

In Memoriam: Joseph Ka Hoi Wong, MD, FRCSC (1954-2014)

Wayne F. Larrabee Jr, MD

Joseph Ka Hoi Wong was born in Guangzhou, China, to 2 loving parents, Hsi Huang and Ching Lam. He came to Canada at age 17 years. He completed his medical degree at the University of Toronto, his residency in otolaryngology at the University of West Ontario, and spent a year in Tokyo, Japan, on a fellowship with the renowned cleft lip and palate surgeon Takuya Onizuka, MD. Joe later established a busy and respected private practice in facial plastic surgery and continued throughout his career to be active in academic teaching.

Joe was active in both his local medical community and national associations in the United States and Canada. He was president of the Canadian Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (1997-2004) and was the Canadian director of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS) (1998-2005). Joe was selected Physician of the Year 2005, at the Credit Valley Hospital, Mississauga, Ontario.

Joe was committed to social justice both in his home community and around the globe. Among his many civic activities, he was co-chair, Peel Region Capital Campaign for the Yee-



Joseph Ka Hoi Wong, MD, FRCSC

Hong Wellness Foundation to build a nursing home and geriatric center in Mississauga; co-founder, Mississauga Board of Chinese Professionals and Businesses; honorary chair, the Toronto Canadian Chinese Artists Centre; member, Millennium Celebration Committee Mississauga; board of directors, Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto Area; and co-chair, Chinese community fund-raising for Credit Valley Hospital.



Smile China Project, 2007

Joe's civic contributions and dedication to the less fortunate in his own community were recognized with many awards, including the Civic Award, City of Mississauga (2000); the Chinese Canadian Legend Award for Excellence (2001); the Ontario Medal of Good Citizenship (2001); the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award (2003); and Inaugural Legend, Mississauga Legends Row 2013 (September 14, 2013, induction).

It was, however, to children with cleft lip palate deformities around the globe, but particularly in his beloved China, that Joe dedicated an extraordinary amount of his time, energy, and resources. He participated in a humanitarian mission to Kenya in 1989 with T. David Briant, MD, FRCSC. It is as the founder and director of the Smile China Project, though, that I most will remember Joe. Through many supporters, frequently from the Chinese community around Toronto, he funded and organized numerous cleft missions to China. Those of us honored to participate in them know they were organized with skill and thoughtful attention to the needs of the children. We would typically perform reconstructive surgery in about 100 children in a week and then give a lecture and discussion course for the local medical community. Joe was always included and honored the local surgeons. He had studied Chinese history and culture deeply and shared his knowledge with pride. Notable missions and milestones of Smile China include (1) Kunming, Yunnan, and Liuzhou, Guangxi, 2001; (2) Lanzhou, Gansu, and Changzi, Shanxi, 2002; (3) SARS in China, 2003; (4) Lanzhou, Gansu, 2004; (5) Shangrao, Jiangxi, 2005; (6) appointment by Premier Dalton McGuinty to represent Ontario in commemorating the 20 years of friendship between Jiangsu and Ontario by conducting a Smile China humanitarian mission to Yancheng, Jiangsu, 2006; (7) Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 2007; (8) Sichuan Earthquake Rescue Missions, Chengdu, Sichuan, 2008; (9) Nanning, Guangxi, 2009; (10) Shanghai 2010 and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of the Joint Venture with Shanghai 9 Hospital with China World Sponsorship; and (11) Changzhi, Shanxi, 2011, where a permanent stone memorial was erected in front of the hospital, which had been built by Norman Bethune, MD, in honor of 10 years of contribution of the Smile China Project in China. He received the Humanitarian of the Year Award by the AAFPRS (2007) primarily for his Smile China work. He was also honored in China as an honorary president, Guang Hwa Plastic Surgery Hospital, Shanghai; and a professor of plastic surgery (honorary) at the Changzhi Medical School, Shanxi, China.

Joe was one of the founding board members of the International Federation of Facial Plastic Surgery Societies (IFFPSS) and was from the beginning essential in working with the Asian facial plastic societies. He understood the subtle-



Joseph Wong, MD, and a patient

ties of politics involved and was able to guide us to a cooperative and inclusive organization. He founded the Pan Asia Academy of Facial Plastic Reconstructive Surgery to create a larger regional organization and facilitate cooperation among the Asian countries. Although he lived in Canada, he was widely respected and trusted by our Asian colleagues. Without his leadership, IFFPSS would not have been able to grow as it has over the past decade in Asia. Joe was also a senior advisor to the International Board for Certification in Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Joe was also a long-term member of the editorial board of *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery*. In this position, he was an excellent advocate for the journal but was, in addition, the “voice of Asia.” Under his leadership, we published in July/August 2010 a theme issue, “Asian Facial Plastic Surgery.” This issue was jointly edited by Joe and myself. The immense clinical experience, especially from China, was evident to all. In addition to publishing some excellent articles, we succeeded in introducing a number of quality researchers to our journal, who have continued to serve as authors and reviewers.

On a personal note, Joe, his wife Gaye, and I formed a deep bond and friendship on the many Smile China missions. I came to admire and respect them both for their altruism, kindness, and humility. Joe and I discovered a mutual interest in Chinese art, poetry, and science. I introduced him to my Joseph

Needham volumes on the history of *Science and Civilisation in China*. He in return and during his most recent illness sent me a treasured biography of Needham, *The Man Who Loved China*. I wrote a number of poems in the style of the Chinese mountain poets both Joe and I admired. *Homage* was written on one of our Smile China missions with Joe’s editorial assistance. *August 2014* was written a few days after Gaye spoke to me of Joe’s death. Joe himself was a man who loved China. I, along with so many others, loved Joe.

Joe was a committed and happy family man. He and Gaye were married for 33 years, and she was always there to support him in his many activities. He was extremely proud of his 2 children, Brian and Amy. He is survived also by his parents, 3 sisters, brother, nieces, and nephews. Joe died on the morning of Wednesday, August 13, 2014, at Toronto General Hospital. He will be deeply missed.

Homage to Chinese Mountain Poets (Yancheng, China, October 2006)

Between furrowed fields
rests a quiet pond
where frogs sometimes speak.
Deer descend like ghosts
at dusk and dawn.
Doe and fawn bend to drink.
They know the path
from high mountain meadows
to sweet water, and back.
Don’t look so closely
and you’ll find it too—
winding through grasses
between pines
into the deep forest.

August 2014 (for Joe Wong)

It’s cool this morning
Tide’s flowing out.
The sun rises slowly—
its warmth more precious
than before.
The blue heron
balanced so perfectly
is beautiful.
How does she know
the precise moment
to lift her wings
and fly into silence?

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