Remembering Dr. Ken Chih 池慶康, our beloved alumnus of NTU Geography

Nora Chiang 姜蘭虹, Professor Emerita, Dept. of Geography

Our valued alumnus Ken Chih, a B.Sc graduate of Taiwan University; M.Sc of University of Texas at Austin (UT), and Ph.D of Princeton University passed away on September 17, 2020 at the age of 66. He is survived by his wife Tina, two daughters Cyrena and Angela, and his grandson.

Born in Kaohsiung, and starting at the age of four, he travelled extensively with his family due to his father’s assignment as the Chinese Naval Attaché in Washington, D.C. (中國駐美海軍武官), covering cities such as Baltimore, New York, Houston, Panama, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, Tokyo, and Kobe. This is how he cultivated his interests in Geography and Transportation, and why he joined the Department of Geography at NTU in 1973.

Ken has an illustrious career, starting with an internship in 1980 at the City Planning Department of the Taipei Municipal Government, to be involved in the initial planning of Xin-Yi district (信義計畫區). In 1983, he was offered a Senior Planner position at the Urban and Housing Development Council under the Council for Economic Planning and Development (CEPD 經建會). From there, he applied his knowledge from his two favorite subjects, Transportation and Geography, while practicing what he learned from his education overseas that includes Urban Planning and Engineering. After graduating with a second Master's degree with flying colors in Transportation and Civil Engineering, he completed his Ph.D in Transportation at Princeton in 1986 (Fig. 1). His dissertation was titled: "A Real Time Dynamic Optimal Freight Car Management Simulation Model of the Multiple Railroad, Multi-Commodity Temporal Spatial Network Flow Problem."

Right after graduation, he joined his advisor's company, ALK Associates, to solve
real world problems (in his own words), meaning building optimization systems for the railroad and maritime industry. In 1993, he joined Orient Overseas Container Line (OOCL) to help Mr. C. H. Tung (董建華) in Hong Kong. In 2007, he accepted a position at General Motors (GM), to experience working in the auto and manufacturing industry, as the Global Director and Chief Architect of Global Purchasing and Supply Chain. He retired from GM in 2009, and accepted the request by Leslie Koo (辜成允), his best friend and high school classmate, to join the Taiwan Cement Corporation (台泥). In 2011, he became the Independent Director of the Board of China Synthetic Rubber Corporation (中國合成橡膠), E-One Moli Energy Corporation (能元科技).

I have the pleasure of editing a book 《人間處處有地理》 for the alumni of NTU Geography Department, and learned for the first time Ken's long and illustrious career in the last four decades, from his article “My Experience as a Geography Graduate” (pp. 35-45). He is definitely an excellent exemplar as a practicing geographer for our graduates, by doing the best he can in every step of his education and career. One can also tell that he always lends a helpful hand to friends in fulfilling their projects in tireless and responsible ways.

On top of all this, he has a beautiful family, and he has played the roles of a loving husband to his wife, and incredible father (Fig. 2) to his daughters. He always stood tall in a group picture (Fig. 3) and was called "Mr. Big" (大個) affectionately by his classmates in Geography. Geography Department won the championship of NTU Freshman Basketball Tournament (台大新生盃籃球賽) in 1973 (Fig. 4) His performance in basketball was unbeatable, repeatedly earning championships with teamwork, and leadership.

A teacher like myself can never write enough on how well Ken did in the various walks of his life. None of us can live up to the standards he has set for himself. He has won awards (Fig. 5) numerous times during his career in Transportation and Urban Planning in the U.S., Hong Kong, and Taiwan. I am sure his colleagues are proud of him, and miss him immensely. May Ken rest in peace, and may God bless his family.
Fig. 1  Graduation from Princeton, 1986

Fig. 2  Ken Chih and his family
Fig. 3  Dr. Fredrick Chien (錢復) and Taiwan students in Princeton

Fig. 4  Ken Chih, third from the left in the first row, 1973

Fig. 5  Chief Information Officer at Orient Overseas Container Line, 1993