

# Obituary

LLOYD E. EASTMAN

(1929–1993)

With the death of Lloyd Eastman on August 19, after a long bout with cancer, Chinese studies in America has lost a leading scholar of the Republican period, a generous colleague, and a demanding but unselfish teacher.

Raised in North Dakota and Washington, Eastman started late on his academic career. He worked a few years as a machinist before attending Pacific Lutheran College, and then was drafted into the army near the end of the Korean War. There he continued his study of Chinese (begun the year earlier at the University of Washington) before he was sent to Japan, where he worked as a reporter for *Stars and Stripes*. In 1957, after completing three years in the army, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill to attend Harvard University to study Chinese history with John K. Fairbank. Harvard was an exciting place to study about China in those years, and Eastman formed many long-lasting friendships with other China scholars there. He also thrived during his two years in Taiwan, studying at the Cornell Center (predecessor of the Inter-University Program) and working on his dissertation. He met his future wife Margaret there, and returned many times in later years to do research.

Eastman began his teaching career at Connecticut College in 1962. After four years there, he accepted an associate professorship at Ohio State University. A year later, in 1967, he joined the history department at the University of Illinois. At Illinois twenty-six years, he became a central figure in the development of Chinese studies there—not by taking on administrative posts, which he assiduously avoided—but through his intellectual presence, scholarly stature, and good-humored collegiality. His enthusiasm for the larger field of Chinese studies enlivened many an East Asian studies lunch, as he queried people about what they had been up to, told stories of his adventures, discussed current events, or gossiped about the field. Members of both the history and East Asian studies communities recognized him as one of their most distinguished colleagues, a judgment the University confirmed by appointing him a Senior University Scholar in 1989.

Eastman's first book (which he claims to have been badgered into writing by Fairbank), was on a relatively narrow topic in late Ch'ing history (*Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy, 1880–1885* (1967)). Thereafter he moved into twentieth-century history and pioneered the study of Republican China, entering this field at a time when few bibliographical aids existed and access to material in China was virtually impossible. Despite these difficulties, in both *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937* (1974) and *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (1984), Eastman set a new standard for scholarly work on the Nationalist regime. He posed

difficult, often politically charged questions. No less impressive, he offered answers that were challenging and provocative, as evidenced by the main theme of *The Abortive Revolution*, which was, as he put it, “that the Kuomintang, after seizing power in 1927–1928, quickly lost revolutionary momentum and became a military dictatorship primarily concerned with maintaining itself in power.” In his work as a whole, Eastman demonstrated a combination of intellectual ambition, courage, and sanity that made him one of the most highly respected China historians in this country.

Unfortunately, as a result of his illness, Eastman had to discontinue what was to have been a major study of Chiang Kai-shek—a task he was better equipped to undertake, in terms of prior research, bibliographical command, and scholarly contacts, than anyone else in the West. During the final period of his life, he nevertheless managed to edit and write an introduction for a volume entitled *Chiang Kai-shek's Secret Past: The Memoir of His Second Wife, Ch'en Chieh-ju*, which will appear soon from Westview Press.

Eastman expected the same high standards of scholarship from his students that he set for himself. For his courses on Ch'ing and twentieth-century China, he kept up with the burgeoning literature on late imperial and modern China, an achievement reflected in the overview of modern social and economic history he published in 1988 (*Family, Fields, and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in the Society and Economy of China, 1550–1949*). As a graduate student mentor he could be intimidating, yet for all he expected of his students, he gave more in return. Long after students had completed their degrees and moved on to careers at other institutions, Eastman continued to share his knowledge. From Urbana, Taiwan, Nanjing, or wherever, would come notes mentioning the name of a scholar he had met or a new book or useful research source he had encountered.

Eastman's generosity extended to the broader scholarly community. In an academic environment sometimes marred by jealousy and exclusiveness, Eastman was inclusive, ready to welcome newcomers to the field and to share his knowledge of research opportunities. He was always willing to review a research prospectus, read a draft of an article or book, and suggest new ideas or directions. He helped organize the journal *Republican China*, which has come to serve as a sounding board for research ideas and opportunities. Eastman was also active in the Association for Asian Studies, enjoying the chance to see old friends at the annual meetings, and serving on the Board of Directors, Program Committee, and China-Inner Asia Council.

Lloyd Eastman's basic integrity led to a refreshing candor, not only in his assessments of colleagues and their work but also in his judgments about himself. As all who knew him will attest, Lloyd Eastman had a teasing (indeed, sometimes biting) sense of humor. But entirely free of affectation, Eastman was modest and low-keyed, reluctant to impose on others or promote himself. These same qualities were manifest in his many contacts with Chinese scholars in Taiwan and the PRC. He invariably struck a happy balance between bluntness and tact, between forthright articulation of his own views and accommodation of the cultural and political sensitivities of Chinese friends. It is a mark of his evenhandedness and diplomatic skills that Eastman was held in the highest esteem by colleagues in Taiwan, even as he wrote critically of their icons and dissented sharply from their interpretations of twentieth-century Chinese history.

During the last two and one-half years of Lloyd Eastman's life, when he knew his time was limited, he drew for spiritual sustenance on Zhuangzi, and seemed to

enter a remarkable zone of peace and equanimity. In this way, as in his scholarly efforts, he proved a teacher to us all.

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