

Opening Remarks

(17:02 – 17:05)

Dear friends and colleagues,

Good afternoon. Today, we gather here to hold a special memorial panel dedicated to Dr. Wen Wang, a productive scholar with strong research in several topical areas, a teacher on campuses on both sides of the Pacific, and a mentor to over a dozen of the younger generation, also an active member of the ABFM community, and a founding member as well as leader of the China-America Association for Public Affairs.

I am Yilin Hou, a professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. It is an intellectual obligation and spiritual calling for me to open this special panel. Let me put the academic life of Dr. Wang into its context, the beginning first.

Twenty years ago, in 1998, about this time of the year, a group from then China National School of Administration visited the Maxwell School. The group's interpreter was Wang Wen. That visit opened Wang Wen's eyes to a new world; not long after that visit, he became determined to pursue scholarship in this discipline.

In this sense, Wang Wen's formal education in public administration as we define it started in 1998, to be followed with an MPA from the University of Georgia in 2002, and culminated in 2006 at the Maxwell School with a PhD in the public finance and financial management concentration.

Wang Wen continued from there to establish a holistic career in public finance and budgeting, capital budgeting and finance, education finance, intergovernmental fiscal relations, and development and governance issues. He had always been an active member of ABFM, and closely involved in the conferences of this community. Here he had, and has, the most of his professional friends.

The Mile-high City fits well for this special panel. As the Chinese saga Confucius put it two and a half millenniums ago, “the benevolent have a passion for the mountains.” Wang Wen was one in that group.

Closing Remarks

(17:37 – 17:45)

My personal acquaintance with Wang Wen started in 1998 at the Maxwell School. I was then a mid-career doctoral student; he came as the interpreter of the group from China. He and I had since maintained a very close relationship. He would be at my door, or on my phone, with any major issue he was faced with till 2009 when he moved to Hong Kong, then in 2012 for a letter of support for him to go to Indianapolis, then in 2016 the chair of the search committee at Rutgers called on me for reference to nail in Wang Wen's tenure. This last January, I was by his bedside in San Francisco, holding his hands, chatting to him to sooth his upbeat emotions, and finally bidding him farewell.

From 1998 to 2018, twenty years for an academic career is by no means long; but one's achievement and impact is not, and should not be measured just with the number of years. Wang Wen carved deep imprints in areas of his research; he trained excellent doctoral and master's level students; and he made lasting friendship with many, in two continents.

No doubt, the undue early passing of Wang Wen is a huge loss to the China-America Association for Public Affairs, to the public finance and budgeting community, and especially to the many of the rising generation of scholars, to whom Wang Wen was always a smiling figure, utterly understanding, proactively willing to help, to teach, and to collaborate.

We all lost a good friend; but sadness is not the theme of this panel. Rather, we need to draw inspirations from Wang Wen, and move on. Let me bring back a few visual images of the Wang Wen that we know so very well:

First, Wang Wen was always optimistic. He smiled most of the time, which helped smooth out many uneasy, unpleasant happenings.

Second, Wang Wen sought all opportunities to move up, to climb high, not to cave in, even in front of terminal cancer.

Finally and more importantly, Wang Wen loved and embraced every bit of the real life that he went through, not wasting any moment, to engage in the joy, beauty, and kindness this world is endowed to offer.

Based on the above observations, I came to the conclusion that Wang Wen had lived a full, all-rounded life, leaving little pity or regret behind. The above are several key characteristics of him that I think we need to reflect on and draw inspirations from.

The memorial of a friend, colleague, scholar, and teacher does not end with the closing of this panel. Rather, it shall continue in multiple ways. Imagine the following scene, which is quite likely to happen:

Twenty some years down the road, someday, we may hear a knock on the door; in comes a young person who says, “Professor, I am Wang Wen’s child. I come to pursue a PhD degree in public finance and budgeting.”

The answer from any of us shall be: “Oh, my dear child, here you are finally. We have been waiting for this day for two decades. Come close and sit down. Let us discuss what area you may go deep into.

Look, this topic, or topics, and these papers were where your Dad had brilliant ideas on, but he didn’t quite finish. Now it is time for you to have them done.”

That may be one of the best episodes, which we call almost perfect continuation.

To close this panel, let me say this again to Wang Wen: “Dear brother, stay at rest up there, and keep enjoying what you used to. On this side, everything shall be fine.”

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Thank you.