

Obituary

Howard Wechsler (1942–1986)

Howard Wechsler, Professor of History and Asian Studies at the University of Illinois, died April 12, 1986, at the age of 44.

Wechsler began his study of China and Chinese history at Brooklyn College, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1962. He then went on to Yale where he studied under Arthur Wright, finishing a dissertation on Wei Cheng in 1970. His professional career was entirely at the University of Illinois. He joined the faculty as an assistant professor in 1969 and was promoted to professor in 1984.

Wechsler was an outstanding teacher whose lectures could hold the attention of a hundred or more students. He not only loved to talk about all facets of traditional Chinese civilization, but he had great empathy for students. He was especially successful in introductory courses for nonmajors, showing a talent and commitment all too rare among scholars.

As a scholar Wechsler concentrated his efforts on the first sixty years of the T'ang dynasty. His *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (Yale, 1974) was followed by three chapters in the *Cambridge History of China* on the political history of the first three reigns of the T'ang and two articles in *T'oung Pao* (1977 and 1980) on Confucianism in the early T'ang government. In 1985 he published his second book, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty*. In working on this book Wechsler read widely on the theory of ritual, especially as developed by anthropologists, and was thus able to approach a major area of Chinese political practice with new insight. After completion of this book, he began another challenging project: a portrait of the city of Ch'ang-an in the early eighth century. Although he had completed much of the research for this book, he had not begun to write it before he died.

Among his many professional activities, Wechsler took greatest pride in his role in helping found the T'ang Studies Society and getting its journal, *T'ang Studies*, off the ground. He was the first president of the Society, a post he held for four years until his death. The field of T'ang studies will miss him as much as we will at the University of Illinois.

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