

# 变换的边界：

亚裔美国作家和批评

The Shifting Boundaries:  
Interviews with Asian American  
Writers and Critics



南开大学出版社

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天 津

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I would also like to express my appreciation of the Fulbright Scholar Program for awarding me the Advanced Research Award which enabled me to go to the US and travel across the country to complete my project of interviewing Asian American writers and critics.

My gratitude to my Ph.D. adviser and mentor, the late Professor Wu Bing, is endless. It was she who initiated me into the field of Asian American literature, founded the Chinese American Literature Research Center and made it a hub for Asian American critics and writers at home and abroad, and supported me all those years with motherly love and care.

I want to thank Dr. Yang Weidong and Dr. Yun Ling for transcribing one interview for me when my eyes were suffering from dry-eye syndrome.

My son Paul has grown fast in the interim, and has always been a source of comfort and happiness for me. He is an ardent lover of traveling across the US with mom and a patient gentleman when mom is doing interviews or working at the computer.

## Preface

Chinese American literature has been a heated topic in China since the 1990s. Simply looking at the number of papers produced in magazines and presentations given at academic conferences on the literature, one would have the impression that there are too many people studying it. No wonder some critics have seriously complained that so much attention have been heaped on Chinese American literature that the value of other literatures have been neglected. However, I feel genuinely concerned to find a few highly profiled writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Frank Chin have been studied repeatedly while a lot of other equally important Chinese American writers did not capture as much attention as they deserve. As for other non-Chinese Asian American writers, they are almost left untouched, not to say other non-Chinese Asian American writers. One cause for such a situation is many other Chinese/Asian American writers are not known by Chinese readers or their books are not available in China. Well, how can one make a fist if he has no hand?

I feel myself should never be excused. Although Asian American literature has been my professional focus for more than a decade, I felt rather guilty that I did not read as many writers as I should have and did not know enough about the historical background of Asian American Movement and the development of Asian American literature. It was like drinking water from a deep river without knowing where the headstream was and how it has meandered along to where I was standing. Therefore, to interview some Asian American writers and critics, to avoid theories

and -isms and listen to their individual stories became my wish to pay tribute to the field of Asian American literary studies in China.

From January 2007 to March 2012, I have done twenty interviews, most of which were conducted when I was a Fulbright Program visiting scholar at the Department of Ethnic Studies of UC Berkeley from August 2009 to July 2010. When interviewing writers, I intended to find out what has motivated them to become writers, who have influenced them in their career, and what personal stories are hidden in their writing. I have interviewed Chinese American writers Yuan-tsung Chen, Marilyn Chin, Ha Jin, William Poy Lee, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, Alice Tuan, and Laurence Yep, Korean American writer Don Lee, Indian/Bengali American writer Bharati Mukherjee, and Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita.

While interviewing critics, I did not limit my inquiries to Chinese American literature, but tried to trace the origin and development of Asian American Studies, and to explore new topics and trends in the field by pursuing them with my questions. I have interviewed King-Kok Cheung, Harvey Dong, Lorraine Dong, Marlon Hom, Guiyou Huang (My fault that this interview was done in Chinese and is not included in this collection), Evelyn Hu-Dehart, Elaine Kim, Jinqi Ling, Ling-chi Wang and Sau-ling Wong.

For every interview, I had to finish reading some literary works or criticism, and then prepare questions about my confusions or what Chinese readers might want to know. Some writers and critics have published a lot of books, and I often felt the urge to tell them, "Hey there. You have written so many books. How can I catch up?" But I always prepared well. And I am profoundly grateful that they always frankly and readily shared their life and insights with me. Ruthanne Lum McCunn told me how she and her mother tried to find a state where they could be legally wedded with their white husbands. Marlon Hom and

Lorraine Dong told me about “paper sons” and the Confession Program in Chinatown. I was shocked to realize that my own friends lived the painful experience which I had read in Chinese American literature. Everyone showed their true temperament. Shirley Geok-lin Lim was so bravely honest. Ha Jin and Bharati Mukherjee let me know about the difficulties they encountered as an immigrant writer. Alice Tuan has a low voice. I enjoyed her pleasant company and her naughty humor. Karen Tei Yamashita is an author who moves her characters back and forth across the boundaries between reality and fantasy and the border between North America and Latin America. Her books remind me of a male writer of epics, yet I was so amazed to find her sitting in front of me—a gentle and elegant lady. Marilyn Chin was able to emerge out of her sad family history and produce such an outrageously funny book as *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen* that the whole interview was filled with laughter.

Among the critics I interviewed, Ling-chi Wang, Elaine Kim, Harvey Dong, Marlon Hom and Lorraine Dong were activists during the Asian American Movement. As scholars as well as history makers, they related vividly their struggles which brought me to the turbulent yet formative years of the late 1960s and 70s. King-Kok Cheung, Guiyou Huang, Sau-ling Wong, and Jinqi Ling mapped the development of the Asian American Studies from different angles, while Evelyn Hu-Dehart opened another door for me—we should study the history and literature of the Chinese diaspora not only in North America but also in Latin America. Sometimes, the versions of the same event described by those critics dovetail with or differ from each other. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. You can get a fuller picture by assembling the scattering pieces.

It is my great regret that I did not interview more writers although I have contacted Fae Myenne Ng, Lan Samantha Chang, Nam Le and Jhumpa Lihiri. Fae Ng was then busy taking care of her father who had

been long confined to bed. As director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Lan Samantha Chang was fully occupied with reviewing tons of applications from all over the world. Nam Le was laboring at his new writing project and was not in the US. And Jhumpa Lihiri's literary agent told me she was a very private person and would not be interviewed. So I did not get the chance to talk more with them. An interview is a form of dialogue which can go on and on. My another regret is I do not have time and energy to continue those dialogues. But at least I have read those writers and critics with great patience and full absorption. I have enjoyed their insights to the utmost. And that is a relief for me.

Liu Kui-lan

April 2012 in Beijing



## 前 言

做一系列亚裔作家和批评家的访谈，出一本访谈录的初衷是想对国内亚裔文学研究做一点实在的铺垫。我个人从事这一领域的研究工作已经十几年，无论研究的广度和深度，都有踏步不前的内疚感，同时我对国内的亚裔美国文学研究来回炒剩饭的现状也有一种忧虑。通过亲身访谈，获得第一手资料，也许既能去除我自己的内疚，还能对其他的研究者有所帮助。

20世纪90年代末以来，华裔文学研究突然变得热门起来，历次学术会议喷涌出大量关于华裔文学的发言，报刊杂志上也发表了很多水平参差不齐的学术论文。有些专家注意到了这种现象，很严正地指出华裔文学太热、研究的人太多，呼吁大家不要忽视其他文学的价值。他们的呼吁很有道理，只要仔细考察这些发言和论文就会发现，几位最有名的华裔作家如汤亭亭、谭恩美、赵健秀等被一再研究，而很多其他同样重要、值得研究的华裔作家作品却被人忽略，至于除了华裔以外的其他优秀的亚裔作家更是少有人问津。造成这种现象一个很客观的原因就是很多大学图书馆仅仅收藏了汤亭亭、谭恩美和赵健秀的作品，而其他的很多优秀作品读者根本接触不到，巧妇难为无米之炊啊！我认为国内学界亚裔文学研究的主要问题不在于太热门，而是文本不全、信息不通、过于偏重华裔文学，在华裔文学领域又过于偏重几位名作家。我自己也难辞其咎，我对亚裔文学的阅读面不是很宽，对亚裔文学历史背景的了解相当粗浅，这让我非常内疚，因此萌生了这个念头：尽量避开理论和主义，通过访谈，切切实实去倾听更多亚裔作家讲述他们的故事，倾听亚裔文学批评家讲述亚裔运动的起源、追溯其发展、分析其现状。

从2007年初到2012年3月,我断断续续进行了20次采访,其中大部分的访谈是我从2009年到2010年间在美国加州大学伯克利分校做富布赖特访问学者期间完成的。在采访这些作家时,我力求挖掘作家们不为读者所知的写作动机、与其他作家的互动以及作品背后的故事。我采访了华裔作家陈元珍(Yuan-tsung Chen)、陈美龄(Marilyn Chin)、哈金(Ha Jin)、李培湛(William Poy Lee)、林玉玲(Shirley Geok-lin Lim)、林露德(Ruthanne Lum McCunn)、段光忠(Alice Tuan)和叶添祥(Laurence Yep),还采访了韩裔作家李栋(Don Lee)、印度裔作家芭拉蒂·穆可吉(Bharati Mukherjee)和日裔作家山下凯伦(Karen Tei Yamashita)。

在采访批评家时,我尽量不局限于华裔文学,而是纵观亚裔文学的整体发展,通过提问与批评家们一起追溯亚裔美国研究形成的历史,探讨其最新发展的动态以及今后的发展趋势。我采访了张敬珏(King-Kok Cheung)、邓仕明(Harvey Dong)、曾露凌(Lorraine Dong)、谭雅伦(Marlon Hom)、黄桂友(Guiyou Huang,中文采访)、胡其瑜(Evelyn Hu-Dehart)、金惠经(Elaine Kim)、凌津奇(Jinqi Ling)、王灵智(Ling-chi Wang)和黄秀玲(Sau-ling Wong)。

每一次访谈都得读相关作品和评论,然后就自己迷惑的地方或中国读者可能想要了解的方面有针对性地提问。有些作家和批评家出版的书比较多,我恨不得跟他们说,“嗨,能不能少写几本?我读不完,跟不上。”话虽是这么说,但每一次采访前我都会做充分的准备,而这些作家和批评家也都非常真诚地和我分享他们的经历和观点。林露德讲述了她和她母亲绕过法律与白人结婚的经历,谭雅伦和曾露凌说到了唐人街的“纸儿子”以及他们在“坦白运动”中的经历。坐在他们面前听他们讲这种亲身经历让我觉得无比震撼,我没有想到,在华裔文学作品中描述的事情就真真切切发生在我的朋友们身上。每位接受采访的作家都在访谈中展现了他们的真性情。林玉玲的坦诚让我感动;哈金和穆可吉让我了解到移民作家写作的艰难;段光忠嗓音低沉,她的活泼爽朗中

透着桀骜不驯，她的幽默逗趣让我忍俊不禁；山下凯伦则更让我惊讶，我无论如何也想象不到，在我面前那位温和雅致的日裔女作家竟能在作品中纵横捭阖，挥洒自如，更像一个男作家的手笔；陈美龄虽然有着心酸的家族故事，然而她的小说却滑稽离奇，采访的过程中我们几乎从头笑到尾。采访的批评家中有的是亚裔运动中的积极分子，王灵智、金惠经、邓仕明、谭雅伦和曾露凌娓娓讲述他们的经历，仿佛把我带到那风起云涌的六七十年代。黄秀玲、黄桂友、张敬珏和凌津奇从不同的角度描绘了亚裔文学发展的轨迹，而胡其瑜像是为中国的学者打开了另一扇门——不仅要研究北美洲的，还要研究南美洲华人的流散经历。我发现，关于同一历史事件，这些作家和批评家们有时会互相呼应，有时会有不同版本的回忆。这就像拼图一样，我们可以通过不同的碎片，组成一幅更完整的画面。

我还联系了华裔作家伍慧明（Fae Myenne Ng）、张岚（Lan Samantha Chang），越南裔作家黎南（Nam Le）和印度裔作家裘帕·拉希莉（Jhumpa Lihiri）等。可惜伍慧明忙于照顾病重的父亲，张岚是“爱荷华写作工作室”的主任，忙于处理来自世界各地的申请，黎南不在美国且正忙于新的写作计划，而拉希莉的代理认为她生性害羞，很遗憾最后没能采访他们。另一个遗憾就是，访谈就像是一组对话，可以不停地追问或探讨下去，而我没有更多的时间和精力将这些对话进行下去。遗憾最终是留下来了，但因为潜心实意地读了这些作家和批评家们的作品，对他们、对我自己算是有了交代。

刘葵兰

2012年3月于北京

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# **Interviews with Asian American Writers**



## From Separate Historical Facts to a Family Saga: An Interview with Yuan-tsung Chen

Yuan-tsung Chen (陈元珍, 1951- ) is a Chinese American writer. In 1972 she immigrated to the US with her husband Jack Chen and taught at Cornell University. Later she lived in Berkeley, California. She is the author of two books, *The Dragon Village: An Autobiographical Novel of Revolutionary China* (1980) and *Return to the Middle Kingdom: One Family, Three Revolutionaries, and the Birth of Modern China* (2008). She has translated both her works into Chinese and got them published in China.

This interview was done in her home in Berkeley in January 2010. She has made revisions to the transcript.

L: Thank you for giving me this chance to interview you.

To begin with, can you say something about your family and educational background?

C: Well, let me thank you too, because you give me the opportunity to express myself.

L: It's my pleasure.

C: I came from a middle class family and we were not rich, but my parents were very well connected. That means they had friends who were rather upper-crust.



But for us, my mother had difficult time to send us to the best schools because the best schools were expensive. But somehow, you know, she tried to manage it. I gave two examples of my schools. One was Nankai Junior High in Chongqing during the wartime. Anybody who was somebody sent their children there, so many of my schoolmates were children of very influential people, and children of rich business people and also very influential intellectuals. And also later on in Shanghai, my senior high is St. Mary Girls' School (圣玛利亚女中). Another girls school is Methodist Girls' High School (上海中西女中). And they were very expensive. When I graduated from St. Mary Girl's School, I didn't go to college because my mother said she really couldn't manage any longer. (laughs)

L: That was a hard time. I think you are well-acquainted with both the cultured and rich life in Shanghai and the miserable and poverty-stricken life of peasants like in Gansu Province.

C: Yes, when I went to Beijing, and then in about three months, three or four months, I don't really remember, but anyway, less than half a year, I went to Gansu to do the Land Reform. Oh, the poverty was, I couldn't imagine it. It's very poor. And in Shanghai, you know, I mean that's before liberation, my schoolmates, they were rich people. It's like going back in time, also in space. It's like going from a very modern metropolis back to medieval time.

L: Yes. The countryside of China was very poor then. How did you become a writer? Was it related to your aspirations when you were a child?

C: Yes. You know, I wanted to carve out a place for my own, and to be a woman of more substance, not only to just like a social butterfly. And in my composition class, I always had high grades. So I thought, well, I would very much like to be a writer. And since that day, I tried