

IN MEMORIAM: TSO-HSIN CHENG, 1906–1998

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Tso-hsin Cheng (the name is sometimes transliterated as Zheng Zuoxin), Corresponding Fellow of the AOU since 1978 and Honorary Fellow since 1984, died 27 June 1998 at the Beijing Hospital at age 92. He was founder of the Beijing Natural History Museum, an Honorary Fellow of the British Ornithologists' Union, and Honorary President of the 22nd International Ornithological Congress, 1994–1998.

Cheng's long and illustrious career in ornithology was well founded in his early age at home. He was born 18 November 1906 in Changle County, Fujian Province. From childhood, Cheng loved nature, especially the colorful birds in the forests. When in primary school, he learned to identify many birds by their calls. He entered the Fujian Christian University (FCU) in Fuzhou City in 1922 and graduated with his B.Sc. in 1926.

Keen to pursue his advanced studies in the United States, he was admitted to the Biology Department of the Graduate School of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor under Professor Peter Olaus Okkelberg. Cheng's thesis was titled "The Germ Cell History of *Rana cantabrigensis* Baird." In June 1930 he received his Doctorate, and a special prize, the Sigma Xi Key Award, a gold key in a brocade box.

In September 1930 Cheng returned to Fuzhou as Professor and Director of the Department of Biology of FCU. In 1934 he was one of the founders of the China Zoological Society. He was invited to the United States as a Visiting Professor in 1945–1946 under the sponsorship of the Cultural Relationship Bureau of the State Department. On his return to FCU he became Dean of Science and Dean of both Undergraduate and Graduate studies. He published *Checklist of Chinese Birds*, which was the first checklist of Chinese birds written in Chinese.

In 1950 he moved to Beijing to take charge of curating bird specimens in the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica, and in 1951 he founded the Peking Natural History Museum. Since 1953, he has been Director of the Ornithological Department, Research Fellow of the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and editor-in-chief of *Acta Zoologica Sinica*. From 1954 to 1961 he was concurrently Professor at Peking University, Beijing Normal University, North-west University, Lanzhou University, and Shandong University.

For more than 60 years, Cheng undertook

field work and research in ornithology and conservation. He published more than ten million words in 30 books, 20 monographs, 150 scientific papers, and 260 popular articles. For example, he was first author of *A Synopsis of the Avifauna of China* (1987) and of 6 of the proposed 14 volumes of *Fauna Sinica, Aves*; for this he received in Beijing in May 1989 the Special Conservation Achievement Award from the National Wildlife Federation (USA).

In the first one-and-a-half decades of his career in New China, from 1950 to 1966, he carried out avifauna studies in remote areas such as the southern part of Yunnan, Hainan Island, Tibet, and the middle part of Qingling Mountain; one result was the description of 15 new subspecies. In 1955 he published *A Distributional List of Chinese Birds* in two volumes, and in 1963 *China's Economic Fauna: Birds*. All three volumes were translated from Chinese and published in English by the United States Department of the Interior.

From 1970 to 1980 he concentrated on volumes of *Fauna Sinica, Aves*. From 1980 to 1985 he led his students and colleagues in studies of the ecological biology of endangered species; for this he received the Second-class Award from the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). He also promoted studies of "hot points" in avifauna of local provinces throughout China. In 1959 he and his colleagues compiled *The Zoogeographical Regions of China*, in which they analyzed the distribution of endemic species, dominant species, and the main economic species of birds and other animals. Their identification of Qingling Mountain in the middle of China as the boundary between the Palearctic and Oriental realms has been adopted by most scientists. His long-term studies of bird specimens included subspecies differentiation among scimitar-babblers (*Pomatorhinus*) and the Silver Pheasant (*Lophura nycthemera*).

In his last decade, Cheng gradually shifted his main attention to bird speciation and conservation problems. Despite his advanced age, he was as energetic as ever. Volumes of the *Fauna Sinica, Aves* were published, one by one. In 1978 he attended the Woodland Grouse Symposium in Inverness, Scotland, his first visit to a foreign country after the Cultural Revolution. In January 1980 he led a delegation to the International Conference on Waterfowl and Cranes in Hokkaido, Japan. In November 1980

Cheng was elected by the CAS as the main delegate in negotiations between China and Japan concerning protection of migratory birds. Agreement was reached; indeed, it was the first time China had signed an agreement with another country concerning birds. In April 1980 four individuals who had received their doctorates in the United States were sent by the State Council as a formal delegation to visit the United States. In September 1981 a second visit to the United States, by the China Association for Science and Technology, discussed issues concerning the Giant Panda. During that visit, on 27 September, Cheng visited the University of Michigan, where President Harold T. Shapiro presented him with a Certificate of Merit for Sciences.

Although China is rich in natural resources, with 1,244 species of birds alone, the number of bird researchers is very small. Until he was 88 years of age, Cheng supervised doctoral and postdoctoral students. Most of his students have become professors and first-class researchers, distributed throughout China and overseas. Even when ill in hospital, he would receive articles by amateurs asking for his advice, and his children would write his replies.

Cheng was an ardent advocate and supporter of the work of the Natural History Museum, which he served as Vice Director from 1981 to 1985.

Cheng was a man of great personal reputation, earnest in his science pursuits, brilliant but humble, honest and upright, standing on principles, not yielding to pressure. With his open heart he was generous to seniors and helpful to juniors and people from all walks of life, especially anyone with an interest in ornithology, at home and abroad.

The passing of Cheng is an irreparable loss to his family, to the Institute of Zoology, CAS, to the Beijing Natural History Museum, and to the circle of ornithologists in China as well as to colleagues throughout the world. Nevertheless, the branch of science that he promoted and to which he devoted himself, especially the China Ornithological Society, will forever prosper and progress. Moreover, his contributions to ornithology, especially to evolution, will be permanently recorded in the history of Chinese ornithology. Cheng will forever live in our hearts.

Cheng is survived by his wife, Lydia Cheng, two sons, and two daughters.