Funeral condolence

In memory of Professor Li Qiang, a great sociologist at Tsinghua University in China,

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Tearful and mournful!!

Upon hearing the sad news that my long-time friend, colleague, and comrade, Professor Li Qiang of the Department of Sociology at Tsinghua University in China, passed away at 2:19 PM on December 12, 2023, I feel heartbreaking sadness and emptiness. He served as president of the Chinese Sociological Association, founded and led the Department of Sociology at Tsinghua University, and is one of China's leading sociologists who has made outstanding achievements in the fields of social class, social governance, and urban development. He is an example of a participatory public intellectual who has a great influence not only on academia but also on the administration and Chinese political leaders.

On April 20th 2013, when I visited Tsinghua University with Prof. Chang Xiangqun from London, I vividly remember him welcoming us though his health was not very comfortable and talking about various things with his Tsinghua University colleagues. I could not visit China since 2019 during the years when COVID-19 was raging. Meanwhile, I heard he was sick with COVID-19 and also heard that he was recovering well. Nevertheless, I could not expect him to be able to attend the meeting on April 20th. His colleagues at Tsinghua University, who had not seen him for a long time, also had the same thought. However, Professor Li defied expectations and came to the meeting with the intention of welcoming us. So how could I not be deeply touched by his friendship and compassion!

As soon as he met me, he asked me about the status of the People's Party, which I was deeply involved in and founded in 2016, and about Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon, who visited Tsinghua University and held a large academic event. He still expressed deep interest in Korea's political development and social change. Professor Li Qiang was wearing a blue face mask that day, but his bright eyes and speaking voice were not much different from the past. The conversation lasted about 40 minutes about his recent publication, <Grassroots Governance> and his future activities. Following the first survey targeting citizens of Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo in 2012, we also reached an agreement to conduct a second round of survey soon. We took a commemorative photo and he left with an impressive pose. I had no idea that this would be my last meeting with him, and no one there would have guessed

Then, on July 8, the 2023 Chinese Sociological Association Annual Academic Conference was held at Nankai University in Tianjin, China. Professor Li Qiang opened a session titled “The Chinese Style of Modernization and Innovations in Grassroots Governance.” I participated in this session and presented a paper highlighting the meaning of the Qinghe social governance experiment led by Professor Li from a global perspective. Many of Professor Li's students participated in this session and presented papers, and we also took a group photo. It had already been agreed that Professor Li would not personally preside over this meeting, but since everyone believed that his health had greatly recovered, no one would have imagined that he would pass away before the end of the year.

The Qinghe experiment, which Professor Li Qiang was passionate about and which I have occasionally visited, is a very unique and creative social governance model. The process in which Tsinghua University researchers participated in the local community, educating residents, consulting with them to create local residential organizations, and rebuilding neighborhood communities with these organizations at the center is truly impressive. In China's reality, where the role of civil society is weak compared to the role of the state or market, the implications of this experiment for China's future are very large and rich.

Looking back personally, Professor Li Qiang was especially very kind to me, thus I would like to express my deep gratitude to him. When I retired from Seoul National University in 2010, he invited me to Tsinghua University as a special visiting professor for a year, provided me with accommodations, asked me to continue my research without the burden of offering courses, and gave me an honorarium of 10,000 Yuan per month. Furthermore, since 2012 was the 20th anniversary of the sisterhood relationsahip between Seoul and Beijing, I planned a full-scale questionnaires survey targeting citizens in Seoul and Beijing with financial help from the Seoul Metropolitan Government. I vividly remember that he, who was the dean of Tsinghua University's College of Social Sciences at the time, accepted my suggestion without hesitation, and we conducted an extensive survey research using the budget that each can spend. Thereafter, we have established a strong solidarity of friendship by visiting each other frequently and holding academic conferences.

Such a close friend and comrade passed away unfortunately at an age when we could still work further together and fruitfully. I find no way to contain my sadness and I feel that the world is just empty. It is, indeed, a great loss and a pity for East Asian sociology too that a sociologist with far-sighted insight into China's future has left us.

I sincerely pray that my respectable friend now leaves this troubled world of secular life and takes eternal rest and peace in the other world.