

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

SHAU WING CHAN (1907 – 1986)

Shau Wing Chan, Professor Emeritus of Chinese and Chinese Literature in the Department of Asian Languages in the School of Humanities and Sciences, died on April 12, 1986, at the age of 79 (80 by Chinese count). He joined the Stanford faculty as an instructor in 1938, and retired as a professor in 1972. He is survived by his wife, Anna Mae, of Menlo Park; two sons, Wayne, of Los Altos, and Loren, of San Jose; and two brothers, Stanley (Shau Hong), of Santa Monica, and Shau Wa, of Placerville. His eldest brother was the late Professor Chen Shou-yi, Chinese Literature, of Pomona College and the Claremont Graduate School.

"Shau Wing Chan was born in Canton, Kwangtung province, China, on April 4, 1907. His family had resided in southern China for many generations, although his paternal roots could be traced to Nanking, Kiangsu province, in eastern China. Several of his ancestors and relatives were men of letters in the traditional Chinese mold . . . [His] father was a local government official in Canton in the service of the Ch'ing Dynasty, and during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was commissioned to learn about Western knowledge in the fields of geography and police science." Here we draw from a traditional Chinese family biography written in graceful modern tones by Professor Chan's younger son Loren, and presented by him as a funeral oration before a throng of mourners on April 16 -- a document that deserves to be treasured by Professor Chan's descendants.

The account continues: His parents passed away early; he grew up with relatives. He pursued studies in English in Lingnan University in Canton, graduating in 1927, and with a gift for languages, learned French and Mandarin Chinese also. Eventually all four brothers went to the United States. Shau Wing had to work for several years to save the money for study abroad, and taught English in the National Sun Yat-sen University and in the Kwangtung Provincial Normal School for Women. He turned down the Sorbonne and chose Stanford, where his brother Stanley was already a graduate student in Political Science. His intention was to learn more, and then return to help his country grow stronger; but the history of our century has twisted many lives; he was to return to his homeland only briefly during his career.

Arriving during the Depression, he had to support himself while a graduate student in English literature at Stanford by work in San Francisco's Chinatown, teaching in a Chinese language school and editing and translating for the Chinese Times, a Chinese language newspaper. He obtained the Master's degree in 1932. He and Anna Mae, a singer in the church where he played the piano, were married in 1935, and two years later, Ph.D. in hand, they returned, they thought, to a professorship in English waiting in National Shantung University in Tsingtao. They had gotten as far as Shanghai when invading Japanese forces drove them back to California. At this point, through the good offices of Professor William Dinsmore Briggs, Chan's mentor and head of the English Department, and of President Ray Lyman Wilbur, Chan was named "Instructor of Chinese Language and Literature" for the year 1938-39, in a program in Chinese established within the School of Letters. The following year he was promoted, with the title "Assistant Professor of Chinese and English." Thus began Shau Wing Chan's long teaching career at Stanford.

World War II found the United States almost completely unprepared in the Chinese and Japanese languages; there were almost no programs or teachers; the explosion of scholarship in Asian Studies, in literature, history and the social sciences, art, philosophy, that was to put the United States in the forefront of these fields, was still in the future, and must wait until wartime urgency had produced the young men with the necessary language skills. Universities able to mount wartime programs had a natural lead; Stanford, with Shau Wing Chan already on its faculty, was one of the fortunate few. During the War, Chan organized at Stanford one of the largest of America's military training programs in Chinese. These wartime programs were by nature short lived, but the institutions that had them had a beginning on which to build. And Chan was gaining prominence; before the War's end, he was a consultant for the United Nations, and the official Chinese text of the United Nations Charter is his work. His textbooks, A Chinese Reader for Beginners, and Elementary Chinese, have had wide use in college level courses; his Concise English-Chinese Dictionary was one of the first such volumes in the United States.

After the War Chan found himself in a motley department of "Asiatic and Slavic Studies," which was also home for a German professor of Indian philosophy and was chaired by a former officer in the old Austro-Hungarian navy, who had a specialty in East Asian naval architecture. For a time the department maintained instruction in Arabic, as well as Chinese and Japanese. A Rockefeller fellowship enabled Chan to revisit China briefly, before the change of government, in 1948; but his career was now permanently in his Stanford department, which he had helped to found, and which in a few years came to specialize in the Chinese and Japanese languages and literatures, the Slavic component becoming a separate entity. As the "Department of Asian Languages," Chan's old department continues today; he was its executive head (known affectionately as "Wing") from 1958 to 1962, and in 1959 he negotiated the establishment of a National Defense Education Act center for training in Chinese and Japanese, bringing highly important Federal funding to Stanford to support language teaching and other East Asia related instruction; this support has continued, and Stanford remains one of a select few institutions with federally funded centers of East Asian studies.

In addition to service as consultant to the International Secretariat of the United Nations at the end of World War II, Shau Wing Chan's extra-university service includes the direction, in 1955-56, of the Human Relations Area Files Research Project on Modern China. He assembled a team of sixteen scholars to produce four handbooks on different areas of China and one on Taiwan for the Army's Board of Psychological Warfare. His real intellectual interests, however, were the things he taught; these included Chinese literature and Chinese philosophy, but above all was the language he loved. His career was an essential part of Stanford's achievement of eminence as a center of Far Eastern language and area studies in the United States.

A long time supporter of the Menlo Park Public Library and other local civic institutions, Chan was widely respected in the local community. At a time long before civil rights movements and fair housing laws, when there was still much unfortunate prejudice against Chinese-Americans, Chan became the only Chinese member of the Palo Alto Kiwanis Club, where he was known as the "adopted Irishman." Modern citizen and Confucian gentleman, Professor Chan's avocations included charcoal drawing (when the mood was on him) and playing his favorite Beethoven Sonatas.

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