

In Memory of a Curious Mind and a Musical Soul

With a heavy heart, I speak here today.

I got to know Shengmen through our Jin Yuelin courses at Tsinghua. He was an active student with an unusually curious mind. Here are two photos of him engaging in discussions with Johan and Jeremy during their courses. The picture on the left is one I received from him, and the red arrow was added by him to show me where he was sitting.

After successfully completing four courses, Shengmen received an official certificate. I clearly remember him requesting a photo with our four Jin Yuelin professors. Even during the certificate ceremony, he was deeply engaged in a discussion with Martin about language and logic.

Later, he wrote a survey article introducing game semantics for language, which was published on our Tsinghua Logic Blog. His acknowledgements section in his bachelor's thesis, which I share here, beautifully captures his academic journey. Shengmen wrote:

When I enrolled as an undergraduate student in the School of Life Sciences, I had no idea that I would end up writing a thesis related to logic, language, or philosophy. Over the years, my academic journey took several unexpected turns. In the spring of 2021, during Tang Hao's course on the philosophy of language, I was first introduced to analytic philosophy. At a time when I was uncertain about my future academic direction, I realized that this was an ideal field for me. Subsequently, through courses taught by Jin Yuelin professors Dag Westerståhl, Jeremy Seligman, Martin Stokhof, and Johan van Benthem, I gradually explored the realm of logic and its intersections with other fields. In particular, it was in Johan's course that I first developed a keen interest in the semantics of natural language, an interest that has flourished in the following semesters. The influences from these diverse disciplines are all reflected in this thesis. I am grateful to these outstanding teachers and will never forget the excitement of walking into each of their classes, eager to discover new ideas and insights.

He also wrote about me in the next paragraph, then about Dag, his thesis supervisor.

I was happy that he had the opportunity to go to Amsterdam to continue exploring his interests. When I asked how he was doing, in January of this year, he wrote:

Now my main interest has shifted from natural language to more formal languages and mathematics. The courses I chose for the winter term and next semester are also more math-oriented.

Sadly, this became the last message that I received from him.

Another of Shengmen's talents was music. For the 10th anniversary celebration of the JRC, he rented a piano, had it delivered to the venue, and performed at the event—one of the highlights of the event. Before graduating, he even held a solo concert. I was invited and had the chance to meet his friends. I enjoyed the evening immensely.

Shengmen left us far too soon. His passing is a great loss to our community. I wish him peace in a different, possible world. As a mother, I feel deeply for his family, and I wish his parents strength during this incredibly difficult time.

I want to thank the ILLC, especially Nick and Robert, for their support. I'm also grateful to the Dutch Embassy in China for their assistance, and to all the colleagues who wrote to me to express their concern. I'd also like to thank Chen Qian and all the Chinese students who have offered their help over the past weeks.