

Memorial for Lucie Cheng

Marian Katz

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today.

Lucie was my first academic advisor at UCLA and my relationship with her greatly influenced my graduate school experience. I worked for Lucie as both a teaching and a research assistant. I took her graduate seminar on the Chinese Diaspora, and we later co-authored a book chapter on Migration and the Diaspora Communities of the Asia Pacific. Even after I changed my research topic and advisor, Lucie continued to be an important mentor to me, as well as a friend.

Lucie was an inspiring teacher. She captured students' attention, and won the admiration of many, with stories of her political activism. She challenged students to look at issues in new ways, often by posing provocative questions, and then by sharing her own answers that frequently defied conventional understandings. She also encouraged students to value their own life experiences and taught them how to make connections between those experiences and what they were learning in her class.

An example of this was the oral history interviews she assigned in her comparative immigration class when I was the TA. Students were given guidelines and instructed to interview an immigrant in their family or community. This allowed students with immigrant family members to explore their family's, and their own, experiences. And it encouraged students who said that they didn't know any immigrants (and yes, there were some) to seek out neighbors and classmates and learn first hand about experiences and perspectives that were often very different from their own. Through doing this students saw how individual experiences are connected with larger social processes. As a TA I appreciated this assignment because it provided a rich supply of material for students to draw on in discussion sections, which, in turn, resulted in sections that were especially lively and well attended.

Lucie was also an active and thoughtful mentor. For example, during my first year in the program she went out of her way to introduce me to the other graduate students in the department who were studying China and Chinese immigration. I felt welcomed into their circle, and some of them continue to be close friends.

As I already mentioned, she created opportunities for her graduate students' professional development. This included teaching and research assistantships, co-authored publications, and in my case assisting her one year to organize the Asia and Asian America section roundtable sessions at the Annual ASA meetings. The tributes to Lucie that I have read so far, such as in the LA Times, have emphasized her early career. So I would like to end by mentioning two important themes in her later work.

One was the importance of focusing on immigrants as agents actively influencing conditions in their "host" countries. An example of this was the research project she encouraged me to undertake for her seminar that examined how students from China organized successfully, largely via the internet, to persuade the US government to extend their visas in the wake of Tiananmen Square.

The other theme was changing patterns of international professional migration, from the one-way pattern of brain drain to the multi-directional flows of an emergent transnational professional class. One important consequence of this was that it made the older models of assimilation obsolete and introduced a new situation in which "continuity of relations with homeland society [was] the norm rather than the exception, and part of everyday life rather than something cut off from it."

Lucie was especially interested in the latter topic, and I think this was because of how deeply it resonated with her own personal experience. Looking back, one of the most important lessons that I learned from Lucie was that it was not only okay, but important, to do research on topics that are personally meaningful. And for that, I am extremely grateful. Thank you.

Marian Katz

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