WMU professor exploring history of Early Imperial China

Dr. Victor Cunrui Xiong, Western Michigan University professor of Chinese and East Asian history, is a Chinese medievalist by training recognized internationally for his research and publications focused on Early Imperial China, especially the Sui-Tang period.

Xiong joined WMU’s faculty in fall 1989 and served as chair of Asian Studies from 1997 to 2003. He also served as visiting scholar at the University of Iowa, the Northwestern University of China and the Japan Center for the Michigan Universities in Hikone, Japan. He has given lectures at some of the world’s most prestigious universities including, Oxford, Harvard, UCLA, Yale and Stanford and has plans to give talks this academic year at New York University, the University of Wisconsin in Madison and Xiamen University in China.

The urban, cultural, and socioeconomic history of Early Imperial China, with a focus on the Sui-Tang period, has been the major topic of Xiong’s published research. He has published three books during his tenure at WMU, including, “Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty: His Life, Times, and Legacy,” and most recently, “A Historical Dictionary of Medieval China.” Xiong’s book, “Sui-Tang Chang’an: A Study in the Urban History of Medieval China,” is recognized as the first comprehensive English language study of Chang’an, the most important city in early Imperial China. Based on careful textual and archaeological research, his study gives a sense of why Sui-Tang Chang’an was considered the most spectacular metropolis of its age.

“During my most recent visit to China, I was interviewed for a documentary on Chang’an in the “Man-made Wonders” series, called “China’s Forgotten City,” which is a coproduction of Natural History New Zealand and Discovery Channel Asia,” said Dr. Xiong. “The focus of the hour-long documentary is on Chang’an (present-day Xi’an). The documentary was mainly based on my first book, “Sui-Tang Chang’an”.”

On sabbatical for the 2009-2010 academic year, Xiong is working on an annotated translation of the 8th century primary source, Shitong, the first Chinese work about historiography composed by Liu Zhiji between 708 and 710 A.D., translated as “A Thorough Exploration in Historiography,” for the University of Washington Press.
Xiong studied English and American literature at Peking University before pursuing his research interest in archeology at the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He also attended the University of Maryland where he studied for a master’s in modern Japanese history. In 1989, Xiong received his Ph.D. in Chinese history at the Australian National University.

Xiong is one of about 30 WMU faculty researchers participating in the China Study Group hosted by the Haenicke Institute for Global Education. The group is comprised of WMU scholars and graduate students focused on China.

The CSG sponsors conferences, research, teaching initiatives and student activities on a regular basis, and offers assistance and connections to those traveling to and conducting research throughout the Asian/Pacific regions. The CSG commits itself to making fundamental advances in campus knowledge about the Greater China and to providing support in this field.

Dr. Xiong’s Web site

Story by Julia Valentine