

>> MAURICE CHARLES: Words fail to express the depth of our sorrow, anguish, and outrage over the sudden loss of a shining presence from our community. But many beautiful and meaningful words described Shaoxiong Zheng, also known as Dennis, and what he means to his family and friends. We gather today in the warmth of this chapel to honor this talented young man's life and to offer our condolences to those who love him, especially to his family. My name is Maurice Charles, I'm the dean of Rockefeller memorial chapel. The next voice that you will hear is that of Paul Alivisatos, president of the University of Chicago.

>> PAUL ALIVISATOS: I want to express my appreciation to all of you for joining us today as we gather to remember Zheng Shaoxiong, known to many as Dennis who was tragically taken from us last week.

This is a sad and difficult time for the University of Chicago community. We have lost a valued member of our community.

We are joined today by Dennis' parents, who have traveled here from China. Dennis was a member of our family, and by extension, that means that you are a member of our family too. We share your deep sorrow at Dennis' tragic loss. We are honored by you as you have chosen to join us in today's ceremony to mourn his passing and to celebrate his life.

I want to extend a special welcome and thank you to Dennis' girlfriend, Xinyi, who helped to plan today's service. We are also honored to welcome Zhichun Bian, deputy consul general of the People's Republic of China in Chicago, who has joined us today to speak on behalf of the Chinese consulate in Chicago.

We are heartbroken by this tragic and senseless loss which has been felt deeply by our community both here in the United States and around the world. This university has welcomed and benefitted from the presence of international scholars and students like Dennis and, in particular, those from China, since our earliest years. Our commitment to the community of scholars from China remains as strong as ever as we face this tragedy together. I want to acknowledge that Dennis' loss has been deeply felt by the students, parents, friends, and alumni from China who form such an important part of our community. My thoughts are with all of you during this most difficult of times.

Dennis was a talented and passionate student, a

proud graduate of the university, a cherished friend to many members of our community. He first came to us from the University of Hong Kong to earn his master's of science in statistics, aspiring to become a data scientist. Like so many of our graduates and alumni, he embodied the values of the University of Chicago through his commitment to improving the lives of others, by using his knowledge and expertise to address some of the key problems we face as a global society.

During his time here, Dennis touched many people's lives. In addition to being a student in the department of statistics, Dennis was also a teaching assistant in the Booth School of Business and the Harris School of Public Policy, and he will be deeply missed by the faculty, his colleagues, and his students, to whom he was a beloved teacher, mentor, and friend.

From everyone I have spoken to over the last several days, what has become most clear to me is that in addition to being a prominent and enthusiastic scholar and a valued colleague, Dennis was a dear friend to so many people, both here on campus and beyond. I have been told of his kindness, his generosity, the light and positivity he brought to everything he did, and most of all, what a supportive and encouraging friend he was to everybody he knew.

As we gather to celebrate Dennis' life, I want to express to his parents, loved ones, and friends the deep sense of sadness and loss that we as a community feel as we mourn his passing. I also want you to know that it was an honor to welcome Dennis into our community, into our family, and that we are grateful for the opportunity to have known him. Dennis will always be remembered here as a wonderful, talented, and caring person who touched so many people's lives and helped make them better. Thank you.

>> MAURICE CHARLES: We now welcome to this podium the deputy consul general of the People's Republic of China, Zhichun Bian.

>> ZHICHUN BIAN: (Speaking in Chinese).

Today it is with a heavy heart that we come to mourn and remember Shaoxiong Zheng. Shaoxiong was an outstanding student with a fine character. He was respectful, caring, kind, talented and was well kind by his peers and Professors. We are shocked and pained by his loss. On behalf of the consulate general of the People's Republic of China in Chicago, I would like to express our deepest condolences to Shaoxiong's family and friend. After Shaoxiong's

unfortunate encounter, the University of Chicago has given great attention and has provided considerate and comprehensive assistance in relevant matters, including helping to bring Shaoxiong's family to the U.S.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to President Alivisatos, provost Ka Yee Lee, and staff at University of Chicago. Shaoxiong's friends, peers, and Chinese community has also done extensive work during this process, which was so the fine qualities, unity and friendship amongst come patriots (speaking in Chinese).

The Chinese ease government attaches great importance to the safety and lawful rights of oversea Chinese nationals. After Shaoxiong's unfortunate encounter, we immediately demanded the relevant U.S. authorities to promptly investigate and release information about the case. And to take concrete measures, ensuring the safety of all Chinese nationals, including Chinese students studying abroad.

The consulate general has immediately contacted Shaoxiong's family. The University of Chicago and relevant parties, and had remained in close contact in order to provide assistance to Shaoxiong's family.

(Speaking in Chinese).

We wish that Shaoxiong may rest in peace.

(Speaking in Chinese).

We hope Shaoxiong's family and friends may be con sold. We also hope that Chinese nationals, including Chinese students, studying abroad, will closely observe local security conditions, be timely acquainted with security warning, strengthening safety precautions and ensure personal safety.

The Chinese consulate general in Chicago will spare no efforts to serve our compatriots. Thank you.

>> MAURICE CHARLES: Next we will hear from our provost, Ka Yee Lee.

>> KA YEE LEE: It is with heavy hearts that we gather here today as we remember our colleague, our friend, Shaoxiong Zheng, who we call Dennis. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to Dennis' parents and friends. Please know that the university community is grieving with you during this difficult time and that you have a heartfelt sympathy and support. As President Alivisatos mentioned, Dennis graduated from the university this past spring with a master of science in statistics. He used machine learning for inferring gene regulatory networks and as period to be a data scientist. His former Professors at the University of Chicago has described him as a

bright and passionate student who wanted to use his talents to make a positive impact in the world.

Dennis did his undergraduate work at the University of Hong Kong and his undergraduate research advisor, who happens to be an UChicago alumnus, remembers Dennis as a wonderful and resourceful research assistant and a gentle and kind person who was eager to learn and always willing to share his knowledge.

I did not have the privilege of knowing Dennis personally but have had the opportunity to speak with some of his close friends and family over the past several days. They shared with me that Dennis was a thoughtful and friendly individual who always lit up the room with his smile. He would go out of the way to help anyone, whether it be a friend or someone he did not know. He was well known and respected among the student body, and he was proud to be a graduate of the University of Chicago. Dennis truly embraced and enjoyed his life, living each day to its fullest.

Dennis was taken from us far too soon and nothing can ease the pain of his loss. Although his life was cut short, Dennis had an extraordinary impact on this world and on the many people who knew and loved him. We are honored that he was a member of our campus community, and we will remember him fondly.

To Dennis' parents and loved one here in Chicago and around the world, (speaking in Chinese).

Shaoxiong made our university a better place. Our entire community mourns with you, the parents and friends, and wishes you peace and healing. We are committed to the safety of our students and to all members of our campus community and will do everything we can to prevent a tragedy like this from happening again. Thank you.

>> MAURICE CHARLES: Dan Nicolae is Professor and chair of the department of statistics. We welcome him to the podium.

>> DAN NICOLAE: To the family and friends of Shaoxiong, known to us as Dennis, I join President Alivisatos, deputy consul Zhichun Bian and Provost Lee in expressing our condolences for your tragic loss. I'm here on behalf of the statistics department to express our collective pain and sorrow for the passing of our beloved alumnus and to share with you some of our cherished memories.

We were fortunate to have had Dennis as a student in the statistics master's program for two years, starting with the fall of 2019. And we knew from the very beginning that his aspiration, his

ambition, was to solve important problems facing our society using the tools of statistics and data science.

Dennis was never a passive learner. He asked countless questions in and outside of the classroom. He debated on statistical reek and statistical methods and he often challenged the status quo.

When faced with diversity, he showed greater determination and emerged stronger. I collaborated with Dennis on his research thesis on machine learning methods for regulatory networks, and I greatly admired his dedication to learning and his intellectual curiosity.

I initially suggested to him a problem in network theory, and he politely listened. He acknowledged my idea. He -- he took notes on the books and the papers I suggested to read. He left. And he came back weeks later to report on his progress. He told me he read a couple of advanced books, different than the ones I suggested. He took an online course on machine learning with graphs. And he made significant progress on a research problem that was very different than the one I suggested, one that was more challenging and better suited to his research interests. And this spirit of inquiry, creativity, independence show me his great promise for scholarly work and also I was convinced that he would be successful in everything he -- in anything he decided to pursue.

Dennis was not only a promising scholar but a wonderful person as well, always willing to sacrifice his own time to help others.

As the unofficial tour guide for prospective and first year students and as a strong advocate of our department, he earned the affection of many of our community members.

Beyond our department, Dennis loved the atmosphere of the university. He enjoyed the diversity of opinions and the rational debates on many topics. He also enjoyed spending time and interacting with his friends and neighbors in Hyde Park, many of whom, who are here.

As we search for healing in face of this hard breaking loss, I know that we all will remember Dennis for his kind and generous spirit, for his talent and dedication. I'm fortunate to have known Dennis, and I will always cherish the memories of our interactions. Thank you.

>> MAURICE CHARLES: Next we will hear from Bruce D. Meyer, the McCormick foundation Professor at

the Harris School of Public Policy.

>> BRUCE MEYER: It must certainly be that his family and friends most intensely feel the loss of Shaoxiong Zheng who we knew as Dennis. Nevertheless, Dennis had an influence beyond his family and friends and beyond the statistics department. Earlier this calendar year, he served as the teaching assistant for a statistics class I taught at the Harris School of Public Policy. Advanced statistics for data analysis II. He brought dedication, creativity, and insight to the work. He was a terrific teaching assistant who was much beloved by the students. Some of his students emailed me to share their thoughts. One said he was the best and most responsible teaching assistant I have ever met. A second lamented how unfortunate it is that we have lost such a helpful and hardworking person. And she went on that his commitment went beyond what was mandated to help students in the class. She cited that he set up a separate Zoom call to help her out given the time difference between Chicago and India where she was.

His students were inspired to learn from him. They were also inspired to teach others in the way he did. Two of the students in the class were so inspired, that they contacted me about being teaching assistants this year for the same class.

The life of Dennis Zheng shows us that even a young person can have a lot of impact on others. He certainly did.

>> MAURICE CHARLES: We have among us Shaoxiong's mother. We welcome Li Rong, even as we offer our deepest condolences.

>> LI RONG: My dearest son, finally with all the tears and sorrow and longing for you the entire way, I arrived at the University of Chicago, the highly esteemed institution where you pursued your intellectual dream.

It's my first time traveling abroad, not for sight seeing or your graduation, not even for your wedding ceremony, but for your funeral! What a brutal tragedy!

I can still vividly recall the look on your face when you left home for Chicago. You wanted me to see that you could fulfill your dreams! You told me that you wanted to show me the world and that we should look forward to the future together. But now you and I are separated into two worlds. I have called your name again and again in extreme grief. My son, we were meant to share a brilliant dawn together but now you left me to face the darkness by myself, a future

without you!

My poor child! How helpless, desperate and angry you must have felt when that vicious bullet penetrated your young chest. As you lay on the ice cold pavement in a foreign country covered with blood at the tender age of 24, all your dreams of pursuing knowledge in science, mathematics, astronomy, literature and love were smashed in a split second. A senseless murder had you left this world, without saying good bye to your beloved relatives, teachers, friends, and classmates, an eternal good bye.

I'm shaking all over, I'm so grieved and overwhelmed with sorrow I can't believe that this was truly happening, that I'm never going to be able to see my precious son again.

They say that a person who shines everywhere is an Angel. God, please give me my Angel back.

In your short 24 years, I have been by your side watching you grow up healthily and happily. You have given me countless happy memories. To realize your ambitious life plan, you worked tirelessly from city of Leshan to Chengdu, attending the No. 7 high school, and then the University of Hong Kong, and finally to the University of Chicago, where you successfully completed your graduate studies. I am so proud of your achievements, and I know how grateful you were for my effort in raising you up. Just two days before the tragedy, I received a bottle of perfume from Chicago as my birthday gift. Today after crossing the ocean to get to you, I stand here, wearing the perfume you bought for me. I know you can tell that mommy's here to take you home when you smell the familiar fragrance.

I just wanted to comb your thick hair with the comb you used when you were a child, to sit by your side and caress your hand some face a thousand times, to kiss your beautiful eyes so that you can perhaps wake up and see your beloved mother once again, and to hold you in my arms and warm your cold body with mine. Let's go home, my son!

My dear son, do you know how proud I was when people praised you as an outstanding young talent? You always impressed people as a modest and self disciplined gentleman. You warmed everyone's heart like the sunshine, but only your mom knows how incredibly hard you had worked for everything. You will always be the first and biggest pride of your mother's heart. My dear son, it would yet comfort you to know that in the darkest moment of my life, countless friends I know and people I don't know have

sent their heartfelt condolences. The Chinese consulate in Chicago, the president of the University of Chicago both called to express sympathy and condolences. The president of the University of Hong Kong sent a letter of mourning, and your childhood high school in Chengdu, China, held a memorial service for you. Numerous kind hearted people have extended selfless and kind hands to warm my almost dead body so that I could have the courage to overcome all difficulties to get to you. I offer my deepest gratitude to them on behalf of you.

My dear son, countless mothers and families are standing by my side. We all share the same grief and anger and call for severe punishment for the murderer! I stand here as a mother of a murdered child. I strongly urge that the safety of every international student be protected so that the tragedy will not happen again. It's a shared demand of tens of thousands of international students and their families. Thank you.

(Bowing).

>> MAURICE CHARLES: In honor of this young man's life, I invite you to rise for a moment of silence.

(Moment of silence) may Shaoxiong's memory be a blessing and may he rest in peace. Please be seated.

My prayer for all of you is that in the days ahead, you may find comfort and courage and strength. If you need our support, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at spiritual life, to student wellness, and to prospectives if you are faculty and staff. And especially to the family, whatever we can do for you in the days ahead, please feel free to reach out. You will always be a part of this community.

The service is ended. Peace be with you.

(Music playing).