo of Sichuan University and Duan Yu of the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences. Li was respected as a person by all who knew him. He consistently set high standards for himself, treated others generously, had a pleasant demeanour and was conscientious in all he undertook. In sum, he was praised as an example for others because he handled affairs broad-mindedly generously, thoroughly and ethically.

Like all scholars who lived through the PRC's tumultuous first 60 years, Li Shaoming encountered many obstacles in his life and work, but he never lost his commitment to ethnology. And there is no better example of how the man and the times shaped each other. Professor Li was constrained by constant political shifts, by factional and institutional disputes, and by lack of resources to carry out his work. Had he lived at a different time, he might have pursued other directions, used other theories, collaborated with different people. Despite his consistent optimism about the future of Chinese ethnology, he always warned colleagues and students that the way forward was long and the burdens would be heavy. But his strength of intellect and character ultimately prevailed. Even if theoretical fashions change, as they already have and will continue to do, the empirical contributions of his scholarship and the strong institutions he helped create will endure. As his colleagues and students, we believe that carrying on his unfinished ethnological work is the greatest and most appropriate tribute we can pay to Li Shaoming.