
Obituary

Søren Christian Egerod in Memoriam

Dr. Phil. Søren Christian Egerod, Professor of East Asian Languages at the University of Copenhagen, passed away on April 21, 1995, 71 years old. His death came as a shock to his many friends and colleagues, who had known nothing of the severe illness, fibrosis of the lungs, which he had courageously fought and kept secret from them during the last two years of his life.

Søren Egerod was born July 8, 1923, in Copenhagen. As it turned out, he was a born linguist and early attracted to Oriental studies, adding private lessons in Sanskrit to his ordinary curriculum while still at school. From 1942 to 1945 he studied Greek, Latin and linguistics at the University of Copenhagen, aiming at a degree in classical philology or in comparative linguistics. Concurrently, however, he also attended a course in Mongolian and, since the university did not offer courses in East Asian languages, took private lessons in Chinese from a Mr. Hsu from Shanghai then living in Copenhagen. In 1945, as soon as it was possible to go abroad, Søren Egerod went to Paris in order to study Chinese and Mongolian at the *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes*. None of this was simple or easy: Mr. Hsu's Shanghai speech was of course quite different from Mandarin Chinese, and at the "*École des langues O*" teaching was old-fashioned and, due to the recent war, severely hampered by lack of teaching materials.

Fortune favours the brave, however: In order to promote Chinese studies in Scandinavia, the Rockefeller Foundation in 1945 offered to finance the education of one student of Sinology from each of the Nordic countries; they were to be selected by the universities in Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen and if they "behaved properly" they were later to be employed by their home universities. Søren Egerod applied and was selected to join the programme as the Danish grantee, so in 1946 he went to Stockholm to be taught by the distinguished Swedish sinologue, Bernhard Karlgren, together with a small group of Rockefeller grantees and others: Henry Henne (Norway), Else Glahn (Denmark), O.B. Andersen, Sven Broman,

Göran Malmqvist and Hans Bielenstein (Sweden), and Aulis Joki (Finland).

In 1948 Søren Egerod received the Fil.Kand. degree in Sinology, Greek and Sanskrit from the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala; the next two years were spent in China, Hong Kong and Macao where he collected material concerning Chinese dialects; his Rockefeller education was concluded with studies in Chinese, Tibetan and Thai at the University of California at Berkeley. After a final year in Stockholm, he was awarded the degree of Fil.Lic. under Bernhard Karlgren in 1952.

Returning to Berkeley, Søren Egerod spent four busy years there carrying on research, teaching Chinese and Indonesian, and preparing his doctoral thesis, *The Lungtu Dialect: A Descriptive and Historical Study of a South Chinese Idiom*, which earned him the degree of Dr.Phil. in Linguistics from the University of Copenhagen in 1956. In 1957 he was appointed Lecturer, and in 1958 Professor, the first chair of Far Eastern languages ever established in Denmark. His only predecessor in the field was Kurt Wulff, who from 1928 until his death eleven years later had held a position as Docent (university lecturer) in East Asian Languages with special reference to Chinese.

Søren Egerod immediately set about to revive, consolidate and expand the area of East Asian studies in Denmark, as well as in Scandinavia generally. In 1960 the East Asian Institute (in January 1994 renamed Department of Asian Studies) was established as part of the University of Copenhagen and in 1968 a Nordic institution, the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies (the present Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), also situated in Copenhagen, was inaugurated. Over the years, Søren Egerod was director of one or both of these institutions for long periods, and at the Department of Asian Studies he held the chair of East Asian Languages with special reference to Chinese until his retirement, August 1, 1993. Among the numerous other tasks he took on were those of being for many years editor of the Scandinavian journal, *Acta Orientalia*, and co-editor of the international journal published by The Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia*, as well as serving as president of the European Association of Chinese Studies and of the Board of the Danish Chapter of P.E.N.

Søren Egerod's research covered a wide field and his scholarly publications are extensive in scope as well as in number. The majority are devoted to linguistic topics: historical and contemporary studies of Chinese phonology, grammar and dialectology; studies of the vocabulary and typology of Southeast Asian languages such as Akha, Mlabri, Radé, Thai, Malay and Atayal; and reflections on typological versus genetic linguistic comparisons and classifications, based on data from a great number of Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages. Other works deal with Chinese literature, China's religions, and the history of Southeast Asia. Finally, Søren Egerod's publications include translations into English or Danish of selections from Chinese philosophical texts, Chinese and Thai poetry, stories from Akha, Radé and Atayal folklore, a Portuguese report concerning a drunken sea captain of a Danish ship misbehaving in Siam in 1703, as well as Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* and *The Te of Piglet*. Whether academic studies or literary translations, these writings all bear the imprint of the humanistic outlook, linguistic virtuosity and artistic temperament of their author.

In his student days, Søren Egerod felt both fortunate and proud to study under a number of prominent scholars whose work and commitment he later often referred to: Carsten Høeg, Hartvig Frisch, Louis Hjelmslev, Vilhelm and Kaare Grønbech; Paul Demiéville; Bernhard Karlgren; Ferdinand Lessing, Mary Haas, Peter Boodberg and Y.R. Chao (to whose wife, an expert and celebrated cook with no flair for barbaric tongues such as Danish, he was simply Mr. Eggroll). Later, when he took up teaching himself, Søren Egerod passed on this legacy of knowledge, insight and dedication, lecturing for many years and at various times on modern and classical Chinese, Cantonese, Thai, Malay/Indonesian, Chinese linguistics, and Chinese literature and philosophy. Søren Egerod was a brilliant and very inspiring teacher, whose courses opened up not only new perspectives and more stringent criteria but also previously unknown susceptibilities and greater tolerances than most students had met with before.

When in 1990 a group of his former students published a festschrift to him on the occasion of his sixty-seventh birthday, they gave it the title of the first chapter of the Confucian Analects, *The Master Said: To Study and...* They felt that Søren Egerod's work discipline and love of learning were truly impressive, but that obvi-

ously they were only part, even though the primary part, of his many interests and colourful and vivacious personality. Søren Egerod was an avid reader of many kinds of literature; an open-minded and perceptive traveler; an eager philatelist; a generous host, who was and enjoyed good company; a keen and witty conversationalist; and a gifted poet and novelist. From 1969 to 1983 he published a novel and three volumes of poetry in Danish, all highly imaginative and thoughtful reflections of adventures and ideas culled from his own life, - wise, humorous, sardonic, and sad.

To many, and in many ways, Søren Egerod's death marks the end of an era.

Birthe Arendrup
University of Copenhagen