In Memoriam: Chester C. Wang 1920-2016

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IN MEMORIAM

Chester C. Wang
1920-2016

Dr. Chester C. Wang passed away on Friday, January 22, 2016, just a few days short of his ninety-sixth birthday. In his ninety-five years, Chester lived a fantastic life, with a wide range of fulfilling personal experiences and noteworthy professional contributions.

Chester was born February 2, 1920, in Henan Province, China, and grew up in Beijing. After surviving World War II, Chester moved to the United States to pursue his dream of becoming a professor of United States history. Despite lacking any English language skills, any friends or family in the United States (Chester was the first of his family to study abroad), and any financial support, Chester earned a Masters in Social Science (U.S. Constitution and Courts System) from Colorado State University and a Ph.D. in East Asian Studies from the University of Chicago (Chester chose University of Chicago over Harvard because Harvard didn't offer him any financial aid). To support himself along the way, Chester held jobs ranging from driving a taxi in Chicago, working in a canning factory in Washington, driving a farm tractor in Colorado, and sweeping up a barber shop.

With the assistance of two University of Chicago professors, Chester became a United States citizen in 1962 and then moved to Los Angeles, where he was an adjunct professor at the University of Southern California for two years. With his first Fulbright Scholarship in 1964, Chester moved to Taiwan, where he met his future wife, Sophie. Chester and Sophie spent their first years of marriage living in Honolulu, where their daughter, Adele, was born. The young family then moved to Madison in 1965 when Chester accepted a position in the East Asian Studies department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and their son, Adlai, was born in 1966. Chester would remain on the faculty until he retired in 1997. He was Chinese Studies Librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1965-1997.

Chester's numerous professional accomplishments included a second Fulbright Scholarship which took him to Japan and Taiwan in 1977, academic papers presented at universities in North America, Australia, Europe, Russia, Australia, and Asia, and a long list of published academic papers and authored books.

Chester disavowed television, choosing instead to lead an active life filled with a wide range of intellectual and physical pursuits. Besides attaining full fluency in English, Chester also learned Japanese and Russian. His passion for music included a performance on Wisconsin Public Radio’s Sunday Afternoons Live from the Elvehjem series. He was continually learning even later in life, auditing classes at MATC and at the UW. He was an avid outdoorsman, leading his family on many memorable (and sometimes comical) weekend camping trips across Wisconsin. He enjoyed his tennis leagues, his fishing, and even in his eighties would walk from his home on the near west side all the way to the campus. Chester’s favorite pastimes included translating academic texts, practicing Chinese calligraphy, and discussing politics and philosophy.
Chester dedicated his life to being a fantastic husband and father, and prided himself on making a positive contribution to the world around him.

Services were held Tuesday, February 2, 2016, in Madison, Wisconsin.