

## Obituary

### George E. Taylor (1905–2000)

Lucian W. Pye

George Taylor, who died on 14 April at the age of 94, was, along with John Fairbank, one of the two pillars in the development of China studies in the United States after the Second World War. He lived through some turbulent and divisive times in China studies but he was always a courtly, gracious gentleman who never in the heat of debate engaged in *ad hominem* attacks. His energies went into institution-building and into helping other scholars achieve their full potential.

George was born in Coventry, England, and received his B.A., M.A. and D. Litt degrees from the University of Birmingham. He came to the United States in 1928 on a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship, first to Johns Hopkins and then on to Harvard to work on Chinese literature and history. In 1930, he went to Beijing on a Harvard-Yenching fellowship for language training and to do research on the Taiping Rebellion. Volunteering to work for the International Famine Relief Organization, he supervised 2,000 workers digging a 40 mile canal off the Huang [Yellow] River near Baotou, Inner Mongolia. From 1933 to 1935, he was a professor of history at the Central Political Institute in Nanjing where he befriended many of the political and intellectual leaders of the Nationalists. In 1936, Taylor returned to England to become a tutor in the University of London External Division, but in 1937 he returned to China with an Oxford University assignment to help Yenching develop a tutorial system.

He was at Yenching when the Japanese attacked and occupied north China and he became an aggressive defender of the Chinese cause. In what became a profound and politically-moulding experience, he and Michael Lindsay (later Lord Lindsay of Birker) spent the summer of 1938 with the Eighth Route Army beyond the Japanese lines in the Hebei and Shanxi countryside. Dr. Hugh Hubbard of the American Board Mission in Baodingfu arranged for their contacts with the Communist guerrillas. Their experience was quite different from that of Edgar Snow who had gone to Yan'an slightly earlier. George began the adventure with idealistic expectations but he was soon doubly disillusioned. First, he was shocked by the intensity of the leaders' commitments to the Soviet Union and their defence of Stalin's purges. Secondly, he was dismayed by the banditry of the guerrillas who extorted and stole from the Chinese civilians. However, he continued to help the guerrillas by shipping medical supplies to them, and thereby came to the attention of the Japanese who were about to expel him when he received an invitation to join the faculty of the University of Washington.

After Pearl Harbor, George Taylor became deputy director of the Office of War Information (OWI) for the Pacific region, and quickly

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demonstrated his extraordinary skills as an imaginative research administrator. While recruiting a multi-disciplinary staff of some 25 scholars, he was one of the first to recognize that anthropology, which up to then had only dealt with primitive peoples, might have the tools and concepts for analysing cultural patterns of advanced societies. He brought America's two leading anthropologists, Alexander Leighton and Clyde Kluckhohn, to Washington. (He and Clyde became close friends; indeed, he subsequently married Clyde's widow Florence Kluckhohn.) He was also the one who persuaded Ruth Benedict to study Japanese cultural patterns and to write *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

After the war, George returned to Seattle to establish the Far Eastern and Russian Institute, which he directed until 1969. Following the same strategy as he used at OWI, George brought to the university such figures as Karl Wittfogel and Franz Michael. He became a national figure in the postwar advancement of area studies in general and China studies in particular. He was an organizing member of the Area Research Committee of the SSRC, and in 1959 he was appointed chairman of the newly established Joint Committee on Contemporary China of the ACLS and the SSRC. He served on two State Department advisory panels and the board of the Fulbright Commission.

During the McCarthy period, George Taylor was a calm and steady voice in support of the Nationalists and critical of the Communists. In that time of high passions, Taylor accepted many blows but he himself never stooped to making personal attacks. When Deng Xiaoping initiated his reforms, George felt vindicated in his belief that Mao had taken China down a disastrous road. Indeed, throughout Mao's rule George's strong sense of empathy made him keenly feel the personal sufferings of the Chinese people: first, it was the landlords, then the intellectuals during the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and then the peasants during the Great Leap Forward and, finally, all the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution. Whereas for many others these were only policy turns, for George they were all tremendous human tragedies.

After retirement, George threw his organizing energies and skills into making the Washington State Council of International Trade the pre-eminent regional trade organization in America, thereby bringing to Seattle the IMF and the World Bank meetings (and their unruly protesters). He was also president of the Washington State Oenological Association for connoisseurs of wine-making and tasting. George Taylor was the author, co-author or editor of 12 books, and a play based on his China experiences which was produced off-Broadway.