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SSU-YU TENG, 1906-1988

Ssu-yu Teng, University Professor Emeritus of history at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, died on April 5, 1988, in Indianapolis.

A world renowned scholar of Chinese history, Professor Teng will always be remembered for his profound scholarship and accomplishments in that field. During his long academic career, he had also become a close friend to East Asian librarians because of his great contributions to East Asian librarianship through his research and publications and his actual service as a practicing librarian.

One of his books, An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Chinese Reference Works, compiled in cooperation with Knight Biggerstaff, has been since its first appearance in 1936 an indispensable guidebook to almost every East Asian librarian as well as to the vast readership in Chinese studies. His many other bibliographical and biographical works, including Japanese Studies on Japan & the Far East, the articles he contributed to Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644-1912; edited by Arthur W. Hummel (Library of Congress, 1943-44), to the Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644, edited by L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang (Columbia University Press, 1976), and to the Biographical Dictionary of Republican China, edited by Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard (Columbia University Press, 1967), have been equally important reference sources to both East Asian librarians and library users.

As a practicing librarian, he served as Assistant Compiler in the Orientalia Division of the Library of Congress (1937-38) and as Acting Director of the Far Eastern Library of the University of Chicago (1943-45). During the early 1950s he started almost single-handedly the East Asian Collection of the Indiana University Library while teaching as an Associate Professor of history. From its earliest holdings of a few Chinese classic sets such as Ssu pu pei yao, Ku chin t'u shu chi ch'eng, and Ta Ch'ing li ch'ao shih lu, the Collection today has developed into one of the major East Asian collections in the United States. Throughout his years at Indiana, even after his retirement in 1976, Professor Teng remained a devoted and tireless supporter of the library. In a recent letter tracing the history of Indiana's East Asian Collection, he described some of his experiences in trying to get books for the Collection:

After my retirement in 1976, I was determined to raise money for the library.... I went to Taipei in 1979 and met several great publishers and government officials.... I introduced myself as a 'book beggar' who would pay for all his own dining and wining expenses. The results were gratifying. A few publishers volunteered to sell to us several valuable, huge collectanea at 50%, 40%, and 30% discount. These collectanea included the Pai pu ts'ung shu chi ch'eng consisting of 7,150 titles, all facsimiles of choice editions, in 4,145 volumes and 850 bookcases, the Chin tai Chung-kuo shih liao ts'ung k'an and supplements in 1,122 titles, and the Kuo hsüeh chi pen ts'ung shu, a basic series for sinological studies, containing 830 carefully selected and punctuated editions, easy for the use of junior and senior scholars.

His zeal for books resulted from his deep conviction that, in his own words, "Just as live fish without water would die, so a research scholar without access to books could perish."

Since Professor Teng's passing, his family has arranged that contributions by friends to a memorial fund established in his name be used to further the development of the East Asian Collection at Indiana. In appreciation of all the contributions Professor Teng made to the library and its users, a memorial plaque has been made and placed in the East Asian Collection's public reading area.
Born in Hunan, China, on August 12, 1906 (June 23 according to the Chinese lunar calendar), Professor Teng received his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from Yenching University in Peking in 1932 and 1935 respectively and his Ph.D. Degree from Harvard University in 1942. Before coming to Indiana in 1950, he already had taught at other universities in China and the United States. He was given the special title of University Professor by Indiana University in 1966. In his more than fifty years of teaching and research, he published approximately ninety books and articles in English and Chinese. The following is a partial list of some of his frequently cited books:

A Partial List of Ssu-yu Teng's Publications


Ch'ing Administration, Three Studies, in cooperation with J. K. Fairbank. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960. (A reprint was issued by the Press in 1968.)


For a more complete account of Professor Teng's publications, see Teng Ssu-yü hsien sheng hsüeh shu lun wen hsilan chi, compiled by Huang Pei and Tao Chin-sheng. (Taipei: Shih huo ch'u pan she, 1980)

(Thomas H. Lee)
Professor Teng at a friend's house in Bloomington, Indiana, possibly in 1985.