

Obituary

STEVEN C. AVERILL

(April 1, 1945 – September 17, 2004)

On September 17, 2004, Steven Averill died after a long illness. It is no exaggeration to say that Steve was among the most widely liked and respected scholars in the field of Chinese studies. From those who remember him from his graduate student days and his extensive research sojourns in Taiwan and Japan to his fellow conferees at numerous academic meetings and his colleagues and students throughout his teaching career, all were deeply affected by Steve's warm friendliness, his ready availability to help others, his wry humor, and above all his basic decency. He will be very sorely missed.

Steve received his doctorate under the guidance of Sherman Cochran at Cornell University in 1982. He taught for nearly a decade at Kenyon College and since 1988 served as associate professor of History at Michigan State University. In the latter post, he played a major role in bringing to the United States and mentoring in Western historiography bright young scholars from China who have gone on to important careers of their own, among them Qin Shao of the College of New Jersey and Di Wang of Texas A&M University. Steve was also very active in the Association for Asian Studies, serving in a variety of leadership posts in that organization.

His lifelong research was on the social history of the Jiangxi highlands, concentrating on the revolutionary era of the 1920s and 1930s but stretching back to find the roots of that revolution as early as the Ming dynasty. A perfectionist, Steve was reluctant to release for publication the bulk of his research until he felt fully confident that he had gotten it right. He did, however, allow the appearance of portions of that research along the way in article form. Each of these articles was beautifully written, and many were genuinely pathbreaking. Among them stands out his 1981 *China Quarterly* article, "The New Life in Action," which for many of us restored the Nationalist New Life Movement to the serious historical analysis that it demands and offered telling insight into the failures of the Nationalist social project on the ground. His 1983 *Modern China* article, "The Shed People and the Opening of the Yangzi Highlands," was a pioneering foray into what has since become a major area of scholarly interest: the social tensions, ecological problems, and processes of identity formation arising out of the reclamation of upland areas in the late imperial era. His 1991 article in *Peasant Studies*, "Moral Economy and the Chinese Revolution," has had a significant influence on ongoing attempts to conceptualize theoretically the Maoist experiment in its early years.

During his illness, Steve worked diligently to bring together the entirety of his research into a monograph that would finally meet his own stringent demands for scholarly quality. The result, *Revolution in the Highlands: The Jinggangshan Revolutionary Base Area*, will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in 2005.

He is survived by his wife, Lisa Morrisette.

WILLIAM T. ROWE
Johns Hopkins University

