IN MEMORIAM:
EDWIN G. PULLEYBLANK 蒲立本 (1922-2013)

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Edwin G. Pulleyblank, a towering figure for over half a century in Chinese linguistics and Chinese history, passed away in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on Saturday, 13 April 2013, at the age of 90, surrounded by his loving family. He is survived by his wife, Yihong Pan; his sister, Grace Craig; his three children, David Edwin, Barbara Jill, and Marcia Ruth Pulleyblank; his daughter-in-law, Barbara Merle Pulleyblank; and his three grandchildren, Amber Lynn Pulleyblank, Ryan Wyeth Pulleyblank and Coren Elizabeth Pulleyblank.

Edwin G. Pulleyblank—or Ted, to his colleagues and friends—was born on 7 August 1922 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, the eldest of three children to humble parents, William George Edwin (a much respected school teacher of mathematics who later became school vice-principal) and Ruth Elizabeth Pulleyblank (who also had teaching credentials). An avid student, Ted excelled in his studies, undoubtedly aided both by his intellect and his phenomenal memory for details that would show up in his passionate, scholarly pursuits in the decades to follow. He attended the University of Alberta on a Provincial Government Scholarship (1939-1942), dividing his interest between Physics and Classical studies (having already taught himself Greek in high school). As if not busy enough, while he was still an undergraduate, he tutored other students in Math and Physics! He ultimately graduated in 1942 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classics (and would undoubtedly have graduated summa cum laude, were such academic distinctions used at his institution and had there been a full-fledged degree program in Classics at the time). During his undergraduate studies, Canada was already engaged in World War II, having declared war on Germany on 10
September 1939, just seven days after Great Britain and France did. Given Ted’s aptitude for mathematics and his affinity for foreign languages—albeit at that time Greek and Latin rather than East Asian languages—he was approached by one of his Classics professors who inquired if he would be interested in doing “secret war work.” He was, and he soon joined a small group of Canadians to go overseas to Bletchley Park in England to engage in Allied military cryptanalysis. During his three or so years overseas in intelligence work, intercepting and deciphering communications of the Axis powers, he became proficient in reading Japanese, a language that he put to full use in later years in his appreciation of the wealth of research on China that have been contributed by Japanese sinologists and linguists. Returning to Canada by 1946, he embarked on the study of the Chinese language and Chinese history at Carleton College (later renamed Carleton University) in Ottawa, while continuing intelligence work for the Canadian government at the “Examinations Division” of the Canadian National Research Council. By then he was married to Winona Relyea, whom he first met in the late 1930’s when his family was vacationing in the western province of Ontario. The couple then travelled back to England on a Chinese Government Scholarship (1946-1948) where he studied Chinese language and history in earnest at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. From 1948 to 1952, he was appointed as a Lecturer in Classical Chinese in the Far East Department at SOAS. Keep in mind that university lecturers in the British system may entail both teaching and research, and the position could correspond to some extent to assistant or associate professor rank in North America. It was this period of his life that Ted recalled and spoke of as the time when his Japanese proficiency exceeded that of his Classical Chinese, which he was teaching at the time!

In 1951, Ted earned his doctoral degree at University of London, having completed a dissertation entitled, “The Background and Early Life of An Lu-shan,” supervised by renown sinologist and Sino-Tibetan linguist, Walter Simon. (Perhaps the seeds of Ted’s interest in Chinese linguistics later were already planted back then?) The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan, which was published in 1955 (Oxford University Press, London), now almost six decades ago, is a monumental,
A classic study of this period in Tang history that has remained unsurpassed in any language. In the interim, Ted furthered his studies at Cambridge University (earning an M.A. in 1953), but he also took a year of study leave in post-war Japan to conduct research in libraries in Tokyo and Kyoto. He also availed himself of the opportunity to write and publish (in English and in Japanese, no less) on his dissertation topic on the An Lushan rebellion. He and his family then returned to England and the following year a third child was added to his brood. He followed his lectureship in Classical Chinese with a one-year lectureship in Chinese History at SOAS, University of London. Shortly thereafter, as a testament of the recognition of his scholarship and potential, at the ripe young age of 31, he was hired away by University of Cambridge, to serve as Chair and Professor of Chinese, where he stayed from 1953 to 1966. By the early 1960s, however, the Pulleyblanks were yearning to return the family to the more open, egalitarian society of their youth in Canada.

An opportunity eventually presented itself, and on 1 August 1966, he was hired, not at the rank of assistant professor as originally advertised, but at the rank of full Professor, in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The department was established only five years earlier in 1961. Through preplanning in hiring Ted at full professor status, the department was able to offer him the headship two years later, upon the retirement of their inaugural department head. Ted duly served as its second head from 1968 to 1975. Amidst teaching and administrative duties, he managed, nonetheless, to continue productive scholarly research. In fact, a number of his seminal works in historical Chinese linguistics were published during those ten to twelve years. This include: 1) his “Late Middle Chinese” reconstructions in 1970 that laid the foundation for his 1984 book, *Middle Chinese: A Study in Historical Phonology*, 2) his 1973 proposal of “Some new hypotheses concerning word families” that was published in the first volume, first issue of the *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*, 3) his presenting of “Some further evidence regarding Old Chinese -s and its time of disappearance” in 1973, where he offered further support for the theory of tonogenesis for Chinese, a theory first proposed in 1954 by André-Georges Haudricourt for Vietnamese (with a passing suggestion that it might also apply to Chinese) and one that Ted

Ted’s extraordinary wealth of scholarly accomplishments—by then having spanned a period of three decades in his self-identified four core areas of research: 1) History of the Tang Dynasty, 2) History of Central Asia to A.D. 1000, 3) History of the Chinese Language (Phonology and Grammar), and 4) General Historical Linguistics and Phonological Theory—did not go unrecognized in his home country. In 1980, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, an induction to the Academy that represents the highest possible honor to be bestowed to Canadians for their outstanding achievements and contributions in one of the three fields of the arts, sciences, and the humanities.

Ted returned as Acting Head for a year in 1985-1986, the year that he good-naturedly agreed to host the 20th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics in August 1987, the only time that the Sino-Tibetan conference was held in Canada. He retired that year at age 65, complying with mandatory retirement policies. Upon retirement, he was bestowed the Professor Emeritus title. In his personal life, a decade after returning to Canada, his first wife passed away, and many years were to pass before he remarried in 2002, this time to someone who shared an area of his research passion, a scholar in Tang history, Yihong Pan.

Despite retirement—or perhaps precisely because of retirement—Ted dedicated his full energy to his numerous research projects, utilizing the time afforded by freedom from formal university service to complete many if not all the major projects that he had in mind. Making full use of his time from retirement to the early years of the new century, his productive output had been phenomenal. Six of his ten books—over half of them—were published after his retirement, and half of those pertain to Chinese linguistics, namely: A Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese and Early Mandarin (1991), A Chinese Text in Central Asian Brahmi Script: New Evidence for the Pronunciation of Late Middle
Chinese and Khotanese (with R. E. Emmerick, 1994), and Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar (1995). Prior to retirement, his groundbreaking book on historical Chinese linguistics is his Middle Chinese: A Study in Historical Phonology (1984). The 1991 Lexicon, with some 8,000 Chinese characters arranged conveniently using Pinyin romanization, is intended to be a companion volume to his 1984 book on Middle Chinese, in providing easy access to his reconstructions of Early Middle Chinese (EMC), Late Middle Chinese (LMC), and Early Mandarin (EM).

His 1995 Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar, his other major Chinese linguistics book post-retirement had hitherto been in mimeograph form only, with revisions made over the years, and then distributed and discussed with his students in the fall at UBC, at the start of their year of “Introduction to Classical Chinese” with him. Only after his retirement did he set aside time to make final revisions on that manuscript to have it published, a labor of love from decades of teaching the classical language and dealing with syntactic issues to aid his students, first in Great Britain and then in Canada, along with courses taught in the United States. As he noted in his preface, the book “has grown out of notes prepared over the years for teaching Classical Chinese to undergraduates at the University of Cambridge and the University of British Columbia, as well as at summer schools in Bloomington, Indiana, Columbus, Ohio, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the 1960s.” Ted’s Outline remains an indispensable, English-language reference grammar of Classical Chinese for learners of the classical language.

As if those six books published since 1988 are not enough, of his articles—totalling well over 100 in academic journals and collected volumes that span six decades (from 1950 to 2008)—an incredible 39 or so of them, or roughly a third of his scholarly output, were published during the two decades after his retirement in 1988. Only in the area of writing reviews did he seem to have discontinued shortly after retirement; his first review (on Author Waley’s The Life and Times of Po Chü-i) was published in 1950 and his last three in 1989, two of which pertained to Chinese history (Tang and Ming Dynasties) and one to Chinese linguistics, namely, his review of Jerry Norman’s Chinese and S. Robert Ramsey’s The Languages of China. It is worth noting that Ted’s choices of works for
critical review are not only extraordinarily broad, covering the multiple
areas of his scholarly interest (viz., Chinese history, early Central Asian
history, and Chinese linguistics), but also impressively diverse
linguistically, as the publications that he reviewed were written in English
as well as four other languages, Japanese, Chinese, French and German.

Even in slowing down in the twenty-first century, Ted continued
to attend and present at conferences through 2003, with two or three of
the papers published shortly thereafter. A paper that he was not yet ready
to publish was his Creel Lecture, “Language and History,” delivered on 6
May 2003 at the University of Chicago. Ted was their 2003 invited
speaker for the annual Herrlee G. Creel Memorial Lecture series, a series
established at their university in memory of their eminent scholar, Herrlee
G. Creel (1905-1994). From that lecture, we learn some interesting
background on Ted that is not found elsewhere in his writings. An excerpt
from his introduction is quoted below, for a glimpse of how Ted came to
the field of Chinese linguistics:

First let me say how much I appreciate the honor of
being invited to give this Creel Lecture at the University
of Chicago. Herrlee Creel was one of the real pioneers in
the study of China in North America, unlike many of the
rest of us who were drawn into the field by the
exigencies of the Second World War. ....

My choice of topic ‘Language and History’ for this
lecture is, as you might guess, partly autobiographical,
referring to the two scholarly disciplines in which I have
been involved in the course of my scholarly career. At
the time I met Creel, not long after the publication of my
dissertation on the An Lushan rebellion, I was primarily
a historian of the Tang period. Shortly after that, I was
dverted into linguistic researches and backward in time
partly by an interest in historical linguistics that I had
developed in my earlier, undergraduate studies in the
field of Classics, which had included an introduction to
Indo-European comparative philology, and partly by
having to face the task of teaching undergraduates to read Classical Chinese. I became convinced that, contrary to the prevailing opinion among many teachers of Chinese that, quote “Chinese has no grammar”, Chinese both ancient and modern, is like every other language in having regular rules of syntax. After publishing a couple of papers on the subject of particles in early Classical Chinese in 1959, I decided that it was hardly possible to solve such problems without a better understanding of the sound system. This in turn led me into the field of historical phonology, which has been my main preoccupation in more recent times.

From the above quote, it can be seen that the seeds of interest in historical linguistics per se were already planted in his youth, during his undergraduate studies in Classics at the University of Alberta! Clearly, from the outset, his interest in history and language were inexorably intertwined. His early exposure to comparative philology was also the source of his abiding interest in Indo-European linguistics. At the same time, it was his study of Chinese transcriptions of foreign words of the Han through Tang periods that led him to challenge the reconstructions of Bernhard Karlgren, beginning in the 1960s with his article, “The consonantal system of Old Chinese” (1962), and from there, he further questioned Karlgren’s single-stage reconstruction of his Ancient Chinese using the Qieyun rhyme dictionary of 601 A.D. and the rhyme tables of the Song period. He proposed, instead, to first reconstruct the language of the Song rhyme tables, which he called Late Middle Chinese (LMC), and then to use that to reconstruct the language of the Qieyun, which he called Early Middle Chinese (EMC), with the two sub-stages of Middle Chinese representing two different time periods and two different locales. In his Creel Lecture, Ted elaborated further on his historical reconstructions before proceeding to the heart of his paper on language as digital cognition and issues pertaining to the origin of language.

Ted’s final presentation, which evolved from his Creel Lecture, was as the special plenary speaker at the 20th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL-20), held on 25-27 April 2008 at The
Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Working under compressed time, Ted’s paper, “Language as digital: A new theory of the origin and nature of human speech,” was published early September that year, as the first article in the Proceedings of the 20th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics. The conference and proceedings were dedicated to him in honor of his 85th birthday, marking the year that he was invited as the plenary speaker (that is, 2007). In writing to accept the invitation to NACCL-20, Ted’s reply in August that year was made all the more poignant by his recognition that his memory was fading (attributing that to Parkinson’s disease) and that this would be his last work:

... at my age and the state of my health, that is, my loss of memory through Parkinson’s, I have stopped preparing papers for conferences or even attending them. Now, however, reading your message through, I am tempted to make this the exception and try to complete what I have been thinking of as my “swan song”, that is my new idea of language as digital, that I proposed in a preliminary way in my Creel lecture called “Language and History” in Chicago in May 2003. Since then I have been working intermittently on a more thorough treatment of the problem. It seems to me that committing myself to presenting this at NACCL in Columbus next April will be just the stimulus I need to get the job done. How about that?

Ted did complete his manuscript and presented it at NACCL-20, and he saw its online publication that fall, before Alzheimer’s disease robbed him almost totally of his memory by mid-summer 2009. Even as he struggled to articulate his thoughts shortly after the conference ended, the irrepressible curiosity in the search of knowledge expressed itself in his “Last Thoughts”:

A swan that has sung is supposed to die forthwith. My “Swan Song” has been offered to the world. I may be on my last legs but I still have some things I’d like to think
about and try to put into writing. Will I ever try to publish them? We shall see. At least let me try to put my thoughts into words.

My article, *Language as Digital*, now awaiting publication, is an attempt to analyze the achievement of the human brain that has enabled our species of bipedal apes to achieve mastery of the planet, Earth, on which we live. Are we unique? Or have similar talking animals evolved elsewhere in the vast universe that is said to have come into being at the Big Bang?

To the very end, Ted was a consummate scholar in his passionate pursuit of knowledge!

During his long, distinguished career, Ted Pulleyblank has had tremendous impact on his colleagues, as evidenced not only by numerous reviews of his books but also by the extensive citing of his publications; regardless of whether one argued against his ideas and his proposals, or agreed with them in part or in whole (or much later, after disagreeing with him), what they could not do was to simply ignore them; and by virtue of that, their own scholarship was inevitably shaped and influenced by Ted’s ideas and propositions. His greatest contributions and impact are most keenly felt in historical phonology, as can be gleaned from an excerpt of his short bio for 1994 election to the position of Vice President (President-Elect) of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics (IACL):

Professor Pulleyblank’s distinguished career is marked by his profound research both as a historian (particularly of the T'ang Dynasty and of Central Asia to 1000 AD), and as a leading figure in historical Chinese linguistics and in general historical linguistics. .... Many of (his) writings made profound influence in the field, especially on our current view of Old Chinese and Middle Chinese phonology. For example, his ideas that the 2nd division syllables had medial $r$ in OC and that the “going tone” came from $s$ are now part of the generally accepted view.
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His work on Middle Chinese phonology replaced that of Karlgren. Pulleyblank recognizes that Late Middle Chinese was different from Early Middle Chinese, not only in time but also in geographical location, thus bringing MC phonology closer to the view expressed in the preface to the Qieyun.”

All in all, Ted’s scholarly contributions, which are primarily in history and language (Chinese history and early Central Asian history on the one hand, and Chinese linguistics and general historical linguistics on the other), have been immeasurable, and they will continue to guide and influence scholars in the decades ahead.

Those of us who had known Ted personally and had studied under him, feel especially fortunate to have had him as our teacher. While he was a towering figure, a world-renowned eminent scholar in the academic field, with extensive publications that span six decades—from 1950 through 2008—and with numerous honors bestowed upon him by the academic community over the decades—we especially remember him with fondness, for his warmth, his kindness, and his patience as our mentor. He was ever so passionate in his scholarly pursuits, and thoroughly dedicated to the field, be it Chinese linguistics or Chinese history. He made full use of his powerful intellect and incredible memory for all the fine details to formulate his ideas and to support them with meticulous attention to every aspect of his argumentation. While basically a very shy and quiet person, and fairly diminutive (being just 5’8” even at his prime), he was nonetheless fearless and even feisty when it came to articulating his ideas and arguing for them at conferences (and arguing against others!). Behind that was also his incredible intellectual curiosity, accompanied by an insatiable appetite to know and to learn. When the Rubik’s cube came on the market in the early 1980s, he deftly demonstrated his ability to solve it in mere seconds. He was equally quick to embrace computer technology, purchasing his first Macintosh computer in the mid-1980s, at the same time that much younger colleagues in his department were buying theirs. Unlike other scholars of his age and time, Ted himself was intimately involved with the computing end of his “Dictionary of Classical Chinese” project (federally
supported by a SSHRCC grant from 1987 to 1994). That included the creation of some needed glyphs that were absent in those early font sets. The project culminated in his much anticipated 1991 book, *A Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese and Early Mandarin.*

And yet, there is also the light-hearted, whimsical side of Ted, such as relating some quirky incidents during the war years, in exchanging stories with Nick Bodman, who served in a similar capacity for the Allies from the U.S. side. He delighted in the books by P. G. Wodehouse, and enjoyed divulging his nickname given by Y.R. Chao’s children (from a sinicized version of the French version of his surname) and sharing Y.R. Chao’s playful, stir-fried egg recipe published in his senior colleague’s wife’s famous cook book, *How to Cook and Eat in Chinese.*

There were many memorable stories that he shared over the nearly four decades that I have known him, delightfully humorous incidents from the past that brought out his smile and a quiet chuckle. And he had shared some of his stories with my students on his visits to OSU. He will always be remembered not only as a truly great scholar but also as a very dear teacher, mentor and friend.

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**Select Publications of Edwin G. Pulleyblank**
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**BOOKS**


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SELECT ARTICLES


**Note:** NACCL-20 Proceedings, containing Edwin G. Pulleyblank’s 2008 article, together with a complete list of his publications, is online at
NOTES

1. Sources for this memoriam include Ted Pulleyblank’s CVs from 1986, 1987 and 1990; his son David’s obituary for his father and some additional information provided by his son, David Pulleyblank (University of Toronto), and his widow, Yihong Pan (Miami University); his publication list compiled in the Proceedings of the 20th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL-20), and three overlooked articles to be added to that list; as well as the miscellaneous materials that the author had collected over time, and her personal recollections, spanning almost four decades, of many happy hours of lively conversations. Numerous opportunities arose that included Ted’s trips to Seattle during my University of Washington student days to participate in activities of the Chinese Linguistic Circle of the Pacific Northwest (so-named by Mantaro Hashimoto on one of his trips from Japan), my regular trips home to Vancouver, one year (1984-1985) as lecturer in Linguistics at University of British Columbia, and Ted’s five visits to Ohio State University where he gave lectures, the first in 1991, together with our second speaker, William Baxter (University of Michigan), and three local visits from Oxford, Ohio, before his final visit in 2008 as our special plenary speaker at NACCL-20.

2. Opportunities to teach Chinese language and/or history in Canada were scarce at that time. In his short piece, entitled “William L. Holland’s contributions to Asian Studies in Canada and at the University of British Columbia,” in Pacific Affair 54.4, Pulleyblank (1978-1980:592) noted that after WWII, Canada was slower than the United States, Great Britain and Australia to respond to the urgent need for greater knowledge of Asian languages and civilizations. In early 1960’s Canada, only the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia had any sort of Asian program, the former beginning in 1952 with the hiring of W.A.C.H. Dobson as Professor of Chinese, and the latter beginning in 1961 with the hiring of William L. Holland to head UBC’s new Department of Asian Studies.

Conference on Chinese Linguistics (Columbus, Ohio: East Asian Studies Center, The Ohio State University), pages 1061-1075. That publication list, together with the entire two-volume set of the NACCL-20 Proceedings, is available online under “Proceedings” at <naccl.osu.edu>. Printed, bound copies of the NACCL-20 Proceedings are also available for interlibrary loan at several libraries, including the Library of Congress, University of British Columbia Libraries, Ohio State University Libraries, and University of Alberta Libraries.

4. Note that one of the non-linguistics books, Essays on Tang and Pre-Tang China (2001), was intended to be the first of two or more collections of his writings, brought together for easier accessibility.