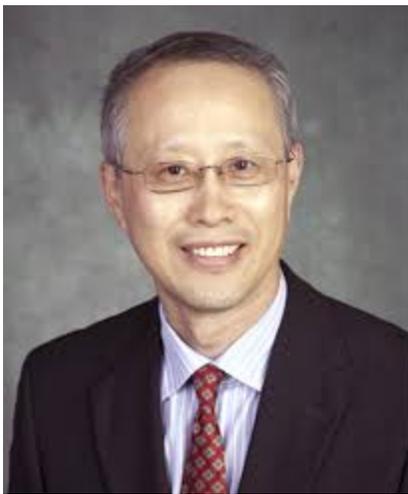


IN MEMORIAM

Zheng Wu, 1960 - 2019

The obituary below was published in the *CPS Newsletter*, September 2019

Zheng Wu, a long-time member of the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria (1992-2019), passed away on August 27, 2019 in Victoria, British Columbia following a brief illness. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Gerontology and Tier I Canada Research Chair in Aging and Health at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia.



Zheng was born and raised in Beijing, China. After completing high school, he and Lanjing Li, his future wife, were among those educated urban youth who the government sent to live and work in rural and remote areas of China. They spent two years in these areas as part of the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement, a policy instituted in China by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution that had them re-educated by the workers and farmers who lived there. Universities were shut down for several years during this period but when they re-opened, Zheng completed a BA in English at the Beijing International Studies University (in 1983). Upon graduation, he spent two more years there as an Instructor before taking a position as a Cultural Representative

for the People's Republic of China at the Chinese pavilion at Disney World in Florida. He subsequently made his way to the University of Victoria, as the first international graduate student from China admitted to the program. He completed his MA in Sociology in 1988 (with Dr. Dan Koenig as a Supervisor) followed by a PhD in Social Demography from the University of Western Ontario in 1992 (with Dr. T. Balakrishnan as a Supervisor).

Zheng's PhD dissertation, entitled 'A Social Psychological Analysis of Remarriage', examined the transition from marital union dissolution to remarriage in Canada, using data from the 1990 General Social Survey. His graduate training and dissertation were the starting points for a longstanding career interest in family demography and specifically, in marital and cohabiting unions and other family relationships. His approach was also consistent: almost all of it featured careful statistical analyses of the General Social Survey and other national survey data sets. Over the years, Zheng's research interests expanded to include numerous other demographic topics, such as race and ethnicity, immigration, and social integration. In recent years, his research program incorporated aging-related trends and patterns, both in Canada and China. Among his concerns were union formation and dissolution in later life and the physical and psychological well-being of older adults. Zheng was an accomplished and productive scholar. Over the course of his career, he held numerous research grants and published over 100 books, edited volumes,

chapters in books and peer-reviewed journal articles. In 2004, he received the University of Victoria Faculty of Social Science Award for Excellence in Research, in recognition of his achievements.

However, Zheng's academic impact extends well beyond his individual research contributions. It includes numerous contributions to the universities where he worked as well as the demography community in Canada and internationally. At the University of Victoria, he adeptly served as Chair of the Sociology Department (2006-2011). He was also the Founding Director of the Population Research Group (2008-2018), an interdisciplinary group devoted to promoting research and training in demography and population studies. Zheng was also a dedicated educator and mentor who spent countless hours meeting with and mentoring students. The students he worked closely with remember him for his intellectual contributions but also, for his kindness and support. Beyond the university, he held numerous other leadership positions, including that of President of the Canadian Population Society. He was also a Research Affiliate or Visiting Professor at a number of universities in Canada, the US, and China. In all of these positions, Zheng dedicated himself to the task of promoting and encouraging research and the collaborative networks and training necessary to do so.

Zheng is survived by his wife Lanjing Li, his brother Jun, and his sister Fei, as well as their families. The things he cared about most were his wife and family, his colleagues/friends, and his work. He was a great host, often bringing all three groups together. However, he also made time to enjoy other good things in life, whether it be hiking up mountains, playing a round of golf, or travelling to exotic and interesting locales. He and Lanjing travelled the world together while also spending time at their urban high-rise cottage in the heart of Vancouver. For all that he was and all that he did, he will be missed.

~Margaret Penning and Neena Chappell, University of Victoria

The tributes below are from the University of Victoria's *Department of Sociology Newsletter*, Fall 2019

Colleague Memories

Zheng was an active member of the Canadian Population Society (CPS), serving in many capacities including as president of CPS from 2008-10. He was a prolific scholar and his expertise in family demography, aging and health was internationally recognized. On a personal level, Zheng was both friend and mentor to me, and his loss is immeasurable.

~Lisa Strohschein, Canadian Population Society

This comes as a tremendous shock and leaves a hole in the hearts of those who knew Zheng, even those who only knew him for the short time that he resided in our department. Zheng was a terrific colleague and friend who emoted the highest level of integrity, diligence and kindness. It has been an honour to have known Zheng for over 35 years, primarily through the tight-knit demography and gerontology communities. Indeed, he has left a deep footprint in these fields. But I will remember him as a gentle soul of the most humble nature, an individual who always had a positive comment to any situation. He will be greatly missed, but will remain forever in our hearts and minds.

~Andrew Wister, Simon Fraser University

I am truly saddened and devastated to hear of the sudden passing of Zheng. This is a great loss for his family, our department, and the wider academic community. I feel honored and privileged that I was able to work with him in a number of different capacities over the past several decades. Andrew and I were also really looking forward to going to China with him next week although it became clear that his health was deteriorating over the past year and that he would be unable to travel. I am also grateful for the many memories of him that I continue to cherish. Zheng was a remarkable man who was always willing to share his enthusiasm for family demography and his incredible technical expertise with others. Overall, he was a very kind and dedicated human being who deeply cared about others. I hope that we can all draw upon his inspiration in this time of mourning and grief and celebrate his life and enormous contributions.

~Barbara Mitchell, Simon Fraser University

I first met Zheng almost 25 years ago, when he visited my institute and gave a talk in Spring 1995. I can still remember he lectured on marriage and family in Canada. After my family moved to Vancouver in late 1990s, we gradually became very close friends. Since 2004, after the School of Public Policy and Administration was founded, Zheng was invited to be a guest chair professor by Xi'an Jiaotong University and became a long-term collaborator at the Institute for Population and Development Studies. In 2012, he founded the Center for Aging and Health Research at Xi'an Jiaotong University, and organized the annual international workshop on aging and health research. Zheng had made tremendous contributions to capacity building of our research team and platform. By cooperating with local researchers teaching courses at Summer School, supervising our graduate students, and hosting PHD students from XJTU to UVIC and SFU, he had made great efforts to enhance international academic exchange and cooperation, and gave great support to introducing social studies of China into international academia.

About two weeks before his passing, I visited Zheng in Victoria. The meeting was very short, about 10 minutes. Working in front of computer, he looked very feeble and slim, but I could see his good mood and spirits, his confidence, and the familiar fortitude in his eyes. He was very rational, telling me his health was very bad, and how much he enjoyed his life of teaching and doing research. He also said we would continue the work. Both of us believed he would recover. It was heart-breaking when I realized that day with him was our farewell.

His first name, Zheng, means integrity, honest, justice, positive, and personal loyalty in Chinese. Just like his name, Zheng always gave us support, care, and sunshine. He was a magnificent person who inspired every life he encountered. His passing is a painful loss for his family, his friends, and our communities of gerontology, demography and social sciences. We will all deeply miss his intelligence, kindness, and friendliness. Our beloved friend, colleague, and teacher has gone, but what he left to us will stay for long.

~Li Shuzhou, Center for Aging and Health Research, Institute for Population and Development Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong University, China

If we are lucky, we have people in our lives whose impact is profound and everlasting. To me, Zheng was one of those people. He was the best kind of colleague - a dedicated, hardworking and talented researcher who was dedicated to his craft and always supportive and generous with his time and with his talents. Our research interests brought us together and our skills were complementary. The result was a great partnership that lasted for a long time and one that we both planned for and hoped would continue, despite Zheng's illness. I will miss our academic partnership and all that resulted from it. However, even more, I will miss the kind, honorable and dear friend that Zheng was.

~Margaret Penning, University of Victoria

Having overcome numerous challenges in his journey to Canada as a young man, Zheng knew and never forgot the value of the light of day. His strong work ethic reflected his adherence to this adage; it was something that I deeply admired. Zheng was an exceptional scholar, but equally, if not more important, he was a kind and generous colleague, mentor, and friend. He was also a fair and patient leader, whose quiet nature belied his great passion for the discipline and his fierce loyalty to the department, his colleagues, and his graduate students. A light has gone out in our community and the loss is immeasurable. Rest peacefully my dear friend.

~Karen Kobayashi, University of Victoria

Zheng played an important part in our lives since Mikael met him and Lanjing in graduate school in London and Cecilia met them when Zheng was wooed for a position in the Department of Sociology at UVic. Throughout these 30 and some years our lives have been intertwined and we have grown immeasurably through our interactions, professionally and personally. Many are the times that we grew frustrated by Zheng's blunt rejection of our favourite ideas because they were not confirmed by data. Zheng had the outmost respect for empirical data. It did not matter if the contradictory data were qualitative or quantitative because empirical data mattered to Zheng. For many years his presence in his departmental office was a refuge where we sought out consolation for our academic struggles and our personal frustrations. Zheng was always up for a visit and chat before turning back to the analysis for a paper he was occupied with – the activity that was his professional life's passion.

He taught us about research and he taught us about entertaining. Zheng and Lanjing parties were legendary and always consisted of the most delicious Chinese dishes we ever ate and we have not visited a restaurant serving Chinese food without them since the first dinner they served us. Zheng's success in academia and personal life was remarkable, especially given that he was a new immigrant to Canada and had to overcome numerous challenges, including grasping the complexities of language and culture. We are lucky to have known him as a colleague and friend even for the too short time that he shared his life with us.

~Cecilia Benoit & Mikael Jansson, University of Victoria

Zheng was an accomplished scholar who lived by his values. His integrity was especially visible as chair of the sociology department where his belief that the discipline is stronger when it embraces multiple perspectives ensured that all were treated respectfully and were valued irrespective of their ideological leanings. He was taken from us far too soon; his contributions as an intellectual and as a person will be deeply missed.

~Neena Chappell, University of Victoria

I liked Zheng. He was a person of dignity and integrity... he and I disagreed on almost everything in departmental meetings I guess but that didn't matter. He was totally bemused by my keeping donkeys as he had worked with donkeys on a farm when he was young – they did not endear themselves to him....

Zheng, Margaret Penning and I all joined the Department of Sociology around the same time. For years, we were the 'junior faculty'. As typically happens, the camaraderie of the early days gave way to a relationship of colleagues. Zheng was a wonderful colleague. Zheng and I probably never voted the same way more than twice in departmental meetings. Zheng was without rancour or meanness of any kind. He treated people on all sides of the political divide with respect and interest in who they were and what they were doing. I was deeply shocked and very sad at his death. I suspect many will write of his academic accomplishments. But I wanted to write as a colleague who knew his dignity and integrity as a person.

~Martha McMahon, University of Victoria

I first met Zheng at an American Sociological Association (ASA) conference in the early 1990s. I was at the University of Richmond, Virginia, then, and we talked about our research interests. Later, we would see each other again at other ASA and Population Association of America (PAA) conferences. We maintained close contact and when I had a sabbatical leave in 1995-96, I decided to come to UVic for the year because of my association with Zheng. Meanwhile, Zheng had been introduced to my spouse, Barry Edmonston, who is also a demographer. We became good friends with Zheng and his wife, Lanjing.

After my sabbatical, we returned east, but soon moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1998. We both worked at Portland State University until we moved to Victoria in 2006. Our friendship with Zheng was a key reason for why we moved to Victoria, and requested affiliations with UVic. Barry and I are fortunate to have known Zheng. We shared research interests and worked together on research projects. He was always ready to discuss ways to frame and analyze intriguing research questions. His positive and enthusiastic approach to research was infectious. He was a joy to work with. He was incredibly dedicated to his work. We could always count on

seeing him in his office on the weekends. Barry and I often knocked on his door on a Sunday, and chat about research, travels, and share funny stories. It's painful to know we can't do this anymore.

We didn't learn about Zheng's passing until September 1. We had been traveling in remote Northern Australia and didn't access email until that day. The first email I saw had the subject line, "Zheng's obituary". Even now, it's impossible to express our disbelief, shock, and grief as we read the emails, with tears flowing. We remain devastated. It's difficult to accept we will never see Zheng or hear his voice again.

~Sharon Lee & Barry Edmonston, University of Victoria

Put simply, Zheng is the reason I am in the department today. I first worked with him in 1995 when I took on the short term position of lab instructor after completing my MA. Returning to the department in 2008, he employed me as an RA. When the lab instructor position became a permanent one in 2010 he encouraged me to apply. The rest is history! Over the years we worked closely together - I helped him with various research and administrative tasks, assisted in coordinating and hosting the Population Research Group as well as several conferences. He was always appreciative of my work. He loved quantitative research and was excited when others shared his passion. He was not only a supportive mentor and employer, but a kind and thoughtful friend. I will greatly miss our "couch chats" in his office.

~ Ruth Kampen, University of Victoria

Student Memories

It's impossible to summarize Zheng Wu's impact on my professional development in a few short lines, but it's fair to say that I owe him my career. I worked with Zheng for 18 years, transitioning from a fledgling research assistant to a full-fledged collaborator under his mentorship. Perhaps the most valuable lesson he instilled in me is the need to be persistent, for it is persistence that sets the course toward success. Whatever I achieve in my career is both a testament and a tribute to Zheng Wu's legacy as the finest mentor a person could hope to have. Since I have gained so much from his presence, I feel the weight of his absence all the more.

~ Christoph Schimmele, Statistics Canada, Ottawa

I am so incredibly sad. He was so kind, honest, dedicated, and modest. He changed my life and I will be forever grateful. Such a wonderful mentor. I had a really nice phone conversation with him a couple of years ago. I am so glad that I told him how much his mentorship means to me. As usual, he wanted no praise.

~ Randy Hart, Saint Mary's University

I could not have asked for a better mentor than Zheng. Whenever I was feeling low or doubting myself he would reassure me that I could do what needed to be done. He often said he owed a duty to help others the same way he was helped when he was starting out and I think this exemplifies Zheng's humble and caring nature. I am forever grateful for his support and will try to help others as much as he helped me.

~ Andrew Elliott, University of Victoria

Zheng's passing came as a tremendous shock and left a big hole in the hearts of those who knew him. Zheng is an outstanding family demographer and sociologist, and an outstanding supervisor. I feel extremely thankful to my supervisor for his guidance during my Ph.D. Studies. I started my PhD with almost no understanding of what was expected or required, merely possessing a puppy-like enthusiasm and a passion for research. By contrast, my supervisor was very disciplined, focused, and determined. His professionalism on sociological and demographic research, as well as on communicating and time management, have benefited me and influenced me very much. Zheng was instrumental in my development as a scholar by providing me with ample opportunities to learn new skills, and by being a truly super mentor in every sense of the world. The support had never stopped, and I asked myself what, over the years, had I done for him? The short answer was not a lot. But I will surely remember him as a gentle soul of the most humble nature, and an individual who emoted the highest level of integrity, diligence and positivity. He will remain forever in my heart.

~ Grace Li, University of Victoria

The tributes below were offered at the annual meeting of the CPS General Assembly, June 4, 2020, in memoriam of Zheng Wu

Zheng and I first met in 1992 at the end of our graduate student years. Coincidentally, we both found our way to the University of Victoria and worked together on and off for over 2 decades. Yet, despite his importance to my academic life, it was Zheng the person who I miss the most. He was kind, gentle, and self-effacing. In fact, one of the last email messages I received from him was not about work, himself or his illness, but rather, was aimed at soothing the way forward for me – by telling me how much he had valued our friendship and our work together.

As a gerontologist, I somehow expect everyone to live to their 80s or longer. But averages conceal the sad reality that not everyone makes it to old age. Zheng – the scholar and person - left us much too soon.

~Margaret Penning, University of Victoria

I first met Zheng in the early 1990s when I was working and living in the U.S. Our friendship and professional collaboration developed over the years, first during my sabbatical leave at the University of Victoria in 1995 and later when my husband, Barry Edmonston, and I moved to Victoria in 2006. It's fair to say that if it weren't for Zheng, we may not have moved to Victoria.

One of my fondest memories of Zheng was our frequent chats on quiet Sundays at the office -- he was often working there on weekends. We would talk about work, of course (we collaborated on immigration and intermarriage research projects) but always had time for laughing over funny stories from our various travels. Zheng and his wife Lanjing loved traveling. I can still hear his infectious laughter and see his smile in my mind. It pains me to pass by his old office on a Sunday now and know he's gone.

~Sharon Lee, University of Victoria

I knew Zheng Wu for almost thirty years, including working with him closely for the past ten years in Victoria. My fondest thoughts are of the many times that we would meet to discuss research. At these times, his intelligence, energy, and modesty were three qualities that stood out.

Zheng's intelligence: Zheng would get very excited when we asked why or how something happened. Nothing pleased him more than a new idea that explained the results in our data analysis. Indeed, I think that he was happier to learn something new than to get our results published.

He was energetic. He did not waste time but could devote many hours to a topic of interest. Even if a problem emerged, Zheng was always interested in finding a solution rather than complaining.

And he was modest. He appreciated recognition for his work but did not need others to credit him at great length.

How many times did an hour-long discussion with Zheng end with good humor and promises to work more and meet again with new results?

He was kind, thoughtful, and the best kind of friend and colleague. We all miss him.
~*Barry Edmonston, University of Victoria*

Margaret Penning, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria

Sharon M. Lee, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria

The death of Zheng Wu came as a great shock and loss for his family, friends, and colleagues. He was a wonderful colleague and friend. He was an extraordinary person: enthusiastic, kind, intelligent, and humble.

Barry Edmonston, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria