

Appreciation of Wu Zhengyi – Friend and Colleague

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One of the joys of my life has been the opportunity to know and work with Wu Lao for the last 34 years of his life, 1979-2013. He came to America as a member of the delegation of Chinese botanists that we organized for the spring of 1979, and it was during the course of that visit there that he and I became acquainted for the first time.

During the course of the final meeting of that visit, which was held at the University of California in Berkeley, California, June 1, 1979, Professor Wu and his colleague Yü Te-Tsun, another outstanding botanist, proposed that Chinese and American botanists work together to produce a revised English-language version of the *Flora Reipublicae Popularis Sinicae* (FRPS; 1959-2004, 80 volumes in 126 books). This great work, in Chinese, was the first comprehensive catalog of all of the plants of the country, but our Chinese colleagues well realized that they did not, in the course of preparing most of their flora, that they had not had access to the literature and type specimens of the West, where most of the work on Chinese plant taxonomy had been carried out for the preceding 150 years. As a result, studies carried out in the isolation of that day in China could not be perfected to the degree that it could have been with access to the historical material, which is why our Chinese colleagues proposed a joint project to try to rectify the situation.

As chair of the American group, I set about to see how this might be possible, and spent a number of frustrating years looking for a publisher who would be willing to deal with a work of this great size. I never was able to locate such a publisher, so set up guidelines to reduce the size of the English-language second edition to within manageable limits, chiefly by limiting the length of descriptions and postponing the inclusion of illustrations.

The Editorial Committee of FRPS was basically in charge of permission for the joint project to be undertaken, and they understandably feared in the 1980s that the new work might interrupt the efforts of Chinese botanists engaged in completing FRPS, to the detriment of that great work. Yü Te-tsun, who had been the chair of the FRPS committee, passed away in 1986, and Wu Zhengyi became chairman in 1987. Ultimately, at the XIV International Congress of Botany in Berlin, on July 28, 1987, Professor Wu informed me that we had the permission of the FRPS editorial committee and, by extension, the Chinese government, to initiate the joint project.

Along the way, I had the pleasure of getting to know Professor Wu personally. The first good opportunity was in the course of climbing and botanizing together on Emei-shan in Sichuan Province in the summer of 1980. Mt. Emei was one of the four sacred Buddhist mountains of China, and the tallest of them at 3,099 meters in height. I learned about its height personally during our hike up the stone stairs





1987年访美，吴老与Peter H. Raven

from the base, roughly a 2,500 meter rise in elevation. In planning my first visit to China (since I had left Shanghai as a baby in 1937), I requested the opportunity to study *Epilobium*, which was richly represented on the slopes of that sacred mountain, and it had been granted. Up through the low-elevation forest with many species of Lauraceae, *Acer*, and many other kinds of subtropical trees, we climbed, encountering gigantic specimens of *Cercidiphyllum* and other botanical wonders along the way. Spending the night at a monastery on the slopes of the mountain, we continued through subalpine fir forest to the summit, enjoying wonderful views in all directions.

During the course of that trip, I became aware of a remarkable coincidence: that Professor Wu and I were both born on June 13, but he was 20 years earlier, in 1916. Thus when we climbed Mt. Emei together, he was 64, I 44 years old. *Epilobium* was plentiful, and I greatly enjoyed studying it and learning about the species on that long hike. By the time we had returned to the base of the mountain, we were great friends, united by the love of plants and the pleasure of learning about them. In a shop at the base of the mountain, he presented me with a painting of a bird that he purchased there. I asked him what kind it was, and he replied shyly, "Perhaps a raven."

It interested me later to learn that while Tsinghua University (where Prof. Wu earned his degree.) was moving to avoid the Japanese army during the course of his graduate studies from Beijing, first to Changsha, Hunan Province. When Hunan Province came under the control of the Japanese, Prof. Wu walked from there to Kunming, Yunnan Province, where he eventually settled and spent most of the rest of his life firmly establishing and building the institutions in the province. He graduated from Tsinghua in 1937, the same year my parents brought me as a baby from Shanghai to California. Two months later, the Japanese bombed Shanghai, and then they occupied it a few months later, in August of that year.

We met a few times in the years between our memorable visit to Mt. Emei and the equally memorable invitation to join in the study of the plants of China at Berlin seven years later. Once the project had been approved, it was necessary to establish a work plan for it, so we convened a joint meeting in St. Louis the



next year, October 1-9, 1988. During those days, we took great pleasure in inviting Professor Wu to our country house near St. Louis. Not surprisingly, given his great knowledge of North Temperate plants, he recognized everything he saw!

The signing ceremony for our project was held in the shade of a grove of *Metasequoia* trees that had been grown at the Garden



1994年南京《Flora of China》编委会会议（右起：贺善安、Peter H. Raven、吴老）

from seeds received from the National Bureau of Forestry, then in Nanjing, in late 1947. As concerns our flora, we carried on with further meetings and gradually established our protocols, publishing our first volume of the Flora of China after much further deliberation and effort in 1994, and completing the work in 49 volumes in 2014, just twenty years. In 2001, Dr. Hong De-yuan of the Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, was appointed Vice Co-Chair of the project, Wu Zhengyi having retired from its active management at the age of 85.

Wu Lao was always available for meaningful consultation from the start of this great cooperative effort to its completion, and unfailingly interested in all botanical questions. I was delighted to see him from time to time in Kunming, and honored to make the commemorative speech on the occasion of his being presented the International Cosmos Prize in Osaka, Japan, in 1999. He was always gracious and welcoming, a scholar of great accomplishment but humble personality.

Prof. Wu was born in Jujiang, Jiangxi Province, but his parents moved when he was very young to Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, from which so many famous Chinese scholars and other accomplished people have come. He showed genuine signs of brilliance as a young boy, mastering calligraphy before he reached the age of ten, and maintaining that level of scholarship all his life. His family home in Yangzhou is now maintained as a very interesting and beautiful museum.

In the broadest sense, Wu Zhengyi's career was a remarkable product of China's 150-year struggle for intellectual excellence and national identity that may be said to have begun with the Opium Wars of the 1840s and to have reached an important benchmark with the ascendancy of Deng Xiaopeng to full power in 1980. The earliest collections of Chinese plants were made by foreigners, often missionaries, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, but by the 1920s a number of Chinese students were going abroad for study and pursuing western scholarly traditions themselves. In that context, it is interesting that Wu Zhengyi was educated completely in China and that he became the greatest Chinese botanist of the 20th century. China



was indeed gaining full access to world knowledge, as painful as their path had been to that point!

In addition to his great works on the classification of the plants of China, Professor Wu made major contributions to the plant geography of the country and of the world as well; to our understanding of medicinal botany; and to the establishment of significant institutions in Kunming and Yunnan Province generally. His suggestions led



与吴老在台中科学博物馆

to the formation of national parks and reserves in Yunnan Province and eventually throughout the country, as well as to the foundation of what in effect has become the national seed bank of China, in his beloved Institute of Botany in Kunming.

Professor Wu was, over the course of his long and fruitful life, not a man to be deterred from his objectives, a traditional Chinese scholar who became attuned to the evolution of his country and contributed importantly to it, and a durable friend who helped all those who shared his intellectual goals and objective, me among them. We do not see his kind often enough in this world.

缅怀亦师亦友的吴老

彼得·雷文

美国密苏里植物园，美国科学院院士，中国科学院外籍院士。

我这一生，最大的乐事莫过于有幸结识吴老，并和他共事了34年（1979~2013）。还记得那是1979年的春天，当时吴老以中国植物学家代表团成员的身份访问美国，我们藉此得以第一次相识。

1979年6月1日，当中国代表团在美行程接近尾声时，我们在加利福尼亚大学伯克利分校举行一个座谈会，在那次会上，吴老和他的同事——著名植物学家俞德浚教授提议中美植物学家合作编纂《中国植物志》（全书80卷126册，历时1959~2004年完成）的英文修订版《Flora of China》。《中国植物志》是中国第一部完整的植物家谱，乃鸿篇巨著！但中国同事们觉得：他们在编写过程中有很多西方的参考文献和模式标本没有见到，要知道中国植物分类学已有150多年的历史了，但那时候中国的科学研究还无法很好的获取西方文献资料，中国同事们希望通过国际合作以弥补这一缺憾。

作为美方代表团的团长，我花好几年寻找愿意参与这一恢弘工程的出版商，但一直没有找到，后来我们想到，通过精简植物的描述，以及单独出版植物插图以压缩整个图书的卷册数。



《中国植物志》编委会拥有该书的版权，当时他们有点担心英文版可能影响正在开展的中文版的编纂工作。1986年，时任《中国植物志》主编的俞德浚教授不幸去世，吴老于1987年继任主编。时至1987年7月28日，就在柏林召开的第十四届国际植物学大会期间，吴老告诉我，《中国植物志》编委会同意编写英文版的提议，版权的问题得到解决，中国政府也予以支持编写《Flora of China》的工作。

在后来的合作中，我有幸与吴老有了更多的接触。1980年的夏天，我们一道在峨眉山做野外植物学调查工作。峨眉山乃四大佛教名山之一，最高峰3099米。我们从山脚拾阶而上，直至山顶，海拔跨度近2500米。在我的首次访华的计划中（我于1937年随父母离开上海），我希望采集和考察柳叶菜属的植物，峨眉山上山的路边生长很多该属植物，我如愿以偿。峨眉山的低海拔处，分布有樟科、槭属以及其他亚热带的乔木树种，中间见到了大量的连香树和其他植物类群。我们还在峨眉山一个寺庙过了一夜，后来见到亚高山冷杉林，到了山顶可俯视四周，美景尽收眼底。

在那次的峨眉山考察中，我发现一个惊人的巧合：吴老和我是同一天出生的，即6月13日。吴老生于1916年，刚好大我20岁。我们一起爬峨眉山时，他64岁，我44岁。我研究的类群柳叶菜属在峨眉山习见，所以我非常享受在峨眉山美好的考察学习时光。当我们返回到山脚时，因为共同的志趣，吴老和我成了好朋友，在山上的一家商店里，他买了一幅工笔花鸟画送给我。我问他画中的鸟是哪个种，他有点俏皮地说：“可能是渡鸦（Raven）吧！”

再后来，我对吴老的身世有了更多的了解，知道他毕业于清华大学，抗战期间，为躲避战火，他的母校清华大学先迁至湖南长沙，长沙沦陷后，吴老随大队人马徒步走到云南昆明，此后他余生的大部分时间都定居在这里，推动了昆明的植物科学研究和机构的发展。1937年，吴老从清华大学毕业，辗转回到昆明。也是那一年，我的父母和襁褓中的我因为战火离开了上海，回到美国加州。2个月后日军轰炸上海，到1937年8月，上海沦陷。

美中合作编写《Flora of China》的协议书签字仪式在密苏里植物园的水杉树下举行，这水杉林种子还是1947年当时的南京国民政府林业部赠予的。项目启动后，我们的编委会开了多次会议，包括制订编写规范等。到1994年，《Flora of China》首卷面世，2014年全书49卷册全部付梓，历时20载。2001年，中科院植物所的洪德元院士被增补为副主编，85岁高龄的吴老也随之淡出编委会的管理事务。

吴老对《Flora of China》的启动和最终完成起着至关重要的作用，他总是对所有的植物学问题抱有浓厚的兴趣。我很高兴多次与吴老在昆明相聚，并且很荣幸能在吴老1999年于日本大阪获得“COSMOS”国际奖时做纪念演讲。吴老不仅是一位学富五车的大家，还是一位和蔼、友善和谦逊的长者。

吴老生于江西九江，但他很小的时候即随父母迁回至他的故乡江苏扬州，那可是一个名家辈出的地方。事实上，还在孩提时，吴老就酷爱植物并初显其日后成大器之迹象，他十岁前谙熟书法，并终生写一手好字。他家族在扬州故里的宅第如今成了一个供人参观的博物馆。

如果往大处来说，吴老的一生是中国从1840年鸦片战争至邓小平领导改革开放历时150年以来致力于民族独立和国家振兴的真实写照。早期的中国植物多由外国人，尤其是传教士采集、命名和研究，1920年后，大批的中国留学生走出国门，到欧美学习和追寻西方的学术文化。有趣的是吴老尽管未曾留洋，却成为20世纪最伟大的中国植物学家。现如今中国与世界的交流大门洞开，要知道今天的局面其实是多么的来之不易。



除在中国植物分类学上的杰出成就，吴老在植物地理学和药用植物研究方面也成绩斐然，并为云南各植物学研究机构的发展做出巨大贡献。正是他的建议和推动，云南省直至全国诸多自然保护区得以建成，中国西南野生生物种质资源库在他毕生热爱的昆明植物研究所得以落成。

在他富有成就的一生中，吴老不仅是一位坚守人生目标的人，同时也是一位秉承传统的学者，毕生致力于国家和民族之发展，并做出重要贡献。我本人也从亦师亦友的吴老身上学到很多东西，终生受益。吴老乃世间少有的科学巨匠！

(翻译：杨雅)

