

## Rev. Albert Chan – Chinese history scholar, linguist

By Vanessa Hua

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Albert Chan, a Jesuit priest and Chinese history scholar who mined for archival treasures around the world, has died. He was 90.

He died from stomach cancer March 10 at the Sacred Heart Jesuit Center in Los Gatos.

Born in 1915, in Pacasmayo, Peru, his father was Chinese and his mother Peruvian. In 1934, he joined the Jesuits in Hong Kong. After initial studies, he completed his bachelor's and master's degrees at Sacred Heart College in Manila, in the Philippines, in 1941.

He was sent to Dublin, Ireland, to finish his theology studies, and was ordained in 1947.

With his special capacity for scholarship and languages, Father Chan was sent to Fordham University in New York for advanced studies in history and then to Harvard University, where he earned a doctorate in Chinese studies in 1954.

Father Chan could read Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, German, French and some Russian. He also spoke Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian.

For 15 years after graduating, Father Chan worked in Hong Kong as a teacher, researcher and

writer. From 1969 to 1976, he researched and wrote at historical archives in Lisbon and Madrid.

In 1976, he returned to Hong Kong, where he taught and worked on a collection of Chinese history books. In 1995, he became a senior research fellow at the University of San Francisco's Ricci Institute, which studies the history of early Christianity in China.

One of his major contributions was the selection and care of 75,000 Chinese books pertaining to Chinese history. More than 80 percent of the volumes were donated from his collection, shipped to the Ricci Institute

from Hong Kong.

His research focus was on the history of the Ming and Qing dynasties, when Western missionaries began making organized journeys to China.

"Five sentences into a conversation, he could relate it to a Chinese proverb or historical event or experience he remembered," said Wu Xiaoxin, director of the Ricci Institute. "He could make vast connections. That's how rich his experience was."

While in San Francisco, he lived both at the USF Jesuit Community and St. Anne's Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

In 2002, due to declining health, he was assigned to the

Sacred Heart Jesuit Center in Los Gatos. Father Chan continued his work, corresponding with other scholars in Europe and elsewhere, and was working on a book.

"He was a scholar of the old school," said Brother Daniel Peterson, the center's archivist, who has been examining Chan's correspondence and notes. "His handwritten notes are in all these languages, and the books are in all these languages, with Post-its and little scribbles in the margins."

He had written widely on the Ming and Manchu periods and Jesuit influence in the Pacific and abroad including the book, "The



**Father Albert Chan** gathered 75,000 books on Chinese history for USF's Ricci Institute.

Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty."

He loved taking walks, greeting and talking with shopkeepers and their families, and browsing secondhand bookstores, such as Green Apple in San Francisco. He also enjoyed cooking, specializing in fusion dishes that combined Cantonese cooking with Latin American flavors.

A Mass was said Thursday at Sacred Heart Jesuit Center in Los Gatos.

# Death Notices