MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Vincent T. Shen (1949-2018)
Professor, Lee Chair in Chinese Thought and Culture
Department of East Asian Studies
Cross-appointed to Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

December 12, 2018

BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the Faculty of Arts & Science is deeply saddened by and mourns the sudden passing of Professor Vincent Shen on November 14 2018 at the age of 69. He was at peace and surrounded by his loving family, who had gathered from across the continent in his final hours.

Professor Shen was a highly respected scholar working across the Chinese and Western traditions of philosophical thought. Born in Taiwan in 1949, he completed his M.A. in Philosophy at Fujien Catholic University before moving to the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie at the Université Catholique de Louvain, where he received his Ph.D. in 1980. There he worked in the archives of philosopher Edmund Husserl and produced a dissertation on action and creativity in the philosophies of Maurice Blondel and Alfred North Whitehead. He taught philosophy at National Chengchi University, Taipei for twenty years before taking up the Lee Chair in Chinese Thought and Culture in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto in 2000. He was cross-appointed to the Department of Philosophy.

Professor Shen was a prolific researcher, author of twenty-nine books and more than one hundred and fifty articles and book chapters. An expert in Daoist and Confucian thought, he also produced major work on comparative philosophy, phenomenology, and philosophical problems in technology, culture and religion. He was unparalleled in his deep knowledge of Chinese philosophy and philology and equally concerned with contemporary questions about cosmology, spirituality, modernity, education and aesthetics. Few scholars could match Professor Shen’s lifelong commitment to a full public intellectual life lived on three continents. He taught and lectured regularly across North America and throughout Asia, and was a frequent visiting professor to European institutions, such as the EHESS in Paris, the Institute of Psychology in Vienna, and the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden. Professor Shen did not shy away from administrative service. He was Executive Director and past president of the Chinese Philosophical Association, Executive Director of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy, and a Vice President of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. At the University of Toronto he served as Chair of the Department of East Asian Studies from 2007 to 2010, and more recently he continued to willingly participate in committees and organise departmental workshops that enriched the intellectual worlds of his colleagues and students.

Alongside Professor Shen’s commitment to research we witnessed everyday his great care and devotion to his students. Many of those students now occupy research positions throughout Asia, Europe and
North America. But Professor Shen generously shared his passion for Chinese philosophy with students of all levels. His warm guidance and encouragement has left a deep impression on many University of Toronto students over the years and set a high standard for his colleagues to follow. The outpouring of testimony from his students since his passing has reminded us of what we will miss. Repeatedly in their reminiscences his students have described how they felt they had been truly seen and respected for the first time when they walked into his classroom. His capacity to inspire was remarkable. We recall Professor Shen sitting in his office for office hours, long lines of students waiting outside while he engaged in lively, animated conversation at his desk, arms waving and invariably a huge smile on his face.

Professor Shen was planning to retire at the end of this academic year and we were preparing a party to celebrate his many years of research, teaching and service to the department. Sadly, he has left us too soon, but we will be sure to remember and to celebrate his profound commitment to scholarship, his dedication to his students and his joyful interactions with us all as colleagues.

Vincent Shen is survived by his wife Johanna Liu, also a Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies, by his son and daughter, and by the two granddaughters to whom he was a devoted grandfather.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be inscribed in the Minutes and that a copy be transmitted to his family as a token of our deep gratitude and respect.

Janet Poole
Associate Professor and Acting Chair, Department of East Asian Studies