

In Memory of Prof. WANG YAO

Professor Wang Yao's Academic Career and Life

WANG Qilong

Shaanxi Normal University, China

The lofty Himalayas are majestic, and the Tibetan plateau is of great pureness. Originated from the top of Himalayas and valleys of the Tibetan plateau, the ancient and glorious Tibetan civilization is an essence of the integrative and diverse Chinese culture, and it has always been a civilization which draws the attention of mankind and the international academic community. That is a prevalent fact and a major reason why the world has attached great importance to Tibetology which is indisputably an international subject. However, in old China, the researches on this branch of learning were often done by following others' lead. After the founding of new China, especially after the reform and opening up in 1978, prompted by a group of Chinese scholars, eventually the international academic community heard different voices from China. And Professor Wang Yao is the first Chinese scholar who made his voice heard in the international academic community.

China's Tibetology has experienced tremendous changes in past thirty years, among which the personnel training is one of the most remarkable points. And it is Professor Wang Yao who had made the greatest contribution so far. He had only a small number of in-staff students and numerous off-staff students, but all of them were proud of being his students regardless of their identities. He was definitely a successful man if put in today's words. Why was it so? As a student of his, I believe it is because he was not only taught but also educated. He was prudent and knowledgeable in teaching, and he set a role model with his distinguished personalities while educating students.

Born in 1928 in Lianshui County, Jiangsu Province, China, Wang Yao graduated from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Nanjing University and Tibetan Language Department at Central College for Nationalities [i.e. today's Minzu University of China]. He served as the honorary dean and doctoral supervisor of Tibetology Research Institute in Minzu University of China. He was also a member of China Central Institute of Culture and History, the director of the Professional Board of the Ethnic Minorities' Language and Writing in China Dunhuang Turpan Association, the supervisor of the Chinese Culture Academy, a member of the Advisory Committee for China Tibetology, and the editorial board member of the special issue journal - *The History of Tibetan Literature* at University of Bonn. Besides, he was also an honorary professor in some top universities like Peking University and Tsinghua University, as well as in Foreign Tibetology Research Center of Shaanxi Normal University. He passed away on Dec. 17, 2015 at the age of 87. In the freezing morning of Dec. 23, many people from all walks of life in Beijing took part in his memorial service. Of the participants, some were his old friends in their 80s, some were young students, and some were social celebrities, and so on. In addition, both Zhu Rongji 朱镕基 and Wen Jiabao 温家宝, the former premiers of the State Council called for condolences and sent a wreath respectively. The current premier Li Keqiang 李克强 and deputy premier Zhang Gaoli 张高丽, State Councillor Yang Jing 杨晶 and Vice Chairman of the CPPCC Wang Zhengwei 王正伟 sent wreaths to pay their condolences. Prof. Wang was so influential that leaders of China felt the big loss.

The departure of Wang Yao left us endless grief and yearning, and the most valuable way for us to commemorate him is to carefully summarize study and carry on his excellent spiritual heritage. This article is a brief review of his academic career and life to express our yearning for him, thus to inspire the later generations to step forward along his track, and enlighten the development of Tibetan studies in China.

I. Wang Yao in Daily Life

As a renowned scholar, Wang Yao in daily life was not flawless, but he was the most real one. His imperfection was revealed in his dependence in daily life. Luckily, God sent him an amiable and gentle wife - Xue Shimu, Renheng to accompany him a whole lifetime. Xue Shimu (薛师母, i.e. Mrs. Wang) took very good care of him so that no matter how hard the life was, he still had a peaceful and warm life. All that provided Wang's academic research a strong support.

Conversely, the love and concern Wang had for his families could be “with all his heart, but never speak out”! We think he was not only a famous scholar but a great husband, father and grandpa. He was family-oriented, and sent his children to Europe to lead a prospective life. I remembered very clearly that he had a granddaughter who belongs to his second son. The little girl is only one day younger than my son. Back in the 1990s when my wife Deng Xiaoyong and I studied for the graduate degrees in Minzu University of China, his granddaughter and my kid were in the same kindergarten. No matter in which season, windy or rainy, he would always ride or walked his bike to pick up his granddaughter. Sometimes we would take over his work to pick up these two kids. And we had meals at Prof. Wang’s home for many times. Three generations of us had meal happily over the table just like a family. Xue Shimu cooked so well that I still remember the taste of the food.

Prof. Wang finally lost his life dependence and spiritual support after Xue Shimu passed away, and his grief touched people around him. Every time we paid visit to him during the Chinese New Year and other holidays, he always talked about his wife with eyes full of tears, even we could feel the sadness of him.

Prof. Wang was never a pessimist; he never lost his faith for life and his sacred academic career even when he suffered incessant humiliations during the Culture Revolution (1966-1976). According to him, he squeezed time for reading history books of Dunhuang and Tubo all the time while he did labor training in the corn field. So, it’s reasonable that he could quickly stand head and shoulders above the rest after the Culture Revolution ended.

Prof. Wang was an upright man who had explicit attitude toward right and wrong, and never went out of his way to curry favor. And we can see that from the following telegram delivered by Mr. Li Fanwen, a famous expert in Tanggutology.

Professor Wang Yao’s funeral committee of Minzu University of China:

I was astounded and grieved at the death of Prof. Wang Yao who was my good teacher and helpful friend! I paid a special visit to my respected teacher Professor Yu Daoquan 于道泉 and my good friend Professor Wang Yao when I came back to my Alma Mata for the first time after my days in the May 7th Cadre School 五七干校 were ended. It was Wang who introduced the Tangutology scholars and books at home and abroad to me then in spite of the political atmosphere and pressure. According to his instructions, I started my academic survey along the itinerary of the Tangut northern migration and went through Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan Province