

James Bosson

James Evert Bosson, Associate Professor Emeritus in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures (formerly Oriental Languages) at UC Berkeley, died peacefully at his home in Berkeley on November 30, 2016, after a long illness. He was 83.

Bosson joined the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley in 1963 to teach Mongolian, Manchu, and Tibetan language and linguistics. Many of today's specialists in these languages trained directly under Bosson. When he was first asked to teach Manchu, there were few available teaching materials, so he compiled his own. He was instrumental in maintaining UC Berkeley's leading role in Manchu studies. His 1964 textbook *Modern Mongolian: A Primer and Reader* (Indiana University Press) remains the standard for English-speaking learners of Mongolian to this day. In 2014, the government of Mongolia awarded Bosson the Order of the Polar Star for his contributions to Mongolian studies in the United States.

Bosson researched and translated texts in Mongolian, Tibetan, and Manchu, and became one of the founding editors of *Saksaha, A Journal of Manchu Studies* when first proposed in 1993. He published several groundbreaking works, including *A Buriat Reader* (Indiana University, 1962) and *A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels: The Subhasitaratnanidhi of Sa Skya Pandita in Tibetan and Mongolian* (Indiana University Press, 1969). In later years he contributed to exhibit and conference volumes, including "Highlights of the Manchu-Mongolian Collections" in *The Treasures of the Yenching: Seventy Fifth Anniversary Exhibit Catalog of the Harvard-Yenching Library* (Harvard College Library, 2003) and Patricia Berger, ed., *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan* (San Francisco Asian Art Museum, 1995).

He published scholarly works in general Central Asian and Chinese studies, but is especially noted as one of the few American scholars of the second half of the 20th century whose work focused on Mongolia. He built upon the legacy of Ferdinand Lessing, who came to Berkeley in 1935, and who published, in 1960, the still-standard *Mongolian-English Dictionary* (now in its third reprinting by Routledge Press). Bosson edited the scholarly *Mongolia Society Bulletin* from 1965 to 1967.

Born in Red Wing, Minnesota, in 1933, Bosson had discovered inner Asia as a high school student in Stockholm, after his Swedish parents returned to their native land prior to World War II. He became familiar with the textbook of Mongolian published by the Swedish missionary to Mongolia Folke Boberg (1896-1987), and took an interest in the studying the language. After the family returned to the U.S. in the late 1940s, Bosson earned his BA degree (1954) at Brigham Young University under the polymath linguist-historian Hugh Nibley. He was later accepted to the graduate program in Far Eastern languages and literature at the University of Washington, where he studied with Nicholas Poppe, the leading specialist in Mongolian and the wider Altaic language family in the United States during the mid-20th century. From 1961 to 1963 he added to his knowledge of Altaic languages during a two-year Fulbright supported residence in Turkey, where he worked on his dissertation and various other publications as he studied yet another Altaic language in depth. Bosson completed his PhD in 1965, after having already been hired by Berkeley to teach Central Asian languages. He remained active at Berkeley until the late 1990's, with visiting teaching stints at Harvard, and retired to his home in Berkeley as Associate Professor Emeritus.

He is survived by his wife, Ann-Britt, and their daughter Jenny Bosson, as well as by two children from his first marriage, Monica and Nicholas Bosson.