

Obituaries

MAY MAYKO EBIHARA

(May 12, 1934–April 23, 2005)

May Mayko Ebihara, professor emeritus of Anthropology at Lehman College, City University of New York, and the CUNY Graduate Center, died April 23, 2005, after a struggle with respiratory illness. She was born in 1934 in Portland, Oregon; during World War II, she and her family were sent with other Japanese Americans to an internment camp in Idaho. She received her bachelor's degree from Reed College in 1955 and a PhD in 1968 from Columbia University, where she studied with Conrad Arensberg, Margaret Mead, and Morton Fried. She taught at Bard College from 1961 to 1964, briefly at Mt. Holyoke, and thereafter at Lehman College. In 1959–60, May was the first American anthropologist to conduct ethnographic research in Cambodia—and she would be the last to do so for nearly three decades. Her two-volume dissertation, "Svay, a Khmer Village in Cambodia," provided a remarkably detailed picture of village life, with analysis of social structure and kinship, agriculture, religion, and political organization. But May could not have known that the world she described would soon be shattered or that her description of village life would become the foundation for academic understandings of prewar Cambodian society—in contrast to the reign of terror of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. Throughout the war years of the 1970s and 1980s, May had no information from the people in Svay, though she knew from news accounts that the area had been the scene of heavy fighting. When the country began to open up again after the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces in 1989, May returned and conducted research in the village on several visits between 1989 and 1996. Conducting the interviews was heart wrenching; of the 139 villagers she had known who were still living in 1975, 70 people—50 percent—had died during the three-and-a-half years of Khmer Rouge rule. The casualties included her adopted parents and grandparents. The people of Svay explained what had happened since she had left thirty years before, the terrible suffering they had endured during the Khmer Rouge years and how they were rebuilding their lives and their community. Standing in a thatch hut with a dirt floor, the son of her adopted grandparents shook his head sadly, remembering the large wooden house on stilts that had been his home as a young man. "Things are not what they were," he said. The people of Svay recognized May as their witness. She was from their old world, "the time before," now part of their idealized memories. She knew the scale of their loss because she understood what their lives were like before; she had respect for the memories of their loved ones. One thing that she could do for them was return copies of pictures she had taken in 1959–60. People wept to see the faces of their lost mothers and grandparents and children; all their photos had been lost in the war and revolution.

A new generation of Western and Khmer scholars have come of age using May's body of work as a cornerstone for their own. Her articles on residence patterns, pre-

war Theravada Buddhist practice and gender roles, and post–Pol Pot Cambodia are classics. May also contributed to the reemergence of Cambodian studies through her service on the Social Science Research Council’s Indochina Studies Committee. She was an active member of the Thailand/Laos/Cambodia Committee of the Association for Asian Studies. Besides her important and meticulous work as an ethnographer and scholar, May was a caring teacher and a generous mentor. She was also a gracious, classy human being. May is survived by her husband, Marvin Gelfand, and her sons, Adam and Jeremy. Buddhist ceremonies were held in Svay Village, Kandal Province, Cambodia, June 10 and 11, 2005.

JUDY LEDGERWOOD
Northern Illinois University

ELGIN HEINZ

(July 25, 1913–April 26, 2005)

We sadly mourn the passing of Elgin Heinz, who died on April 26, 2005, at his home in San Rafael, California, at the age of ninety-one. Although his body had become frail in recent years, Elgin’s mind remained as sharp as ever. Those of us who looked forward to his annual winter solstice message reviewing the state of the planet were well aware of this, and we will sorely miss his insight, his wit, and his humanity.

Elgin’s was, to say the least, a remarkable life. He was born in 1913 on the campus of Tsinghua University, where his father was one of the original faculty members of the then new institution set among former Qing royal gardens. In his early years, he was as fluent in Chinese as he was in English (much to the chagrin of his relatives when he first visited the United States). After Elgin learned to read, the majority of his early education consisted of reading through the Tsinghua library and leading something of a “Young Indiana Jones” life of curious investigation exploring the Chinese countryside. David Weitzman recalls how Elgin had enchanted us with stories “describing his riding through villages, with his bright red hair, green eyes, and pale, freckled skin meeting and terrifying Chinese farmers who had never seen a white man before, certainly not one who looked like him. He was sure they saw him as the red-haired devil. An interesting image given our memories of the soft spoken, gentle Elgin we knew in his later years.”

Elgin entered the University of California, Berkeley, in 1930. Searching for a major in a department that did not compartmentalize knowledge, he chose public speaking because he could take courses across many disciplines using his major to provide framework and form. Again he was to haunt the library, even reporting that he obtained the floor plan from Building and Grounds so that he could navigate its many corridors. Elgin’s love affair with books never ended, and he had a remarkable collection, even adding a room to his house to accommodate his ever-expanding library. In 1934 he received his bachelor’s degree and later earned a graduate degree in history from San Francisco State University

In the fall of 1935, Elgin started teaching English and public speaking at Balboa High School in San Francisco and subsequently taught geography and history. He spent the next forty years as a teacher in the San Francisco schools, interrupted only