

OBITUARIES

DERK BODDE (1909–2004)

Professor Derk Bodde passed away peacefully in his sleep on November 3, 2003, in his home in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He was 94 years old. Active intellectually and socially until the very end, his death represents a great loss to the academic community and particularly to the field of Chinese studies. Many colleagues and students benefited from his broad learning, his wise counsel, and his friendly demeanor. He had kept up a meaningful relationship with all of them long after his retirement in 1975.

From his early years, Professor Bodde was committed to scholarly learning and writing, passions that remained with him to the end. From the age of fourteen, he contributed beautifully-written field reports, diaries, and essays in his school journal, the *St. Nicholas Magazine*, texts that are still well worth reading today. His travel diaries of visits to the Borubudur Buddhist temple, to the Bromo volcanoes on the Island of Java, and of several trips inside China (published 1923–1927), demonstrate his pristine literary qualities—terseness, conciseness, attention to concrete detail, logical strength, mastery of literary composition. These writing qualities reached their maturity in his later sinological studies. It comes as no surprise that he majored in literature at Harvard University and that his first major research project as an undergraduate student dealt with a problem of literary criticism, namely, “Shakspere and The Ireland Forgeries” (1930), a published Honors Thesis which was reprinted several times.

As a boy, from 1919 to 1922, Professor Bodde had the good fortune of spending three years in China, when his father was invited to teach physics at Nanyang College near Shanghai (now called Jiaotong daxue or College of Communications). While he was studying at Harvard, the founding of the Harvard-Yenching Institute in 1928 may have awakened reminiscences of his childhood experiences in China. Professor Bodde was among the first few students who registered in the new and well-funded Chinese program. A year later, he obtained a two-year fellowship to study in China, renewable for four years, and which he managed to extend to six years (1931–1937).

Professor Bodde’s last fellowship years in Peking were very eventful and productive. In 1935 he married Galia Speshneff, who had immigrated to China from Russia after the Russian Revolution. He published an an-

notated translation of Tun Li-chen's *Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking, As Recorded in the Yenching Sui-shih-chi* (1936) as well as the first volume of Fung Yu-lan's bulky *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (1937). During that period he also wrote most of his dissertation, entitled *China's First Unifier: A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssü (280?–208 B.C.)*. While there, he met Professor J. J. L. Duyvendak, chairman of the Department of Chinese Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands. At his invitation, Professor Bodde went to Leiden in the fall of 1937, where he obtained his Ph.D. in 1938. His dissertation was published that same year by E.J. Brill.

Starting in the fall of 1938, Professor Bodde began a long and outstanding career as Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, a career that ended with his retirement in 1975. During his tenure, he set up the teaching program and the Chinese library at the University. Under his directorship, the undergraduate and graduate programs became (and still are) one of the foremost departments of East Asian Studies (Chinese and Japanese) in the United States. Although carrying progressively heavier teaching and administrative loads, Professor Bodde managed to keep up his research and publication pace. He produced some one hundred articles and more than a dozen monographs on a variety of subjects relating to China: philosophy, language, literary criticism, mythology, feudalism, law, festivals, science and technology, social and political history, religion, and so on. His research approach represented a well-balanced blend of philology, history and sociology, with substantial translations of primary Chinese sources. For Professor Bodde, understanding China's historical development was a *sine qua non* to understanding contemporary China. The best path to China's past was the intelligent and informed reading of its written tradition, not only philosophical, but also social, political, and religious. One aspect of Professor Bodde's learning that always amazed me was that he always knew exactly where to find the sound relevant information in both Chinese and Western sources on any sinological question. Being well read in several Western languages, particularly French and Russian (in this case, he had inside help), it is as if he had classified all the information he ever read in an orderly and ready-to-use format.

During the war years, Professor Bodde, like many of his colleagues in Chinese studies, was asked to work for the Office of Strategic Services' Research Division as well as for other government agencies, to provide background information for American policy towards China. Some of this research was published in the form of short papers (*Leaflets*) on language, society, communications, religions, and so on.

In 1948, Professor Bodde was among the first recipients of the new

Fulbright Fellowships Program for Study in China. Accompanied by his wife and child (Theodore), he spent an eventful year in Peking from the summer of 1948 to the summer of 1949, witnessing the gradual collapse of the Nationalist government and the occupation of Peking by the Red Army. This was the subject of his best known publication, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution* (1950). He also published in 1950 with Galia Speshneff a study of China's influence on Tolstoy, entitled *Tolstoy and China* (Princeton University Press, 1950). But the main purpose of his stay in Peking was to finish the annotated translation of the second volume of Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*, which he completed amidst the turmoil, and which was published by Princeton in 1953. The two-volume set became standard reading for generations of undergraduate and graduate students of Chinese philosophy.

In the following years, Professor Bodde became more and more concerned with, and critical of, American policy toward China and Vietnam. With the beginning of United States military involvement in Vietnam (1963), he publicly voiced his opposition to the initiatives several times in the Philadelphia media and in the *New York Times* and he participated in several gatherings of concerned scholars. His commitment to social issues, with their many ramifications especially after the McCarthy era, did not distract him, however, from his main task of research and teaching; quite the contrary. He published major studies on "Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy" (1953), "Feudalism in China" (1956), "Myths of Ancient China" (1961), as well as full-length monographs on original topics, such as *Law in Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Case translated from the Hsing-an hui-lan*, with Clarence Morris (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967) and *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances during the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Princeton University Press, 1975).

Professor Bodde had a long-standing interest in the multi-volume project of Dr. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1951–present). The two scholars corresponded with each other and Dr. Needham traveled several times to Philadelphia. On his retirement in 1975, Professor Bodde spent three years in Cambridge, England, to work with Dr. Needham. The result of this research, one of Professor Bodde's last major sinological projects, was published in 1991 as *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science: The Intellectual and Social Background of Chinese Science and Technology* (University of Hawaii Press). The book represents a kind of summing up of the author's understanding of China's intellectual development, a topic he had broached several times during his career in published articles such as those on "Chinese science" and "Laws of nature".

As the foremost Western scholar on the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.) and the First Emperor, Professor Bodde contributed “The Ch’in State and Empire” chapter in the first volume of *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (1986).

An important part of Professor Bodde’s scholarly output was in the guise of book reviews. During his academic career, one could hardly find one important work published in his wide-ranging field of specializations that he did not comment upon. His incisive reviews, both critical and helpful, showed that he had read the book thoroughly and done *ad hoc* research on the topic in order to write his review and had not sought simply to add another title to his impressive list.

Professor Bodde’s outstanding contribution to the field of sinology as a researcher, professor, teacher, writer, and administrator was publicly acknowledged on several occasions. Among other honors, he was elected President of the American Oriental Society, was chosen as the first Dr. Sun Yat-sen Distinguished Visiting Professor of Chinese Studies at Georgetown University (1980–1981), and was the first recipient of the Distinguished Scholarship Award of the Association for Asian Studies (Philadelphia, 1985).

As I think back on the many years I knew Professor Bodde as a teacher, a mentor, and as a friend, I am sure that I will continue now as before to feel his stimulating and critical presence every time I sit at my keyboard to write about China: “Charles, you should check this”. His granddaughter Jennifer said it best: “One is Professor Bodde’s graduate student for life.” This is perhaps the best way not to miss him too much.

Charles Le Blanc