

Obituary: Julia Ching (1934-2001)*

Professor Julia Ching, a noted scholar of Chinese philosophy and religion, died Friday, October 26, 2001, in Toronto at the age of 67, of complications relating to cancer. Born in Shanghai in 1934, she went to high school in Hong Kong after the Communists took over China. After graduation, she went to New York to study at the College of New Rochelle. She served as an Ursuline nun for two decades during which she took a master's degree at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and a doctorate in Asian studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. From a faculty position there she moved to posts at Columbia University and Yale University before going to the University of Toronto in 1978.

Entering the field of scholarship only at the age of 35, Dr. Ching soon rose to prominence as a world expert on the neo-Confucian philosophy and religion of the Song and Ming dynasties of tenth- through seventeenth-century China. She was also well known as a leading expert in the comparative study of Chinese and Western religions. The fifteen books she has written or edited include her definitive studies of the leading Ming Confucian Wang Yangming (Columbia University Press, 1976) and the leading Song Confucian Zhu Xi (Oxford University Press, 2000). She also co-authored a book on Christianity and Chinese religions with the theologian Hans Küng (Doubleday, 1989), which has been translated into several languages including Chinese and Japanese. For her scholarly achievements she was appointed to the super-rank of University Professor at the University of Toronto, named incumbent of the R.C. and E.Y. Lee Chair of Chinese Thought and Culture, made a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and recently named to the Scholars' Council of the Kluge Center at the U.S. Library of Congress. She received honorary L.H.D. and D.D. degrees.

* This obituary is provided by Zhonghu Yan with Willard G. Oxtoby of the University of Toronto.

Professor Julia Ching's interests were not limited to technical scholarship. She exemplified the ideal of a classical Confucian scholar with a strong sense of public responsibility. She participated in movements such as the Inter-Action Council, Science for Peace, and the Canadian Pugwash Group. An astute commentator on current events, she was frequently called on to interpret breaking news from China, both by the general Canadian press and networks and the Chinese-language media in Toronto. In response to the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, she published a book on protest and dissent in China, *Probing China's Soul* (Harper & Row, 1990). She became arguably the principal cultural authority in the Chinese community of Toronto, which numbers over 400,000, or ten per cent of the metropolitan area population. For this as well as her scholarship she was named in 2000 to membership in the Order of Canada.

For those who knew her well, Julia Ching was a true friend indeed. She often went an extra mile to help those who needed her most, despite her physical limitations. For those who were lucky enough to sit in her classes, Professor Ching left an indelible memory as an inspiring teacher and a true mentor.

Professor Ching is survived by her husband, a Toronto comparative-religion colleague, Willard G. Oxtoby; John Ching, her adopted son from mainland China; and her mother Christina Ching Tsao, a resident of New York City.

United States contributions to the Julia Ching Memorial Fellowship to assist Ph.D. students in Chinese thought and culture in the later stages of their work may be made payable to the "Associates of the University of Toronto, Inc." and forwarded to Mr. Gary Kaufman, Treasurer, at the Associate Office, 1307 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 3200, New York NY 10019. Canadian contributions for the same fellowship fund may be made payable to University of Toronto and addressed to Ms. Suzanne Puckering, Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, Toronto M5S 1A1.