Obituary

Anthony Cheung (Cheung Kin-tak; 1946–2013)
“The Force of Will to Make Something Worthwhile Possible”

Anthony Cheung (Cheung Kin-tak; 1946–2013) died suddenly of heart failure the first week of June 2013 in the midst of a life still full of hard work, friends, and family. No one person knew him well enough to speak of him fully. He was publisher of The Journal of American-East Asian Relations and Imprint Publications. He was a musician, an historian, a graphic artist, a collector of stamps and coins, a pretty good cook, a proud and rigorous father, and a fine, loving, and demanding friend.

He ran a one-man show. In fact, when I first mailed in my subscription to the Journal, he phoned me almost immediately to find out who I was. Eventually, when I became the editor-in-chief (2005–2012), scarcely a day went by without a telephone call from him, sometimes two or three, sometimes for an hour or more. The talk continued when we met for dim sum at the Phoenix Restaurant
in Chicago Chinatown, which he treated as his club. The waiters knew to bring him a Johnnie Walker Black Label as soon as he sat down (and to bring another when the first got watery), and it was only the threat of arrest that kept him from lighting up a cigarette. I could no more convince him to stop smoking than to give up Chinese food.

His saga came out in long and detailed but I think controlled monologues: his childhood in Hong Kong, when the Japanese occupation was still fresh in his grandmother’s stories (she told him not to hate Japanese); his beloved aunts and his revered father, who survives him; his brothers and sisters (he was the oldest of seven); British boys’ school in Hong Kong and in England, where his fellow students called him “Choong”; stellar grades at University of Hawai‘i, where he lived on peanut butter and made friends he maintained until he died; arriving in Manhattan for graduate school with his new bride, Connie, and being so horrified at the cockroaches that they immediately left for University of Chicago. He could not tell enough proud stories of his children—Jennifer, Alexander, and Octavian—and of his adventures as a young man which are too rich to go into here.

At University of Chicago he did graduate work with Akira Iriye, who became his lifelong mentor and supporter. Iriye then helped him to join the journals department at University of Chicago Press, where he learned the publishing trade and graphic design. He canvassed Chicago Chinatown and convinced restaurants that they needed English-Chinese menus, which he designed (some are still in use). After a period of government work, he decided that his most important goal was to promote international understanding through international scholarship, and to carry out these ideals he started Imprint Publications, an independent publishing house in Chicago.

In 1990, the Committee on American-East Asian Relations, which had been founded by the American Historical Association in 1968 to support multi-lingual, multi-archival, and multi-dimensional scholarship, was winding down. Anthony proposed to Iriye that a journal could carry on the Committee’s work. He then consulted with Ernest May at Harvard and went on to Washington to persuade Warren Cohen, who had given a 1984 presidential address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in which he insisted that the field of American-East Asian relations was on the “cutting edge” of historical scholarship.¹