



WISTERIA IN EARLY SPRING – 1995

*“To enjoy blossoms,  
you must plant flowers.”*



CHARLES CHU

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CONNECTICUT COLLEGE



PHOTO BY HAROLD SHAPIRO

*The Connecticut College Community  
gathers to remember*

## CHARLES CHI-JUNG CHU

HARKNESS CHAPEL  
SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2009  
2:30 P.M.

# CHARLES CHI-JUNG CHU

OCTOBER 8, 1918 – OCTOBER 30, 2008

## PRELUDE

*Fugue in E-flat Major, J.S. Bach*

*Variations into a Round*

John P. Anthony  
*College Organist*

Gabriel Kastelle  
*Performing on the erhu, which  
Professor Chu enjoyed playing*

## WELCOME AND INVOCATION

The Rev. Lee A. Ireland  
*College Chaplain*

## REMARKS

Leo I. Higdon, Jr.  
*President of the College*

Jonathan D. Spence  
*Sterling Professor of History  
Yale University*

## THROUGH THE EYES OF CHARLES CHU

*Friends, colleagues and a current student in the Chinese  
program founded by Professor Chu share his art and poetry.  
Please follow on pages 6-8.*

Sally N. Zuar '11

Marion E. Doro  
*Lucy Marsh Haskell '19  
Professor Emeritus of Government*

Roger L. Brooks  
*Dean of the Faculty*

Yibing Huang  
*Chair, Department of East Asian  
Languages and Cultures*

David J. Zimmerman '75

## A SELECTION FROM THE PEKING OPERA

*My Ominous Dream, from The Fisherman's Revenge*

Tek-Wah King  
*Senior Lecturer in Chinese*

REFLECTIONS

Mary Ann Siegel '66

Hughes "Toby" Griffis

John F. Niblack

AN EARTHLY SOJOURNER

*This poem can be found on page 9.*

Fae S. Varinata '86

Tiffany Varinata '12

REMARKS

The Rev. Kent C. Smith  
*Former Professor of History  
Connecticut College*

REFLECTION

Paula Chu  
*Daughter of Professor Chu*

CLOSING

The Rev. Ireland

POSTLUDE

*Fantasia in G Major, J.S. Bach*

Professor Anthony

*Please join us for a reception in the Charles Chu Asian Art Reading Room after today's program.  
A receiving line will form at the entrance of the Chapel for those who can't attend the reception  
but would like to greet the Chu family.*



## CHARLES CHI-JUNG CHU

Abundant energy. A generous smile. Wry humor. His love of nature, art and life – and most of all, us.

How could *we* not love *him*?

Charles Chu was the kind of professor who'd promise – only half jokingly – to resign if his two star seniors didn't get into the Chinese program at Harvard in 1971 (they did).

He was the kind of artist who'd rather give away his paintings than sell them.

He was the kind of story-teller who delighted in telling his grandchildren they could see the face of Confucius in a wrinkled paper napkin from lunch. "Look! Here, here in the napkin. It's Confucius!"

When Professor Chu was promoted to associate

professor in 1969, he immediately banged out a thank-you note to President Charles E. Shain on his typewriter. "What else can I do but to give all that is in me?" he asked. "Those who want to learn come to me and I shall never refuse any request."

Professor Chu, a preeminent teacher, scholar, master painter and professor emeritus of Chinese, was born in a farming village about three hours by train from Beijing. From a young age he was known for his energy, his active imagination and his love of nature. His mother nicknamed him "Little Frog." Each year he managed to persuade his family to let him continue on in school. After earning an undergraduate degree at the National Central University in Beijing, he came to America in 1945 to pursue a graduate degree in political science at Berkeley.

He soon met Bettie Simmons, and they formed an

instant attachment. “We can’t remember either the one or another proposing. We just knew,” she told *The Day* in 1995.

Professor Chu taught at Yale for 15 years before coming to Connecticut College with Bettie and their four children in 1965 to start the new Chinese program – one of the first of its kind for an American liberal arts college. The Air Force was eliminating the language program he taught in at Yale, and a professor sent a note to Shain suggesting that Chu be considered for the position.

At Connecticut College, Professor Chu was quickly embraced for his wit and warmth as well as his willingness to work hard – and without complaint. He expected the same from his students, although they were not always enamored of his early morning classes.

In February 1966, he reported to Shain on his first semester. “Chinese 101-102: The 9 beginners work hard,” he wrote, “and remain cheerful.” A few weeks later he asked for permission to take three days for a conference in New York. “My sophomores would enjoy three free mornings. By now I am afraid that they have formed a habit of getting up at 7. (maybe not),” Professor Chu wrote.

He was always generous with his time and spirit – and even his money. He helped more than one student with tuition. His house across Williams Street from the campus was always open for lunch, conversation and, on more than one occasion, a place to stay.

His faculty file is stuffed with letters to Shain outlining the growth of the department: course plans, quick lines on the progress of star students, decisions about which books and language tapes to buy, attempts to find part-time and then full-time teachers; the decision later to expand to the study of other East Asian languages and cultures.

In his free time, Professor Chu enjoyed cooking, playing the erhu – a kind of Chinese fiddle – and painting. Always painting. He had had no formal training since grade school, but learned by doing, studying and experimenting.

“People say to me, ‘Isn’t that wonderful. You painted that snake with a single brushstroke.’ What they don’t see is the 50 that I threw away before I got it just right,” he told *The Day* in 2001.

When Professor Chu retired in 1984, he devoted his time to painting. And paint he did: not just flowers, birds and animals (including a camel, the Connecticut College mascot), but the College Arboretum, the Connecticut River and Mohonk Mountain – always in traditional Chinese literati style with a calligraphy poem, sometimes written by Bettie.

In 1985, he teamed up with Hughes “Toby” Griffis to assemble a unique collection of East Asian art for the College. Six years later, the College dedicated the Charles Chu Asian Art Reading Room on the main floor of the Shain Library. The room, one of the most beautiful locations on campus, is the permanent exhibition area for what is now known as the Chu-Griffis Asian Art Collection.

Professor Chu was a presence on campus in his retirement and was well-known by students and faculty, especially in his old department. The program he founded, now the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, is thriving.

In the early 1990s, when he was traveling extensively to buy paintings for the Chu-Griffis collection, Professor Chu submitted one of his periodic reports to Provost Dorothy James. “After working on this project for six years, one may ask how I feel about the whole thing,” he wrote. “I confess that I constantly ask myself, ‘Am I living in a dream world?’ My only answer is it is fun to dream.”

— *Barbara A. Nagy*



## AN ARTIST INSPIRED BY MANY MOMENTS

One red dot can symbolize the spring. A flower is a world unto itself.

With simplicity and understatement, Charles Chu used ink and watercolor to evoke a thought, an experience, an emotion: fresh snow in the Arboretum. A playful squirrel outside his kitchen window. The beauty of imperfection. Coming to terms with aging.

Chu brought together poetry, painting and calligraphy in the traditional Chinese literati style. He'd spend hours in the Charles E. Shain Library researching topics when he got an idea – what *did* a hummingbird really look like in flight – but when it was time to paint, each work was done quickly, intuitively.

“The artist’s thoughts flow through his hand. The brush strokes must continue decisively without wobbling,” Chu told a writer in the College news office in 1969. With aged ink and the right brush technique, he explained to another interviewer, the painter can create shadows.

“Once a picture is begun, it must be carried through without interruption. There is no turning back to correct mistakes. It must be a spontaneous outpouring, because it is visual poetry.” If he didn’t like the results, Chu would throw his work out and start over – sometimes dozens of times.

“I don’t paint to be exact, anatomically correct,” he told *The Day* in 1995. “I paint to capture the nature, the spirit.”

For Chu, painting was a way to converse – to say something and evoke a response.

He was often asked to paint on commission, but found it painful. “He kept running into people who said, ‘Charles, where’s that painting you promised me nine years ago?’” Bettie Chu wrote earlier this year. “Pop was an artist who was inspired by many moments, and these moments could not be planned or predicted.”

# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE CAMPUS – 1984

*Sally N. Zuar '11*  
*Student of Chinese*

Connecticut College lies in the hills near a river.  
In spring the flowers are everywhere.  
After class you walk on campus with a delighted heart  
and burst out singing modern melodies.

Ancestors crossed the ocean to build a new nation.  
They planted trees that would shade their descendants.  
The early sages labored so now fruits spread everywhere.

Through associations with your professors and friends  
your mind blossoms during the years that speed past.  
You carve your own jade  
into a valuable treasure for the world.

Elegant buildings house these treasures.  
Generations of scholars guide you.  
One by one and all together  
we are inspired to achieve great things.  
Through us the light of Connecticut College shines.

*Ms. Zuar will read the entire poem in English and then repeat the last two stanzas in Chinese.*



# FROGS – 1989

*Marion E. Doro*

*Lucy Marsh Haskell '19 Professor Emeritus of Government*

Being happy makes me jump around.  
Sitting quietly I wait for a bright moment.



# MOUNTAIN LAUREL (UNDATED)

*Roger L. Brooks*

*Dean of the Faculty*

The arboretum is full of spring light.  
My heart is intoxicated by blossoms and birdsong.  
Lightly I walk in the fresh green woods.  
Let this refreshment liberate me from books.



## ABSTRACT ART – 1992

*Yibing Huang*

*Chair, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures*

Abstract art is extremely simple.

It means to express a form outside of real form.

You are so proud of your ability

to use few strokes to do a complicated subject.

By swinging your brush, you are called an intelligent person.

“May I ask you sir - what is the meaning of this form?”

Your answer - “It is too deep for words.”

*Professor Huang will read the entire poem in English and then repeat it in Chinese.*

## A JUNCO ON FORSYTHIA – 2004

*David J. Zimmerman '75*

Birds fly south in the cold of winter.

Our area becomes quieter.

Some birds are unafraid of the nasty weather.

There is a lovely one sitting on his favorite branch.

He does not leave.





## AN EARTHLY SOJOURNER

All whom Moses called wise are represented as  
sojourners.  
Their souls are colonists leaving heaven for a new home.  
Their way is to visit earthly nature  
as men who travel abroad to see and learn.  
So when they have stayed awhile in their bodies  
and beheld through them all that sense and mortality  
have to show  
they make their way back  
to the place from which they first set out.  
To them the heavenly region  
where their citizenship lies  
is their native land;  
the earthly region in which they became sojourners  
is a foreign country.

Philo of Judea, born c. 30 BCE

*Bettie Chu asked years ago that this poem be read at the College's memorial for Professor Chu. Those who attended her service will recognize the passage. It brought her much comfort in the months after his death. As we honor her original wish today, we think of the Chus as sojourners who have returned to their native land.*

Today's program was planned and organized by:

The Rev. Lee A. Ireland, *College Chaplain (Chair)*

John P. Anthony, *Professor of Music and College Organist*

Mary-Jane Cassidy, *Office of College Advancement*

Merrill B. Collins, *Office of Events*

Yibing Huang, *Associate Professor of Chinese and Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures*

Wendy L. Mahon, *Office of the President*

Laurie A. McGrath, *Office of Religious and Spiritual Life*

Barbara A. Nagy, *Office of College Relations*

The Committee extends special thanks to Professor Chu's family.

This booklet was designed by A.J Zane '09 and edited by Barbara A. Nagy of the Office of College Relations.

The Chu family asks that gifts in memory of Professor Chu be made to Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Ave., New London, CT 06320.

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