

Charles Chu biography

(www.littlefrog.com)



Charles Chi-Jung Chu was an accomplished painter, professor, calligrapher, and scholar. He was born in 1918 in a small farming village in Hebei Province, China. His mother called him "Little Frog" when he was a young boy, and if you knew him as an adult, you'd understand why the nickname remained with him through his life. Chu possessed a lightness of spirit and a boundless energy that was quite infectious.



Chu went to high school in Beijing and then studied at the National Central University in Chongqing. After serving in the Chinese army during World War II, he came to the United States in 1945 to pursue graduate studies in political science at UC Berkeley and, later, at Harvard, with the intention of returning to his native China to help it reconstruct after the war. When Communists took charge of China's government, Charles realized there was no room in his home country for a political scientist trained in America, or for the American family he and his wife, Bettie, had begun to raise.

Shifting his vision, he set out to adopt this country and to make his impact as a teacher. He enjoyed teaching at Yale University for 15 years, but could not resist the opportunity to create and direct a Chinese program at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. He became one of the College's most loyal, devoted, and beloved professors. Until his retirement in 1984, Professor Chu taught Chinese language, literature, and the history of Chinese painting. He was known by his students, many of whom maintained close contact with him until his death, as a wholly devoted teacher of the most influential kind. He demanded excellence of his students, and he nurtured in them a passion for learning. The Chu home, adjacent to the campus, was always open to his students, some of whom, through the years, lived with the Chu family and had both the opportunity and the challenge of constant tutoring from their professor.



Though he had several very successful art exhibits throughout his teaching career, it was not until his retirement from the College at the age of 65 that Chu was able to devote himself fully to his painting and to curating the Chu-Griffis Collection. This extensive collection of literati style paintings was established in Chu's honor by his close friend, Toby Griffis, and was funded by the Griffis Foundation and by numerous donors of funds and paintings. It is housed in the [Charles Shain Library](#) at Connecticut College.

Charles Chu and his wife Bettie lived in New London for 40 years. Three of his four children remain in Connecticut, and one is working, temporarily, the family hopes, in California. Eleven grandchildren are scattered here and there. Charles Chu passed away at his home in

2008, and Bettie died within a few months of him. The couple was once told by a "seer" that the two had been together for seventeen lives, and their children have enjoyed wondering how their parents are cooking up a reprise for their next lives together.