

In Memoriam: Ching-yi Dougherty

To: UCSC Community

From: Georges Van Den Abbeele, Dean of Humanities

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By [Public Information Office](#), Staff Writer



Courtesy Special Collections, UC Santa Cruz

It is with great sadness that I announce the death of Ching-yi Hsu Dougherty, Senior Lecturer Emeritus of Mandarin Chinese, who passed away at her home in Oakland on October 13. She was 96.

Dougherty, a founding fellow of Merrill College and one of its first Resident Preceptors, began her career at UCSC in 1967. She was the first chair of the UCSC interdisciplinary East Asian Studies committee. Dougherty also served as Chair of the Faculty at Merrill. Following a reorganization in 1979, she was a Cowell fellow before retirement in 1981.

While at UCSC, Dougherty gained a reputation among her peers as a pioneer by teaching the pinyin romanization system and simplified Chinese characters adopted by the People's Republic of China, rather than Wade-Giles romanization and complex characters still used in Taiwan and Hong Kong. More than a decade passed before most other Chinese language programs followed Dougherty's lead. Dougherty also led in the introduction and regular use of Chinese characters beginning with the first lesson, a practice hitherto thought too difficult for beginning students but now widely adopted.

As Marlowe Hood, a former student who later provided the world with the first on-the-scene reports of the 1989 Tian An Men Incident, wrote when Dougherty was awarded the UCSC Alumni Association's Distinguished Teacher of the Year Award in 1981:

"Mrs. Dougherty's contribution to education is multi-faceted. She has devised her own system of Chinese instruction for the first and second year levels. Familiar with the methods used in most other institutions, I find hers superior. She encourages competence in both simplified and complex characters. Her grammatical and syntactical formulas-which at first seemed overly structured to me-have made it possible to decipher the rather stylized writings of Mainland and Taiwan publications alike. Mrs. Dougherty is, in short, widely recognized for her original contribution to teaching method and for the consistent high caliber of her students. Most remarkably, the entire Chinese program at UCSC has been conceived, created and executed by her

alone."

Living on campus among students throughout her career, Dougherty was known as an easily approachable mentor. While modestly claiming no special skills for herself, Dougherty took great pride in the disproportionate number of prestigious fellowships and awards her long-time students obtained during her career. A remarkable number of Dougherty's students went on to their own distinguished careers in Chinese language and literature or related fields, including UCSC Professor of Literature Christopher Connery.

Dougherty was born in 1913 in Beijing, China. She received her undergraduate degree in education from prestigious Yenching University, later made part of Peking University. Her father, one of China's first western-educated dentists, did not approve of her attending a coeducational college, and wanted her to attend an all-women teacher's college instead. Demonstrating the self-reliance evident throughout her long life, Dougherty arranged her own intensive preparation program, quietly followed it, and sat for the difficult entrance exam. For the rest of her life, Dougherty treasured the look of astonishment and then pride upon her father's face when one morning, while perusing the newspaper, he glanced at the exam results and found, at the very top of the list of successful candidates, his own daughter's name.

She arrived in the United States in 1938 to do graduate work at Mills College in Oakland, California, as the Japanese occupation of northern China had disrupted her studies there. While attending Mills and living at International House in Berkeley, she met her future husband, Ellsworth C. Dougherty, who had graduated from Berkeley with an AB in Zoology in 1939 at age 18, and was then working on his PhD in Biology (awarded 1944). He would go on to get his MD degree at age 25. In 1944, the couple was forced to go to Seattle, Washington to marry because California still had anti-miscegenation laws. This attracted some press attention both within the United States and without. The Japanese repeated the story in China as proof that Americans did not view Chinese as equals. Dougherty's husband, Ellsworth, was considered a visionary and prolific researcher in comparative biology before his untimely death in 1965.

In the 1940's, during World War II, she taught the Chinese language to American servicemen on their way to the Pacific theater. After the war ended, Dougherty taught Mandarin at the Department of Oriental Languages at UC Berkeley until the birth of her son, Brian. In the 1950's, Dougherty operated a small retail business in Berkeley. From 1960 until her arrival at UCSC, Dougherty was an instrumental part of the Berkeley Chinese-English Machine Translation Project. At the time, the computer input of Chinese characters was a cumbersome process, requiring the operator to recall almost 10,000 different telegraphic codes for individual characters. The team developed a system allowing computer operators to vastly improve accessibility and efficiency. Dougherty also made major contributions in syntactic coding for word combinations and the writing of Chinese recognition grammar for machine translation. Dougherty, together with Sydney M. Lamb, and Samuel E. Martin, co-edited Chinese Character Indexes.

In her fourteen years at UCSC, she shaped the lives and careers of generations of UCSC students, and is remembered with special fondness by UCSC faculty, staff, and alumni.

Ching-yi Hsu Dougherty is survived by her son Brian, daughter-in-law Phyllis, and grandchildren Adam and Adriana.

Special thanks to RW Rogers, UCSC alumnus and former student of Ching-yi Dougherty, for this obituary notice.

