

**Ying-shih Yü 余英時, Gordon Wu '58 Professor of Chinese Studies, Emeritus  
Professor of East Asian Studies and History, Emeritus  
February 20, 1930-August 1, 2021**

Ying-shih Yü, Gordon Wu '58 Professor of Chinese Studies, Emeritus, and Professor of East Asian Studies and History, Emeritus, passed away at his home in Princeton on Sunday, August 1, 2021, at the age of 91. A scholar and teacher of Chinese history as well as a preeminent Chinese public intellectual, Professor Yü rose to great international stature. He was widely regarded as the most influential intellectual historian of China of his generation, training dozens of students and inspiring countless colleagues in his career at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

Born in Tianjin in 1930, the son of Yü Hsieh-chung, a history professor, and Chang Yun-ching, Yü Ying-shih attended the newly founded New Asia College in Hong Kong then under the leadership of renowned Chinese historian and philosopher Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895-1990). After receiving his degree in 1952, he went to Harvard University as a visiting student and stayed to earn his Ph.D. in 1962. He taught at the University of Michigan and Harvard and took leave to return to Hong Kong and New Asia College, where he served as President, and as Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the new Chinese University of Hong Kong (1973-1975). He was elected as a lifetime member of Academia Sinica in 1974. Before his arrival at Princeton in 1987, he taught at Harvard University (1969-1977) and at Yale University (1977-1987), where he was the Charles Seymour Professor of History. At Princeton, he taught in the Departments of East Asian Studies and History as first the Michael Henry Slater University Professor and then the second Gordon Wu '58 Professor of Chinese Studies before retiring in 2001.

After his retirement, Professor Yü continued to write and publish energetically, completing many scholarly articles and books, writing commentaries on contemporary Chinese issues, and completing his memoirs. He remained a highly engaged member of the university community, giving the inaugural Frederick W. Mote Lecture of the East Asian Studies Program in 2006. During that time, he also received significant recognition for his scholarly contributions. Among other accolades, in 2004, he was elected to the American Philosophical Society; in 2006, he was awarded the John W. Kluge Prize for achievement in the study of humanity, awarded by the Library of Congress (a co-winner with historian John Hope Franklin); and in 2014, he was awarded the first Tang Prize in Sinology from the Academia Sinica in Taiwan for lifetime contributions to the study of Chinese history and culture. He was also distinguished with many honorary doctorates from institutions in the U.S., Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan.

Professor Yü's publications and teaching made a profound impact on generations of students of Chinese history and culture around the world. He authored more than thirty books, forty-one monographs, and more than five hundred articles and essays in English and Chinese, on topics spanning from ancient Chinese history to the present day. As early as the 1970s, he recognized the critical importance of publishing his work in both Chinese and English to extend the reach of his scholarship and foster intercultural dialogue on the interpretation of Chinese history. His early publications concentrated on economic and cultural history from early to medieval China as well as the formation of the early Chinese intellectual tradition, and over the course of his career, he turned to issues in the intellectual history of the Song, Ming, and Qing

dynasties as well as modern and contemporary China. His scholarly inquiry ultimately extended to four major areas: Chinese historiography, cultural and intellectual transformation in late imperial China, intellectual culture of modern China, and the modern value system of Confucianism. In each of these four areas he produced groundbreaking works that combine the rigor of traditional sinology, the sensitivity of a literary reader, and the sharpness and depth of modern historical thinking. Trained in both Chinese and Western historical scholarship, he consistently brought a comparative lens to his work, drawing as easily from Thucydides, Max Weber, and Peter Burke as from Sima Qian, Dai Zhen, and Hu Shi in his discussion of history and philosophy. This too gave his scholarship tremendous reach across the globe.

His many publications exemplify his intellectual and linguistic breadth as well as his eloquent literary style. Some prominent books in his oeuvre include his earliest English language monograph *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Relations* (University of California Press, 1967), his study of the modern literary scholar Chen Yinke's late poetry, *Chen Yinke wannian shiwen shizheng* 陳寅恪晚年詩文釋證 (Taipei, Dong da tushu, 1998), his two-volume analysis of the political and intellectual contexts for Song dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie* 朱熹的歷史世界 (Taipei, Yun chen wenhua, 2003), his study of Qing scholars Dai Zhen and Zhang Xuecheng, *Lun Dai Zhen yu Zhang Xuecheng* 論戴震與章學誠 (Hong Kong, Longmen, 1976; Beijing, Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian, 2012), his reexamination of the modern Chinese intellectual Hu Shi, *Chong xun Hu Shi licheng* 重尋胡適歷程 (Taipei, Lianjing, 2004), and most recently, his reflections on early Chinese historical thinking, *Lun tian ren zhi ji: Zhongguo gudai sixiang qiyuan shitan* 論天人之際：中國古代思想起源試探 (Taipei, Lianjing, 2014) and *The Religious Ethic and Mercantile Spirit in Early Modern China* (a translation of his 1987 book originally published in Chinese; Yim-tze Kwong, trans., Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, ed., 2021). He also published his memoirs in Chinese, *Yu Yingshi huiyi lu* 余英時回憶錄 (Taipei, Yun chen wenhua, 2018), a work that will soon appear in English, *From Rural China to the Ivy League: Reminiscences of Transformations in Modern Chinese History* (Josephine Duke and Michael S. Duke, trans., Cambria Press, 2021). Important essays from his early decades have also appeared in the two-volume set *Chinese History and Culture* (Chiu-Duke and Duke, eds., Columbia University Press, 2016). In 2004, a ten-volume edition of his collected works, *Yu Yingshi wenji* 余英時文集, appeared in Chinese (Guilin, Guangxi shifan daxue).

Yü Ying-shih was a lifelong frank commentator on many aspects of contemporary Chinese politics, society, and culture, and he maintained a steady presence in ongoing debates through his articles, critiques, and interviews in popular magazines and newspapers in the Chinese-speaking world. His scholarly writing on anti-intellectualism in Chinese culture contributed significantly to the formation of a new intellectual consensus in Taiwan during its period of democratizing. Though he participated in these debates from early in his career, his outspoken advocacy of democracy in China gained momentum in the post-1989 political environment. Among other efforts after 1989, he co-administered the Princeton China Initiative with Professor Martin Collcutt, which, with the support of John Elliott and others, provided financial assistance to political dissidents and activists from China to pursue their careers in this country and elsewhere. In this work, Yü Ying-shih's scholarly and political commitments converged, and he was a consistent defender of the relevance of Confucian humanism to

contemporary democratic values, both within and beyond the Chinese cultural sphere. He stated in his 2006 Kluge acceptance speech that “we are also justified to speak of a Confucian idea of ‘human rights’” that Chinese scholars over the centuries recognized and defended. In 2014, his works were banned in the People’s Republic of China, but they have continued to circulate widely in the U.S., Asia, and Europe.

As a teacher and colleague, Yü Ying-shih was known for his generous support and advice, both for his own students and countless others whom he encouraged and helped over the years, without expectation of acknowledgment. Beyond his formidable scholarly work and his commentary as a public intellectual, he was also a talented composer of classical Chinese poetry, an accomplished calligrapher, and a skilled Go player. As he said often, he loved above all the time to read and write. He leaves behind him his wife, Monica Shu-ping Chen Yü, who was also a teacher and scholar of classical Chinese, and two daughters, Judy and Sylvia Yü. His footprint in the world of Chinese history and culture was enormous, and he will be greatly missed by family, friends, and colleagues around the world.