

Eulogy for Professor Hua Guo

by Peng Peng Yu (Beijing University BS 2001)

Professor Guo was 43, and in those crowded years of remarkable life he went further than most of us would go in four score years and six, if we were granted twice Professor Guo's allotted life span. But we are not just celebrating a life well lived; we are also mourning someone who deserved to live much longer, who could have achieved much more, and enjoyed far longer the love of Ms. Wu, his life's companion; the joy of helping his daughter on her journey into adulthood, and the pleasures of rich companionship.

I first met Professor Guo in my junior year, when I took his Quantum Mechanics course. Although six years have passed, I still vividly remember the striking characteristics about him on the first day of class, namely his mildness and modesty. Being a theoretical nuclear physicist, Professor Guo regarded himself as “just a physics fan” and described his teaching role as “being here to *discuss* physics” with us.

Later that day, I stopped by Professor Guo's office to see if I could be excused every week from one of his lectures due to a time conflict with a graduate-level course – Lie Groups and Lie Algebras – that I was taking. Our conversation began; I expected to be lectured about why students should proceed with solid steps as opposed to leaping forward. Rather than prejudicing and capping my abilities, Professor Guo smiled and gave full rein to my pursuit of theoretical physics. Furthermore, Professor Guo said that each student, if given total academic freedom, could develop a curriculum for himself or herself that would be both broad and deep – and ultimately more challenging and fulfilling than any core-course based curricula could ever be. My jitters faded as I discovered one of the most receptive minds at Beijing University.

Not only did Professor Guo nurture my elementary quantum mechanics, he was the one who led me to read Sakurai's Advanced Quantum Mechanics and Modern Quantum Mechanics for my senior thesis. Frankly, not until I entered graduate school did I

truly realize what a hefty amount of time Professor Guo had spent with me—an undergraduate—in the middle of the mandatory administrative routines he had to deal with as vice-chair of the department. It was indeed a privilege and also a pleasure working with Professor Guo who believed that undergraduate students should be put in the same league as graduate students or even mature researchers, for creativity and potential. I always enjoyed going to his office and entering a debate over one subject or another.

On the other hand, Professor Guo was equally strict with me in academics and research as he was with his graduate students, and even more with himself. I remember a snowy day in 2001 – the fourth day after the traditional Chinese Spring Festival – when Professor Guo and I were working in his office before submitting the report of our results. Professor Guo went through the draft I proposed line-by-line, word-by-word and modified formulae, notations, grammar, and even punctuation. Moreover, in his detailed explanations of the revisions, Professor Guo introduced to me the custom of scientific writing in theoretical physics that still guides me every time I write.

If I were asked about the professors under whom I had the most pleasure of learning, Professor Guo would be one of them with no doubt; He was not only my teacher and advisor, but also my friend. I believe his down-to-earth style had earned him genuine friendship with his colleagues, his neighbors, and his students.

I recall the last time I spoke with Professor Guo. It was the night before I left for the United States. His warm encouragement and impassioned expectation for me came from his heart. Those words are and will always be, one of the major thrusts in my studies and academic career.

Death brings to a close many unfulfilled wishes. I regret not being able to return to my alma mater to visit with Professor Guo. Only this summer, Ran Zhou (Beijing U. BS 2001, MS 2004), my classmate from high school and one of Professor Guo's former graduate students, came back with the news that Professor Guo was in fairly good shape after his transplant. We were thankful for

Professor Guo's renewed health. Then about a week ago Ran had to make the hardest phone call to me.

Overseas, the limited sources of information from home substantially deferred my receipt of the sad news. I only recently found out – through his obituary – that ten-odd years ago, Professor Guo joined the faculty of the theoretical group in the department at its lowest period. Such a vital force as Professor Guo was paid barely enough to sustain his family. His cramped apartment was where he did most of his work. Nothing detracted from Professor Guo's dedication to teaching and research. I learned that not only had he helped the careers of many students such as myself through his advice and warm support, but that many professors had become equally indebted to him.

The theoretical nuclear physics community has lost a brilliant mind, his family a beloved husband and father, Beijing University a valuable professor, and we all lost a dear friend. In his stead, Professor Guo lives in the hearts and minds of many people. I feel the strong impetus and obligation to write down these words in memory of Professor Guo – my teacher, my advisor, and my friend.

Peng Peng Yu

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