

Chinese Rotary History Researcher Liu Jingheng

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T. C. Lai, JP (1921-2022) was a translator, scholar, calligrapher, and painter. He was the 14th President of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Island West (1967-1968). On March 11, 1970, he was appointed a non-official Justice of the Peace by the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir David Clive Crosbie Trench.

T. C. Lai was born in 1921 into a family of scholars in Hong Kong. His father was Lai Jixi, a late Qing Dynasty Hanlin scholar and Grand Historian. He served as the Chief Editor of the Imperial History Bureau of the Hanlin Academy of the Qing Dynasty. After the 1911 Revolution, the Qing emperor abdicated, and some of the remaining Hanlin scholars, including Lai Jixi and Au Dadian, fled to Hong Kong. In 1927, they participated in the founding of the School of Chinese Studies at the University of Hong Kong, with Lai Jixi and Au Dadian appointed to teach history and classics. Lai Jixi, known as "Lai Taishi," along with patriots, advocated for the preservation and promotion of traditional Chinese culture, collecting books and lecturing. In 1920, they rented 27 Caine Road in Mid-Levels, Central, Hong Kong Island, to hold lectures on Chinese studies twice a week. In 1923, seeing the enthusiastic enrollment, Lai Taishi proposed establishing the "Xuehai Book House." With generous donations from prominent business leaders, he purchased 20 Bonham Road for his library and lectures. In 1963, due to the demolition and reconstruction of the Hsueh-Hai Library's Panham Road site, the library deposited its entire collection with the City Hall Public Library in Central. By 2001, the collection of over 30,000 books had been relocated to the Hong Kong Central Library, where it remains available for public reading, thus continuing the legacy of Chinese studies in Hong Kong for a century.

Lai Tien-chang, who received family education from a young age, possessed a solid foundation in Chinese studies. He graduated from the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong in 1942, excelling in both Chinese and English. The following year, he was admitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Chongqing Nationalist Government. From 1944 to 1948, he was stationed at the Embassy of the Republic of China in London, UK, where he worked on Chinese cultural affairs.

He returned to Hong Kong in 1949 and taught at St. Paul's College and the Department of English at the University of Hong Kong. In 1963, he went to the University of Manchester, UK, to study adult education. After completing his studies, he became the first Director of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1965, a position he held until his retirement in 1984. CUHK's diverse extra-mural program attracted tens of thousands of adults.

It was both fate and coincidence that Lai Tai-shi helped to establish the Faculty of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong, and that his son would lead the Department of Extra-Mural Studies. Lai Tien-chang managed the Xuehai Bookstore, founded by his father, for many years and served as Chairman of the

Board from 2002 to 2010, tirelessly promoting traditional Chinese culture.

Lai Tien-chang passed away on the morning of November 21, 2022, at the age of 101.

Translation Scholar

Lai Tien-chang had a deep connection with translation, having been exposed to traditional literature and art from a young age. Although he majored in English in college, he also studied Chinese with masters of Chinese studies such as Xu Dishan, Chen Yinke, and Ma Meng. Having studied translation in secondary school and university and lived in the UK for several years, he gained a certain understanding of Westernization and subsequently worked in language education and translation. Lai Tien-chang has been writing in English, introducing and translating Chinese culture. He recalls that in the 1970s, there were very few books on Chinese culture, and those that existed were mostly academic research. It was difficult for foreigners to find suitable books to understand China and Hong Kong. Therefore, he began translating and introducing Chinese culture and art, including poetry, idioms, calligraphy, paintings, seals, couplets, customs, food, local customs, music, and drama. His books primarily cater to a general Western audience, using simple writing and translation techniques. Many Hong Kong readers also enjoy reading his books to learn about Chinese culture. His first book promoting Chinese painting was about the master Qi Baishi, the only Chinese painter at the time who could be accepted and appreciated by foreigners. To make his calligraphy easier to understand, he provided over 200 examples. He said that most books introducing Chinese culture assume readers already have a basic understanding of Chinese culture, while he started from the most basic level. For example, when introducing seal carving, he began by discussing why Chinese people love stone and why they carve characters, which was very interesting to Western readers. In his translation of poetry, he wasn't obsessed with the author's identity. He primarily focused on the reader's ability to understand and appreciate the text, rather than being bound by the original source. Furthermore, if the translated text is too profound, it would be meaningless if the reader couldn't understand it.

Lai Tien-chang's contributions to language education include being a founding member of the Hong Kong Translation Society and the first person to organize a diploma program in translation. Recognizing society's thirst for translation talent, Lai invited translators such as Song Qi, Yao Ke, and Qian Shan to launch a translation program in 1970. He also advocated for a change in the subordinate status of Chinese and, along with other scholars, successfully campaigned with the government for Chinese to be recognized as a legal language.

Lai Tien-chang has been a member of the Hong Kong Translation Society's Executive Committee since its founding in 1971. Initially serving as Vice President, he served as President from 1974-76 and 1980-86, and was awarded

the title of Honorary Fellow in 1986. He became Honorary Advisor in 1996, continuing to support young artists and contribute to the Society's development. In 2005, he was awarded the title of President Emeritus.

Lai Tien-chang has published over 40 books and translations in English, including "Chinese Painting" (Oxford University Press), "Chinese Calligraphy," and "Chinese Seal Carving" (University of Washington Press).

Calligraphic Skills Inherited from Four Masters

Lai Tien-chang, educated at a young age, developed a love for calligraphy and painting, becoming a renowned calligrapher. Wang Wu-chieh commented that his calligraphy skills were derived from the four masters: Wang, Chu, Su, and Mi.

A man of profound scholarship and exceptional artistic skill, Lai Tien-chang served as an advisor to the Hong Kong Museum of Art in the 1970s. After retiring from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1984, he devoted himself full-time to painting. He enjoyed painting for pleasure, held exhibitions, and published albums. His paintings combine the characteristics of Chinese and Western painting, exploring the aesthetic fusion of the two. His subject matter blends ancient and modern, Chinese and international, and he is particularly renowned for his unique Hong Kong landscapes. He believes that Hong Kong, as a cultural intermediary, "has a mix of ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign elements. We all possess some of them. Why not seize this opportunity and experiment more?"

A scholar of Chinese classics with a strong Western influence, Lai Tien-cheong's paintings are a unique blend of ancient and modern, Chinese and international. His most representative works draw viewers into his paintings, allowing them to view the scenery from multiple perspectives, a hallmark of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Lai Tien-cheong is particularly renowned for his Hong Kong landscapes, including Victoria Harbour, Lion Rock, the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, and Sha Tin Racecourse.

Alisan Fine Arts has represented Lai's paintings since 1992 and has hosted four solo exhibitions, including the most recent in 2013. Lai Tien-chang has also held solo exhibitions at the University of Hong Kong Art Museum, the Hong Kong Central Library, and the Hong Kong City Hall. His works are collected by the Peabody Essex Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of Art, the University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, the Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and several art connoisseurs.

Lai Tien-chang's Calligraphy

Lai Tien-chang's "Jiangnan Beauty"

Lai Tien-chang's "China and the West, Past and Present"