FROM *MOBY DICK* TO YALE

Kang-i Sun Chang

A few months ago, at the Yale faculty meeting, Dean Tamar Gendler read a retirement tribute to me that began with this statement:

> Kang-i, you are a scholar of classical Chinese literature with a special expertise in poetry and broad interests in comparative studies of poetry, literary criticism, gender studies, and cultural theory and aesthetics. . . .

I was of course very flattered by the many dazzling words which Tamar used to describe my academic specialty, but I was most struck by her use of the word "scholar."

Honestly, I did not set out to become a scholar. In fact, a few years ago, my former student Haun Saussy (now a university professor at the University of Chicago) delivered a very interesting lecture in which he questioned the appropriateness of using the word "scholar" to define my intellectual identity, saying: ". . . years of acquaintance with Kang-i made me see the depth of her commitment to a way of life that I wouldn't precisely identify with the *scholar*, if we're thinking in English."[1] He further explained that other terms, collectively, might get closer to what he was thinking, though he said "each of them is misleading in its way":

> When I think of Kang-i, though, I think of someone who has been through formative experiences, with book and brush and typewriter and computer, that relate to the accumulation of knowledge, but also been through other experiences to which she has responded by forming the personality that in Chinese we identify with the *wenren* 文人, the *shenshi* 紳士 or, more colloquially, the *dushuren* 讀書人.[2]

Sitting in the audience, I was very intrigued by Haun's use of the Chinese term *dushuren*, which literally means "a book-reading person." *Dushuren* is a generic term, which usually refers to the kind of educated individuals who devote themselves to

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reading books; they read all kinds of books and may produce poetry and other writings but don't necessarily have academic ambitions. In a way, Haun's use of the Chinese term *dushuren* best describes my intellectual journey since my early years.

Some of you already know that I had a very traumatic childhood. I was born in Peking (today's Beijing) in 1944 but grew up in Taiwan in the 1950s, during a period known as the White Terror, when Taiwan was under martial law, and both political dissidents and innocent civilians were often prosecuted, incarcerated, and even executed under a paranoid KMT government. I was six years old when my father was arrested and imprisoned in the military prison in Xindian near Taipei and was later sent to the infamous Green Island Concentration Camp. By the time my father returned, ten years later, I was almost sixteen. In those years, my mother held our family together. She was an amazing woman. After my father's arrest, she single-handedly brought us from Taipei to the countryside in southern Taiwan, where she worked as a sewing teacher to keep her three children fed and clothed. During those difficult times, I learned all on my own to bury my head in books. In literature, I found a place that my heart could call home. While in the Linyuan elementary school, during the after-school hours, my teacher Mr. Lan taught me the ancient philosophies of Laozi, calling my attention to the recurrent images of water in the book *Laozi*. He encouraged me to be like water, always flexible by opening new spaces while constantly flowing. He also encouraged me to memorize many verses from the *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. I think my later passion for classical Chinese poetry and philosophy germinated during those after-school hours spent reading those classics as a young girl.

During the 1950s–1960s, school textbooks in Taiwan consistently left out the names of Lu Xun, Shen Congwen, and other important mainland authors due to political reasons. Thus, from a very young age, I thought literary masterpieces in modern and contemporary times were mostly produced by Westerners, not by Chinese writers. At age nine, I was obsessed with reading the Chinese translations of modern European fiction. At age twelve, I read the Chinese translation of the Bible cover to cover, treating it like a world history book. That was also the year that I began to learn English, starting with the ABCs. In those days in southern Taiwan, we mainly learned to read English as a written language, as we were not taught to speak it yet. However, I always had excellent grades in school. Being "number one in class" (*di yi ming*) was my consistent goal because I wanted to comfort my father, who had been unjustly imprisoned and suffered terribly under inhumane conditions. My mother had always told me and my two younger brothers about how our father was a number-one student in school, and when he graduated from Waseda University in Japan, he even received a gold medal for his academic achievements from the president of the university.

When I was eighteen years old, I was elected as the "privileged student" (*baosong sheng*, meaning a student automatically admitted to a college without the entrance examination) to enter Tunghai University's English department, where all faculty members were either Americans or Britons specializing in language and literature. It

was at Tunghai University that I finally learned how to speak English and how to write a research paper in English. We were taught to read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (in modern translation), Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden, John Donne, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, as well as William Shakespeare. I also took courses on American literature, learning works by such authors as Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway. In those years, I buried my head exclusively in the world of Anglo-American literature.

I also remember that upon entering Tunghai University in the autumn of 1962 as a freshman, I immediately joined the Christian activities on campus. My father had only been out of prison for two years, and my heart was still replete with sadness. Youth fellowship on campus became my source of spiritual comfort. Every time I interacted with my Christian friends, singing hymns and reading the Bible with them, I was reminded of the beauty and hope in the world. However, it wasn't until my junior year that I started attending Bible study at the home of Professor Paul Alexander (who taught in the Department of Biology) and his wife Lucy Alexander. The first hymn we sang at their house was "Amazing Grace."

In my senior year at Tunghai, I decided to focus my thesis on the nineteenth-century American writer Herman Melville. My initial choice was entirely a matter of coincidence, about which I will not go into detail here. But I recall that on the day I began reading *Moby Dick*, I was immediately absorbed by the author's tone, and so I stayed up all night to finish reading the book. The next day, I went to see Professor Anne Cochran, chair of the English department, asking her to approve my thesis topic on *Moby Dick*. However, Professor Cochran was reluctant to give me her approval at first, because she was worried that I might have trouble researching a book so full of biblical allusions. It was only after I had successfully passed a quiz on the Bible that she finally agreed to my proposed topic. Then she assigned my English teacher J. David Witwer as my thesis adviser, and eventually my thesis turned out to be one with an extremely long title: "The Importance of Herman Melville to Chinese Students, with a Comparison Between the Ideas of Melville and Prominent Chinese Thinkers."

During my senior year, I invested a lot of time and energy in the writing of my thesis. Perhaps the reason the novel *Moby Dick* captivated me so much in those days was because the book directly addressed the meaning of struggle in life, which reminded me of my own hardships as a child. Also, the profound and abstruse language of the novel seemed a worthy challenge to me. Although most secondary sources on the novel were devoted to the question of how Captain Ahab madly hunted for the big whale Moby Dick, I found the personal salvation of the character called Ishmael most fascinating. I particularly noticed that the wanderer Ishmael was the only person in the book to come back alive to tell his story.

Upon graduation in 1966, I was admitted to the graduate program of the English department at the National Taiwan University (NTU), after passing a very competitive entrance exam. I loved the English program there, but my real goal was to come

to the US. It was clear to me that the only way to escape from Taiwan, especially from the shadows of the White Terror, was to gain admission and a fellowship from an American university. In my second year as a graduate student at NTU, I was admitted to the PhD program of the English department at Texas A&M University, with a generous tuitionship.

I finally arrived in the US in July 1968, when I was twenty-four years old, and ended up settling down in Princeton, New Jersey. My boyfriend, C.C. (later my husband, also known as Chézy), was then a graduate student in the School of Engineering at Princeton University, and he had just passed his qualifying exam. We thought that was the right time to get married. I then decided to enroll in the School of Library Science at Rutgers, instead of going to Texas to enter a PhD program in English literature. For me, at that time, it was far more important to stay with my husband than to pursue an academic career. I had always considered myself a *dushuren* anyway, one who could read and write anywhere, regardless of location. Also, by staying in Princeton, I could learn from our dear friend Mrs. Edith Chamberlin. It could be considered extraordinary for a woman of her generation (she was born in 1889) to hold two university degrees, one of which was in philosophy. It just happened that two years before I arrived in the US, she had been assigned by Princeton University as the "host family" to welcome C.C. as a newly arrived international student. The then almost eighty-year-old Mrs. Chamberlin liked C.C. so much that she said to him, "Chézy, please call me Gram."[3] So, very quickly they had become close friends. When I arrived in 1968, I also called Mrs. Chamberlin "Gram" and treated her as my American grandma. She then introduced us to her family and friends as "my Chinese grandchildren."

Once, Gram said to me, "Eleanor, it seems that I knew you accidentally. But today I know it's not."[4] Later, when Gram learned about the prison ordeal my father had gone through previously in Taiwan, she felt deeply touched by the story. Thus, in the spring of 1970, she went on a trip to Taiwan to meet my parents as well as our other family members (including C.C.'s parents and his siblings). Gram was especially happy to speak to my father in person; she often talked about it afterwards. (Several years later Gram wrote to the New Jersey senator Clifford P. Case, who eventually helped my parents immigrate to the US.)

In the fall of 1968, it was Gram who taught me how to read poems by women writers like Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson. I often sat on her balcony facing the beautiful Lake Carnegie while drinking tea and reading poems with her. She was also the first person to kindle a true understanding in C.C. and me toward American democracy. Her many contributions to the local newspaper, *Town Topics*, often expressed her humanitarian concerns during the Vietnam War, a seemingly endless conflict that was still ongoing when I came to the US. To me, Gram represented a true intellectual, and I began to look up to her as a role model.

In Princeton, I also loved to browse through stacks of Chinese books at the Gest Oriental Library. It was in the fall of 1968 that I suddenly found tons of books written

by great mainland authors such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Shen Congwen—works that were banned in Taiwan and had not been available to me in my earlier education. Somehow, at Princeton, I finally found my Chinese cultural roots. I began to read books from Mainland China voraciously and concluded that my previous biases against the Chinese literary tradition were wrong. In the meantime, I was prepared to take courses at the Rutgers Library School, while C.C. was hard at work on his dissertation. By August 1969, I had already completed seven core courses at Rutgers and had only one more semester to go before getting my MLS degree.

But the tragic death of our infant son David in October 1969 changed everything. That was a terrible time, and as poor graduate students, we even found it difficult to pay for the infant's death. The hardship we experienced is hard to put into words. To make ends meet, I decided to take a semester off from Rutgers and found a temporary job, earning one dollar per hour, at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) center near Princeton. I fortunately had already received my permanent residency and was able to work. I went to work at ETS every morning overwhelmed with sorrow. A colleague named Betty often comforted me by giving me devotional books in English, which slowly renewed my faith. I often thought to myself at the time, "I am only twenty-five years old. How will I live to be fifty years old?" It was during those difficult times that Gram gave us the moral support which we desperately needed.

Luckily, in May 1970, my husband got an offer from South Dakota State University to teach courses in civil engineering as an assistant professor. By that time, he had almost finished writing his dissertation and just needed the summer to revise it. In July we quickly headed for Brookings, South Dakota, and during the long drive through numerous interstate highways, we experienced for the first time the beauty of wilderness in the American West. That was the first time we felt the healing power of nature. I especially loved the landscapes of South Dakota, which reminded me of the Tang poet Wang Wei's famous verse on the Chinese frontier: "On the vast desert, a lone vertical column of smoke;/Shining upon the long river, the setting sun is round [大漠孤煙直/ 長河落日圓]." So, it was in South Dakota that I returned to the readings of classical Chinese poetry.

I was pleased to know that, as a land-grant university, South Dakota State University had a very good university library. When I first visited the library, I was impressed by its collection, which included many government documents and congressional papers. Most amazingly, after a short interview, I got an offer from the university librarian to serve as a reference librarian, a position which would start a year later. (They knew that I still needed to go back to Rutgers to complete a semester of courses for my MLS degree.)

When I finally got my MLS degree and returned to South Dakota in December 1970, it was already deep winter. South Dakota is known for blizzards. Many times, we were forced to leave our car in the middle of the road, and we literally crawled back to our apartment during the heavy snowstorms. That was a difficult time, but it also

showed how human strength and resilience make it possible to cope with circumstances like that. And so, South Dakota had changed us; it forced us to learn to adjust.

Since my job at the University Library was not going to begin until July 1, 1971, I decided to enroll in the master's program in English and American literature there. Who could have predicted that studying at the English department in SDSU would turn out to be one of the most enjoyable experiences I had encountered as a *dushuren*! That was a very small department, but I had a lot of good teachers there. First, Professor Roland Botting, who was very demanding, taught me literary history and bibliography, providing a thorough review of English literature. Professor Jack Marken, then head of the English department, taught a seminar on English Romantic poets in which I learned how to do close reading on the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Blake. Professor Ruth Alexander opened my eyes to the literary world of the American frontier. In her seminar on Willa Cather (1873–1947), we read novels such as *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Àntonia* (1918), works that evoked the vastness of the prairie as well as the immigrants' will power facing all kinds of challenges.[5] Interestingly, Professor Paul Jackson, also a painter and rodeo cowboy, convinced me that there was another way to read Shakespeare. In class he focused on the idea of "sea change" in the Shakespearean plays, which I always remember! In February 1972 Professor Jackson did a painting of his farm for C.C. and me.[6]

Kang-i Sun Chang at Professor Paul Jackson's rodeo performance in Brookings, South Dakota, Spring 1971.

A painting by Professor Paul Jackson of South Dakota State University, February 1972.
(A gift to Kang-i and C. C. Chang.)

A painting by Nell Yarbrough, December 1972. (A gift to Kang-i and C. C. Chang.)

In those days I was so much in love with the literature classes offered by my English professors that, even after I had started working as a reference librarian at the University Library, I took night classes in the English department.

In spring 1972, I took Professor Jerry Yarbrough's night class on Victorian literature, and we read Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Charles Dickens (1812–1870), Robert Browning (1812–1889), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), George Eliot (1819–1880), Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889). That class had such a positive impact on my life that I will always remember Professor Yarbrough fondly.[7] It was under Professor Yarbrough's direction that I began to do research for my MA thesis, which was about Thomas Carlyle's concept of hero worship. I became very close to the Yarbroughs and called them "Jerry" and "Nell," respectively.[8]

When I was taking the Victorian literature class, I showed Professor Yarbrough a song lyric by Chairman Mao, titled "Snow: *Qinyuan chun*" (沁園春・雪). Professor Yarbrough was so moved by the heroic spirit in Mao's poem that he encouraged me to apply Carlyle's theory of heroism to Mao's China to show that hero worship did not altogether disappear from modern times. I liked Professor Yarbrough's suggestion very much for the comparative approach would help me develop further a discourse theory of hero worship in a broader sense. I was also wondering why so many young people were willing to risk their lives to follow Mao to Yan'an and joined the revolution. Could it be hero worship on the part of these people that led Mao to his power in 1949? As Robert Jay Lifton pointed out perceptively, the most distinctive trait of Mao's heroism was his "revolutionary romanticism."[9] And Edgar Snow, as early as 1937, predicted that Mao was going to become "a very great man," because "undeniably you feel a certain sense of destiny in him."[10] I thought this "certain sense of destiny" in Mao would have greatly attracted Thomas Carlyle. At the time when I was working on my MA thesis in 1972, however, most people still did not know how terrible Mao's Cultural Revolution was in China. Not until several years later when we finally learned that, even though Mao and his revolutionary romanticism had once enchanted millions of Chinese youths before, many Chinese people became totally disenchanted with Mao's regime in the end.

I should also mention that, when I started to do research on Mao and his reception in China, I was very much handicapped by the lack of Chinese materials available to me. Part of the reason was that there was not an East Asia library in SDSU, and the only way for me to get hold of the Chinese sources for my research was through very limited interlibrary loan services.

It was about this time that John King Fairbank, the famous American historian of China, came to SDSU to deliver a lecture on US-China relations. (That was the first time that I learned that Fairbank originally hailed from South Dakota and was born and raised in Huron, a town near Brookings.) I was then reading Barbara W. Tuchman's book *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*, and so I took a special interest in Fairbank's lecture. After the lecture, Fairbank spoke individually to some of us present in the audience and asked about our interests. The truth is, at age

twenty-eight, I had no idea what I wanted to do in the future. But I was surprised by my own answer to Professor Fairbank, saying, "Oh, in the future I would like to get a PhD in China studies."

It was C.C. who finally set me up for an academic career as a China scholar. He told me that he would support my career 100 percent, and he urged me to apply to PhD programs in East Asian Studies. He also said he would try his best to follow me wherever I ended up going. It just so happened that a letter from our dear Gram in Princeton (dated March 26, 1972) also touched on the same subject. She wrote: "Dear Eleanor and Chézy: I have thought a great deal about the possibility of Eleanor doing her further graduate work to a PhD at Princeton. It is really exciting to think that you both may be Princeton PhDs... I hope if Eleanor is at Princeton that Chézy will find a job near enough to stay in Princeton also...." Gram even invited us to stay in her Princeton home in the summer (when she would go to her *summerhus* in Massachusetts), because she thought this would give C.C. a chance "to apply in person to a good many engineering firms or to colleges... for teaching jobs, etc."

With such encouragements from both C.C. and Gram, I became obsessed with the thought of going to Princeton to study Chinese literature with Professor Yu-kung Kao. I had heard that Professor Kao was a true master who had an encyclopedic knowledge about classical Chinese literature as well as a solid background in English literary criticism and sinology. After much soul searching, I came to the realization that what I had been lacking was a formal education in classical Chinese literature, although I already knew a little about modern Chinese fiction and poetry and had studied English and American literature. Especially after brainstorming with a Princeton friend, I concluded that going to Princeton to study with Professor Kao would be the best path for me. I knew I desperately needed a teacher who could steer me into important subjects of classical Chinese literature and criticism that I should know. I became so excited about my plan that I made an appointment to visit Professor Kao at Princeton in July. Meanwhile, to focus on my MA thesis and to complete the remaining course requirements for the degree, I decided to resign from my position as the reference librarian after the end of the academic year.

I then finished a 168-page thesis, titled "Carlyle's Literature of Heroism and Its Contemporary Model—Mao," in November 1972 and got my MA degree in English from SDSU a month later.[11] I was also busy applying to several PhD programs in East Asian Studies, including a few programs in the midwest that were not too far from South Dakota—just in case the Princeton application did not work out.

In January 1973 I was appointed as an instructor at the English department of SDSU. In March I finally received responses from all the schools to which I had applied. I got in with most of the programs, including a very attractive offer from Washington University in St. Louis that would give me full fellowship. Unfortunately, although Princeton had admitted me to their East Asian Studies program, they were not able to give me any financial aid. Thus, it seemed more and more unlikely that I could afford to go to Princeton to pursue my PhD. Also, my husband still could not find a

suitable position in the New York area. Finally, he received an offer from Sverdrup Corporation, an American civil engineering company with headquarters located in St. Louis, Missouri. So, when the April fifteenth deadline came along, I decided to accept the admission offer from Washington University in St. Louis so that both of us could live together in the same town. I was also happy to learn that Professor Shuen-fu Lin, a former student of Professor Kao in Princeton, was then teaching at Washington University.

However, after we had left South Dakota and settled down in St. Louis, things did not turn out as we had expected. First, Professor Shuen-fu Lin had already left for the University of Michigan and there was no replacement in classical Chinese literature at the department in St. Louis yet. Deep down in my heart, I regretted the lost opportunity of going to Princeton. When the new semester started in early September, I was particularly unhappy with the courses I was forced to take at Washington University. I was stuck in such a difficult situation that I had many sleepless nights. One evening, C.C. must have sensed my distress, so he called Professor Kao in Princeton. Much to my surprise, C.C. asked Professor Kao if I could still go to Princeton even though I had already turned down their offer of admission and that the new semester already began three weeks before. Miraculously, Professor Kao called early next morning to deliver the good news, saying that the dean had approved my re-admission.

C.C. and I immediately dropped everything and began packing. The next morning C.C. and I drove nonstop on the interstate highway towards New Jersey, and we arrived at Gram's house in Princeton at midnight, utterly exhausted. It was amazing that everything turned out to be fine during that semester, although we had never been so poor before, having to pay for the expensive tuition at Princeton for the entire academic year of 1973–1974. Also, for the next five years, C.C. and I lived in two different cities, struggling between commuting and our careers. As I now look back on it, I can see that without C.C.'s impulsive phone call to Professor Kao on that fateful evening in September 1973, I could not have arrived where I am today.

As expected, Professor Kao became a life-long mentor to me. (He died in October 2016.) Apart from his amazing erudition, he knew how to teach students. In class, he taught us how to do close reading with classical Chinese poetry. By calling attention to what is hidden, such as a poet's unarticulated intention, Professor Kao made us learn a great deal about Chinese culture, history, and philosophy. I can never forget his explanation of two simple lines of Wang Wei's poetry: "Walking to the place where the water ends/ I sit and watch when clouds rise [行到水窮處/ 坐看雲起時]." Professor Kao commented, "If someday you reach a dead-end, do not despair; you must quietly sit and gaze upon the clouds, and that is how you will find your way out of a difficult situation." To Professor Kao, Chinese poetry was not just something with a special arrangement of beautiful images; it was meant to embody the lyrical mind of the poet. Being fully familiar with Western literary criticism, Professor Kao also encouraged me to take a comparative approach in my study of literature. I was indeed fortunate to have studied under Professor Kao, and with his excellent guidance I finished writing

my dissertation on the Chinese song lyric (*ci* 詞) in my fourth year of study and revised it into a publishable book during my fifth year as a Whiting Fellow.

At Princeton, I also enjoyed working with Professor Frederick W. Mote,[12] a historian who taught Yuan and Ming history and often used literary sources to provide a window for exploring aspects of traditional China. I also took courses from professors in comparative literature, such as Professors Andrew H. Plaks (also teaching pre-modern Chinese fiction), Earl Miner (also teaching Japanese poetry),[13] and Ralph Freedman,[14] from whom I always learned something new and different. In retrospect, I can say that the five years I spent in the Princeton PhD program changed my life.

I got my PhD from Princeton in May 1978. But that was an impossible year to get any teaching job in East Asian studies. Several of my classmates who also graduated that year ended up leaving the field, and one of them became the vice president of Chase Manhattan Bank. I decided to stay in our St. Louis home, focusing on the research for my second book, on Six Dynasties poetry.[15]

The next year I became a visiting assistant professor at Tufts University, and by then my husband had already been transferred from St. Louis to New York City, so we ended up settling in our new home in Princeton. Every weekend, I commuted between Boston and Princeton by taking the Amtrak train.

Then, in spring 1980, Connecticut College in New London offered me a tenure-track position as assistant professor. Meanwhile I also got an offer from Princeton as curator of the Gest Oriental Library and East Asian Collection. I decided to take the Princeton job, although I found it difficult to give up my original plan to teach. Ever since I entered the Princeton PhD program, my career goal was to be a literature professor. But there was something comforting about having both of us living together in Princeton, after so many years of commuting between faraway places. So, the job as a curator for the Gest Library seemed like a good solution for me.

Unfortunately, very soon I found the curator's job very difficult, for I was overwhelmed with tons of administrative tasks as well as various personnel issues. Every day there were piles of books in front of me in the library, but I had no time to read them. As a responsible employee, I never wanted to do my work by half measures. In fact, I often had to work at home until midnight (and even over the weekends) to catch up with backlogs in the library acquisition. In those days, the curator of the Gest Library also functioned as a bibliographer. While working long hours at home to catch up with the library business, I often became worried about my future as a scholar and writer. Thus, it seemed more and more like an impossible situation for me. I also thought about how times had changed since the 1940s, when Dr. Hu Shih (胡適) once served as curator of the Gest Library. In the old days, Dr. Hu Shih, in his role as a curator, was expected to spend all his time reading and researching the library collection, without being bothered by administrative duties. But those days were long gone!

Thus, I quickly found myself in a dilemma: If I wanted to apply to a teaching position the following year, then all my library subordinates, especially after hearing about my job interviews, would surely be very upset. Also, the university librarian,

Donald W. Koepp, and all my former professors at the East Asian studies department (especially Professor Mote) had been very supportive of me in my assuming the position as the new curator, and I really could not bring myself to betray their trust in me. However, after pondering this issue for several days, I finally made up my mind to confide to both Mr. Koepp and Professor Mote that I wanted to step down from the position of the curatorship at the end of the academic year so that I could start pursuing my career as a scholar and writer and possibly a professor. As expected, they were both very disappointed by what I had said to them, but I promised them that I would work as hard as possible as the curator for the rest of the year. I also asked them to please treat this matter confidentially.

The year 1980–1981 turned out to be a very satisfying year for me after all. My first book on Chinese song lyrics came out from Princeton University Press on time, while I devoted all my time to the Gest Library. Mr. Koepp was also very generous in funding book acquisition and other library expenses. I was particularly delighted when the university decided to create a new bibliographer's position for the Gest Library, for which I was chair of the Search Committee. Thus, by the end of the academic year, I felt quite accomplished as a curator. On June 30, 1981, Mr. Koepp finally announced the news of my resignation to the Gest library staff.[16] Needless to say, it came as a surprise to all of them and they felt quite sad. (My official last day was going to be July 15, 1981.) Luckily, I had a good rapport with my library staff and so the story ended well.

The greatest thing that happened to me was that a few months later, in the spring of 1982, I got an offer from Yale as assistant professor of East Asian languages and literatures. That was certainly a significant turning point in my life. I felt that I finally found a place where I could be a teacher, scholar, and writer, at the same time. The only drawback was that C.C. had to start a much more difficult daily commute—this time it was between New Haven and New York City. But I was also very lucky to get tenure only after four and a half years of teaching at Yale. (By the way, we were especially grateful that our baby girl Edith, named for Gram,[17] was born around the time I was tenured.)

Working for the last thirty-nine years at Yale, up until I retired a few months ago in June, I have most enjoyed teaching the Yale undergraduate and graduate students. I have had wonderful students for all these years, and teaching has been a most rewarding part of my life. I have always formed very close bonds with my students. Earlier this semester I received a delightful message from a sophomore which reads: "Hello Professor Chang, I am thinking about you because I found your office in the humanities quadrangle. I hope your retirement is going well, and I wish you success in your book writing. I miss taking your classes, but I am so grateful to have spent a year under your mentorship. All the best. . . ." Another former student, who graduated from Yale College in 2003 and later from Yale Law School in 2012, recently wrote this poem in commemoration of my retirement:

To Kang-i Sun Chang, After Her Retirement

Another autumn, another dogwood adagio
Who will teach students to count leaves with the old masters?
Ah! But your letters still arrive in my mailbox
And save me from standing illiterate before the oak tree

– October 20, 2021

I am very humbled by the content of this poem, but I will always treasure the student's memories of my teaching. As for the trees mentioned in this poem, they are meant to refer to the trees in the old HGS. But of course, we all know that those trees have completely disappeared from the newly renovated HQ (i.e., the Humanities Quadrangle) today. (By the way, I purposely did not reveal the students' names here, for fear of leaving someone out.)

In addition to the students, Yale is an exceptional university with an extraordinary faculty. Over the years, I have written many books and articles on Chinese literature and have benefited greatly from the advice of my EALL colleagues and members of the Council on East Asian Studies. For example, Edwin McClellan,[18] Yu Ying-shih,[19] Stanley Weinstein,[20] Jonathan Spence, Beatrice Bartlett, Edward Kamens, Peter Perdue, and Deborah Davis have all helped me in various ways. I am also indebted to Michael Meng, head of the East Asia Library, for his help in getting Chinese sources for me. But many of my thoughts were inspired by talking to other faculty friends as well, especially those beyond the East Asian fields. I remember that during my first week at Yale in 1982, I accidentally ran into Harold Bloom at Book Haven on York Street. Over the years, before Harold passed away in October 2019, we had developed a long professional friendship, and I often visited him in his home on Linden Street to hear him recite and talk about the verses of American poets such as Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens. Once he said to me, "I am essentially a teacher, and a literary scholar and critic. My work is mainly to teach people how to enjoy poetry. It can be said that this is also your work." Harold was very sad that the art of reading poetry has long since been lost in American popular culture, and thus I was especially happy when he later published the books *The Best Poems of the English Language* (2004) and *Till I End My Song: A Gathering of Last Poems* (2010).

I also recall that in the fall of 1993, I sat in on Harold's class on twentieth-century American poets, and I was especially delighted to find out that our Yale colleague John Hollander was among the twelve poets to be read in the course. I always admired John Hollander's poetry as well as his book *Rhyme's Reason* (1981), and in fact I had heard about him long before I came to Yale. (I used to audit John's younger brother Robert Hollander's course on Dante during my Princeton years in the 1970s.) Anyway, my professional friendship with John Hollander (who also lived in Woodbridge until he died in 2013) turned out to be very rewarding. One year John was working on poetry about cats, and he asked me if cats appeared in the ancient Chinese anthology,

The Classic of Poetry (*Shijing*). Interestingly, our discussion on cat poetry led me to add a special section in my Man and Nature in Chinese Literature class.

I also enjoyed working with Michael Holquist in the Department of Comparative Literature.[21] We both loved working with colleagues beyond our own fields. We organized two conferences altogether in China in 2001 and 2005. Among the Yale participants in the China conferences were Edward Kamens, Dudley Andrew, Wai-Chee Dimock, Elise Snyder, and Jane Levin.

I have also learned a great deal from many other distinguished colleagues, including Peter Brooks, Roberto González Echevarría, Giuseppe Mazzotta, Joe Roach, and Traugott Lawler. But today, due to the lack of time, I will only elaborate on a few examples, such as Nancy Cott, Paul Fry, and Dick Brodhead. Nancy, who was a key member of the Women's Studies program from the beginning, greatly inspired me with her insights into the moral power of early American women in New England.[22] Even after she left Yale in 2001, she continued to be supportive of my work on women writers of traditional China. As for Paul Fry, one year I sat in on several sessions of his legendary class called Literature 300, which was an extraordinary survey of the major trends in twentieth-century literary theories. Also, Paul was extremely generous with his time in helping my PhD students, who often took English literature with Paul as one of the fields in their qualifying exams.

And, finally, I was very lucky to have Dick Brodhead as a friend for all these years! To me, Dick has set an example for many of us. I first read Dick's book *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* in 1982, and felt that his use of the perspective of cultural history to study nineteenth-century American novels was very interesting. After that, I read his *The School of Hawthorne* (1986), which was even harder to put down. I should also mention that a few years later when I began writing my Chinese book *The Challenges of Literary Canons* (2002), I derived a lot of inspiration from Dick's Hawthorne book. In my book, I particularly quoted Dick's reasons for the vicissitudes of Hawthorne's standing in American literary history. As Dick has observed, Hawthorne's grand status in literature has gradually been declining since the twentieth century. Thus, Dick believes the vicissitudes of Hawthorne's standing in modern American literary history can be used as a perfect point of reference in our study of the evolution of a typical literary classic. Interestingly, just as Hawthorne was slowly fading from everyone's memory, we gradually discovered that the literary status of one of Hawthorne's contemporaries, the novelist Melville, was progressively escalating. As someone who once wrote a senior thesis on *Moby Dick*,[23] I naturally considered Melville's canonical rise an amazing turn of events.

As I now look back on my own intellectual journey, through a long, winding road, it all seems like a whale hunting—it has been a course of much adventure and contingencies.

Notes

1 Haun Saussy, "Learning to Be a Scholar with Kang-i Sun Chang," lecture delivered at the workshop "From Belles Lettres to the Academy: in Celebration of Kang-i Sun Chang," sponsored by the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures and the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University, March 1, 2014, p. 1.

2 Haun Saussy, "Learning to Be a Scholar with Kang-i Sun Chang," p. 1.

3 She had once written a poem called "When Children Call You 'Gram,'" which was published in the *Longview Washington Daily News* in 1944.

4 I was known as Eleanor then.

5 I was in touch with Professor Alexander even after I left Brookings, and she visited me at Yale in the 1980s. She passed away in 2010.

6 Professor Jackson is the only SDSU professor with whom we are still in touch even to this day!

7 Professor Yarbrough was also a minister throughout periods in his life.

8 Jerry died in 2014, and Nell passed away in 2010.

9 Robert Jay Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 81.

10 Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 80.

11 The original copy of this MA thesis is now at the Sterling Library of Yale University. Many thanks to Michael Meng, head of the East Asia Library and librarian for Chinese Studies, for making this thesis part of the Yale collections.

12 Professor Mote passed away in February 2005.

13 Professor Miner died in April 2004.

14 Professor Freedman passed away in May 2016.

15 Many thanks to Ernest Tsai, then curator of the East Asian Library at Washington University, for giving me access to the library there.

16 Years later I heard that Mr. Koepp passed away in April 2010. (Many thanks to Martin Heijdra, currently director of the East Asian Library at Princeton University, for providing this information.)

17 Gram passed away at age 96, in February 1985, the year before my daughter Edith was born.

18 Edwin McClellan died in May 2009.

19 Yu Ying-shih left for Princeton in 1987; he recently passed away in August 2021.

20 Stanley Weinstein passed away in 2017.

21 Michael Holquist died in June 2016.

22 Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2nd edition.

23 A copy of my senior essay, titled "The Importance of Herman Melville to Chinese Students, with a Comparison Between the Ideas of Melville and Prominent Chinese Thinkers," can be found in Box 11, Folder 14, in Paul Yu-kuang Sun Papers (RG 316), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library. Many thanks to Christopher J. Anderson (formerly Special Collections librarian at the Yale Divinity Library) for having the Sun Family Papers set up in honor of my father, Paul Yu-kuang Sun (1919–2007). Chris recently moved to Princeton and is currently head of Public Services and reference librarian at the Princeton Seminary Library.