

## In Memory of Lucie Cheng Claudia Mitchell-Kernan

My deep affection for Lucie Cheng grew out of my admiration for her. Each time we had a chance to have dinner together in recent years, my pleasure in her company always reminded me of how much I missed the more regular contact we enjoyed in our beginnings at UCLA. Although Lucie was only a few years my senior, I looked upon her as a mentor back in the mid 1970s, when we were directors of the Asian American Studies Center and what was then called the Center for Afro American Studies. She was often the person I turned to as I struggled to grasp the complexities of our shared situation.

As leaders of organizations that had burst onto the academic scene in the late 1960s, we were now trying to find a path between the political activism of our founders and the necessities of achieving stature in the UCLA community while maintaining fidelity to our mission. Lucie could always be counted on to confirm or challenge the wisdom of a decision I was about to make, to point out the nuances of various approaches, and to suggest the probable sequels to one or another course of action. While she tended not to press her views, she was very open when questioned and supported her views with thoughtful reasoning.

Lucie was an astute observer of people and what was going on around her, and I remember being struck by the fact that even when she was expressing disapproval, she tended not to be personally harsh in her disagreement but rather to contextualize the actions of others and to consider the interests that were in play on all sides, as much as her own. I thought her wise beyond her years, and as I learned more about her life and politics, it became clear that her wisdom was at least in part experientially based in some of the great events that have shaped the modern world – the struggle between the forces of nationalist and communist China and the rapprochement of China and the United States.

My sense of Lucie is that she was always looking ahead and moving forward, and in this, I believe we were truly kindred souls. As I faced my own existential crisis a decade ago and as she experienced hers in recent years, our conversations nevertheless were about our plans for the future, projects we hoped to undertake or had already set in motion. Of course, Lucie couldn't control her father's illness and his passing, but while these events changed the direction of her life, it struck me that they represented mostly a new context in which Lucie went forward with the same intentionality that was her customary way. The map might be different, but the compass was the same.

At dinner about two years ago, we talked a lot about her newspaper and the chairs on social transformation she had established at her university. She was particularly proud of her newspaper. While she felt that some saw her new directions as unrealistic at first, she was determined to move her ideas ahead into other languages to serve communities whose voices were seldom heard in the public sphere.

At our last dinner together in August 2009, we talked about doing a book together. We also talked about the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the ethnic studies centers, which was then just beginning. Certainly, the growth and success of the centers we once led underscored our shared view that we were not powerless in the face of forces that many people regard as impersonal, propelled by an internal dynamics and momentum that defy intervention. We were both believers in the potential efficacy of our own actions. We shared the view that life—particularly social, political, and economic conditions—were shaped by the decisions of people and policies intended to underwrite the interests of some and to ignore or marginalize those of other groups. We both cared deeply about issues of inequality and shared the belief that where we stood in the present was not inevitable. Although neither of us was naive about our capacity to change the world, we felt strongly we had a responsibility to try to change things for the better.

I was a bit frightened at that dinner when Lucie talked about a few bequests she was planning to make, as it clearly signaled to me that as always, she was planning ahead and moving toward a future, even though that future might be limited in length. Perhaps a bit more sharply than usual, I felt that the long separations between our visits were lost opportunities to enrich my own life and to continue to learn from her. She left her influence on me personally, made significant contributions to the UCLA and scholarly communities, and in the national and international arenas. Hers was a truly purpose governed life.

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