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Toshiyuki Aoki (1935-2016)
A Tribute

By

Eugene W. Wu

Toshiyuki Aoki, an extremely private person, was a man of few words but he stood tall among his colleagues. His library career began at the East Asian Library of Yale University, first as a cataloger and then the Japanese acquisitions librarian. In 1968 I invited him to join Harvard-Yenching Library as head of the Japanese Collection, succeeding Mr. Shigeharu Isobe who had returned to Japan. He remained in that capacity for thirty-one years until he took early retirement in 1999, two years after I did.

I knew little about him personally in 1968 except that he was very well received by his colleagues at Yale. It didn't take long before I discovered why. "Mr. Aoki," as we all affectionately called him, was a thoughtful, understanding, supportive leader who led by example. He demanded much of himself, and his attention to detail and sense of responsibility inspired both those working under and with him. He was therefore also liked and respected by his colleagues at Harvard-Yenching Library. I found in him a person I could completely trust. When he joined the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Library's Japanese Collection was in need of a larger selection of academic journals and government documents, the latter being an important research source. The Library was also somewhat deficient in pre-war publications, especially in the social sciences. He set out to improve the situation, first by greatly expanding the Library's exchange program with universities and other research organizations in Japan, and later on through a number of cooperative acquisitions projects sponsored by the Eastern Library Consortium composed of East Asian Libraries of Columbia, Princeton, Yale and Harvard Universities, with financial support from the Japan-United States Friendship Commission. Particularly worthy of mention in this connection is the cooperative purchasing program under which the consortium members would exchange, on a quarterly basis, lists of expensive publications each library had purchased, or was in the process of purchasing, in order to avoid unnecessary duplications. The lists were also distributed to some twenty other smaller Japanese collections in other libraries for their information. Another cooperative project was the division of labor in the acquisition of local gazetteers from Japan, with each consortium member taking responsibility acquiring in depth local gazetteers from certain geographic regions, thus increasing the total number of such publications in the U.S. libraries. These cooperative and resource-sharing programs proved very successful, and in 1988, in order to help further stretch the libraries' combined acquisitions budget, Mr. Aoki was asked to be the liaison with the Center for Research

Libraries (CRL) in Chicago, tasked with recommending the purchase of Japanese publications priced over one thousand dollars.

Mr. Aoki also contributed in making the contents of the Japanese Collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library better known. He assisted Mr. John Yung-hsiang Lai, Associate Librarian of the Harvard-Yenching Library, in the publication in 1985 of the Library's Japanese card catalog in thirty-three volumes by Garland Publishing of New York. The book catalog was a major step in making the bibliographic information about the Library's Japanese Collection better known to scholars outside of Cambridge. In 1994 he also co-compiled with Prof. Oka Masahiko of the National Institute of Japanese Literature in Tokyo, a specialist on the literature of the Edo Period and Edo editions, yet another catalog: ハーバード燕京図書館和書目録 (*Early Japanese Books in the Harvard-Yenching Library*, Harvard University) (Tokyo: Yumani Shobo, 1994).

While Mr. Aoki was a very private person, he was passionate about and dedicated to his work. His in-depth knowledge of the history and civilization of Japan made him an exceptional Japanese studies librarian. Never flashy, he went about in his own quiet way and got the job done superbly. The outstanding Japanese collection he spent decades building at the Harvard-Yenching Library will be his legacy to scholars for generations to come. The field has lost a diligent laborer and I a good friend and a respected colleague, but when I close my eyes, I can still hear him playing his piccolo at the staff parties of the Harvard-Yenching Library.





With Eugene Wu
in front of HYL



With Seunghi Paik, Choong-Nam Yoon and
Eugene Wu at a HYL staff party

All photographs courtesy of Eugene Wu