

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

RICHARD KUNG-YI KAO (1926 – 1989)

Richard Kung-yi Kao, Associate Professor of Chinese, Emeritus died on May 25, 1989, after a valiant struggle with lung cancer. He was sixty-two.

Born into a prominent traditional family in Peking in 1926, he attended the Catholic Fu Jen University from 1946 to 1948 and the National Taiwan University from 1948 to 1950, where he obtained a B.A. degree in Foreign Languages and Literature. Immediately upon graduation from college he started his long and distinguished career in teaching Chinese as a second language. He was Instructor of Chinese with the FAST Program of the US Embassy in Taipei from 1950 to 1957 and Assistant Director and Dean at Taipei Language Institute from 1957 to 1962. From 1962 to 1963 he was Senior Instructor at the Inter-University Program in Chinese Language Studies, previously known as the Stanford Language Center in Taipei. In 1963 he came to Stanford as a Lecturer in Chinese. While carrying a heavy teaching load, he started to work for his Ph.D. degree in Linguistics. His dissertation, entitled *The Classification of Chinese Words*, was passed with distinction in 1970, whereupon he was appointed Assistant Professor of Chinese. He was promoted to Associate Professor of Chinese with tenure in 1975.

An affable, caring, and considerate person, Kung-yi was unstinting in helping and advising students and colleagues alike. Moreover, he was blessed with a lively mind, a wonderful sense of humor and sparkling wit. There was so much life and fun about him, colleagues in Asian Languages were so accustomed to his hearty laughter in his office and the hallway, that Building 250, the home of the Asian Languages Department, hasn't seemed the same ever since he was forced by illness to quit teaching in September of 1987.

Kung-yi was an active faculty member at Stanford. In addition to being the coordinator of the Chinese language program and Director of the Asian Languages Summer Session, he served on various committees both inside and outside the Department. In 1974-75 he served as a consultant to then Stanford President Richard Lyman on US-China Relations. Indeed, Kung-yi played a crucial role in Stanford's exchanges with China. In 1978 he accompanied a group of University officials and friends on a historic visit to China. And he was instrumental in helping to bring a number of distinguished scholars and teachers from China to Stanford. One of the visitors later became Vice President for Academic Affairs at Peking University. Another is now President of the Beijing Language Institute.

Kung-yi was a fine linguistics scholar and his abiding interest was in designing a theory of his own relating modern theories of language to classical Chinese philosophy on the one hand and the Chinese language on the other. His publications in this area are all marked by a deep and searching intelligence and by an admirable thoroughness of research and care in presentation.

Above all, Kung-yi was a superb and inspiring teacher – a fact recognized by all those who have studied under him or had the privilege of getting to know him well. A large number of younger China scholars around the country were his students at one time or another. Many of them have expressed appreciation and gratitude for the singularly important contributions he

made to their language training and to their intellectual development. "He is the most inspiring and competent teacher of Chinese I have worked with throughout my seven years of graduate study at Yale and Stanford," says one former student. And another former student writes:

. . . his teaching has never been limited to the classroom. As someone who observed him as his Teaching Assistant in two different first-year Chinese classes, and who saw and talked with him frequently around the Department of Asian Languages, I can truly say that he has also been an invaluable informal teacher to me, a person who never ceases to stimulate thought and discussion about the Chinese language and how to explain it. Now that I am teaching Chinese on my own, I'm realizing how much I really owe him. In the classroom, Professor Kao's effectiveness goes beyond mere technique and knowledge. He has the rare ability to command full attention, to communicate his own enthusiasm for his subject. This natural ability, coupled with his profound grasp of the intricacies of the Chinese language is what makes him such an exceptional teacher. In my long years of studying Chinese, I have not met anyone who is his equal as a teacher.

It is only fitting, therefore, that in the 1972 Commencement Exercises Kung-yi was presented with the Walter J. Gores Award for excellence in teaching. The citation of the award characterizes Kung-yi as "A gifted teacher of classical Chinese who conveys the entire cultural context of the language and who makes learning an exciting experience."

Kung-yi is survived by his wife, Barbara, of Stanford; a son, Abe, and a daughter, Elizabeth, also of Stanford; another son, John, of San Francisco; his mother of Sunnyvale; a sister of Cupertino; two sisters of Los Angeles; three sisters of Taiwan; and a brother of China.

Alphonse Juilland
Lawrence Lau
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