

December 10, 2010

I am Xiaoyuan Liu, one of Larry's students.

I came to Iowa City, to Schaefer Hall, from China in 1982.

If I am right about this, I was the first student from the People's Republic of China ever admitted by the University of Iowa to its humanities programs. China was a very different place then, and the world was very different.

I was born into a culture that usually holds teachers in very high esteem. We Chinese have an ancient saying: 一日为师，终身为父 (*yi ri wei shi, zhong shen wei fu* -- "A teacher for a day should be respected as a fatherly figure for life.") But I grew up in China in a time when schools were trashed, students were sent down to the countryside, and teachers were ridiculed, humiliated, and struggled against.

So, in 1982, I came with little schooling, longing for a normal education. I brought a challenge to myself and to the professors in the History Department. I did not know what to expect from my American professors, and they probably did not know how this student from the PRC would handle and survive the department's programs. Yet, professors in Schaefer Hall welcomed me with open arms, demolishing many barriers knowingly and unknowingly.

Larry took the lead in this international experiment. He was a demanding professor and a most considerate mentor. He let me know that I had one goal in school, which was to achieve what he termed "intellectual maturity." Thus I grew up one more time. Outside school, Larry and Miriam simply adopted me. Later, when I started a family in Iowa City, Larry and Miriam extended their gentle care to my entire family, and continued in the years to come.

It turned out I did not, as Larry once speculated, return to the PRC and become a diplomat. I stayed in this country as an academic. I have however kept one habit from my times in Inner Mongolia: I moved around like a nomad. Larry was with me every step I took, ready to lend me his unreserved support.

So, I found the reason for the Chinese saying on this side of the Pacific. Larry showed me that the meaning of "teacher" is truly universal. I remember so many things Larry taught me. And yet, I know I don't have to memorize any, because Larry is already part of my life, professional and beyond. I say farewell to my teacher today, but I know I will be seeing Larry for the rest of my life.