Obituary

Professor Ji Baohong – 1936–2010

Professor Ji Baohong, the renowned leprosy expert, who was born on 15th March 1936, in Shanghai, died from cancer in Paris on 10th February 2010.

Professor Ji had been committed to leprosy work since the 1950s and was a prolific researcher into leprosy and other mycobacterial diseases. He had been professor of microbiology at the Service de Bactériologie et Hygiène at the Faculté de Médecine Pitié-Salpêtrière, University Paris VI, since 1989. His knowledge of leprosy ranged from clinical aspects, treatment, chemotherapy research to leprosy control and management.

Latterly he had become interested in the control of Buruli ulcer. At his funeral in Paris on 17th February, Professor Jacques Grosset testified to the important role Professor Ji had been playing in researching chemotherapy for this disease. Professor Grosset noted that Professor Ji had helped define the optimal duration of treatment with the combination of rifampicin-streptomycin and that he had assisted with the development of a number of orally administered combined regimens. Professor Grosset expressed his sadness that Professor Ji would not now see the results of his research which would soon become apparent.

Professor Ji was born in Shanghai in 1936 and from an early age loved reading and would read everything he could. In 1954 he was admitted to study medicine at the Shanghai Faculty of Medicine. Following his studies, Professor Ji worked in a leprosy hospital in the suburbs of Shanghai. Between 1959 and 1984 he worked as Medical Doctor, Researcher and Hospital Director at the Shanghai Zeng Yi Hospital in Shanghai. In 1978 he had the opportunity to go to New Delhi in India to participate in an international research seminar about the standardisation of screening for leprosy. The University of Kyoto invited him to Japan as a leprosy research professor in 1979. The following year he visited a dozen scientific research institutes in six European countries and in the United States of America.

For five years, between 1989 and 1994, Professor Ji held the post of Medical Officer and Secretary of THELEP Steering Committee for the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. THELEP was the Scientific Working Group on Chemotherapy of Leprosy, which brought better understanding of the basic issues in chemotherapy of leprosy, built research capacities in many leprosy endemic countries and made important contributions to the development of multidrug therapy.
Professor Ji had also been the Scientific Advisor to ILEP Member, Fondation Raoul Follereau (FRF) for over twenty years. In this role he frequently travelled to West Africa and Madagascar to assist in confirming cases of leprosy, to evaluate the effect of treatment and to train local doctors and health workers in leprosy. He also travelled to attend meetings of other non-governmental organisations, most notably as a member of the ILEP Technical Commission (previously known as the Medical Commission and then the Medico-Social Commission). He served on this Commission from 1992 to the end of 2007. During his last two terms on this Commission he was concerned with the clinical aspects of leprosy, treatment, research and prevention of disability.

Doug Soutar, ILEP General Secretary, noted, ‘Dr Ji was one of those rare people who was able to combine his technical and scientific expertise with a genuine empathy for those affected by leprosy and for the health worker in the field.’

Professor Ji leaves behind his wife Mrs Zhang Wen Zen and his two sons born in 1961 and 1969.

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Professor Ji had also been a frequent contributor, and an excellent referee for Leprosy Review. His comments, when reviewing manuscripts, were invaluable for authors, and he always tried to get the best out of any paper he was reviewing. He was a tremendous source of information on matters relating to chemotherapy and his loss will be greatly felt. Professor Ji was also a great encourager of people and was able to mix with professors and students alike.