



Choyun Hsu

July 10, 1930 - August 3, 2025

The Hsu family mourns the passing of Cho-yun Hsu on August 3, 2025, at the age of 95, peacefully in his home in Pittsburgh. He is cherished by his wife Manli Hsu, his son Leo Hsu, and Thalia Gray, grandson Oliver Hsu, his sister Wan-tsin Hsu, twin brother Yih-yun Hsu, the extended Hsu family, and dear friends and colleagues in Pittsburgh and around the world.

Cho-yun Hsu was born in Xiamen, China, in 1930, the seventh of nine siblings, to Hsu Fengtsao, a naval customs officer and provincial administrator, and Zhang Ying. Through his whole life he deeply valued his relationship with his parents, with his brothers and sisters, and with the teachers and students with whom he formed lifelong friendships. Cho-yun was born with arthrogyriposis, a physical disability affecting his hands and feet that made it difficult for him to walk unaided. As a result, he did not attend school until he was sixteen years old, instead learning at home, including being tutored by his father. He learned English listening to the BBC and followed political events around the world, listening to his father's analyses and commentary. From the ages of 16-18 he attended Wuxi's Fu Ren High School, which he enjoyed supporting even in his old age.

While the Hsu family ancestral home was in Wuxi, the Sino-Japanese War caused the family to move frequently around China, exposing Cho-yun to the ways of life in villages and rural agrarian areas and different cities, and to the

horrors of war.

The family relocated in 1948 to Taiwan where Cho-yun attended National Taiwan University in the 1950s and was recognized by mentors for his potential. He traveled on a freighter on a months-long journey to attend graduate school at the University of Chicago. In Hyde Park he lived at the Chicago Theological Seminary, a formative, intellectually exciting experience. While at Chicago he underwent a series of major surgeries to correct his malformed limbs, requiring a six-month hospital stay. He received his PhD in Humanities in 1962 and his dissertation was published as *Ancient China in Transition*, the first of many scholarly books. He returned to Taiwan to teach at National Taiwan University, traveling to the US around projects promoting US-China cooperation through the 1960s.

In 1966 he reconnected with Man-li Sun, who he first met in 1963. In February 1969 they were married in Taipei, a marriage that would last 56 years until his death. In November 1969 their son Leo Lopung Hsu was born in Taipei. In 1970 Cho-yun accepted the role of visiting professor of History and Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and the young family moved to North Craig Street in Oakland. His one-year stay was extended and he became a full professor at Pitt, where he taught for nearly thirty years, enjoying the company of colleagues across many associated fields in the humanities and social sciences while staying closely connected to diasporic Chinese scholars in the US and elsewhere, and to the Chinese academic community in Taiwan.

In Pittsburgh the family lived in Squirrel Hill and Point Breeze and enjoyed the community of Chinese-Americans in Pittsburgh, with whom they gathered at Sunday Chinese School held at the Cathedral of Learning. At the annual Folk Festival at the old David Lawrence Convention Center, Cho-yun would write guests' names in Chinese on bookmarks. Post-retirement, a group of Chinese-American friends would gather frequently at one another's homes or

at Panera.

Along with teaching at Pitt, he was elected to the council of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, and was a visiting professor at Duke University, the University of Hawaii, Nanjing University, Chinese University Hong Kong, and many other places. He was a founding director of the CCK Foundation, where he was proud to help build international networks of China scholars. In the early 2000s he began to lecture in China and visit archaeological sites there. In 2024 he was honored to receive the prestigious Tang Prize for Sinology.

Cho-yun Hsu possessed many talents: an extraordinary memory; an ability to analyze the smallest details and connect them to the broadest scopes; confidence in what he knew he had learned, balanced by a limitless curiosity, and the willingness to revisit and rewrite his own past conclusions. His desire to engage with the idea of China in relation to an ongoing body of learning was endless, and this quest, which he felt as a personal calling and charge, gave his life meaning and purpose.

His academic contributions were immense, continuously challenging China scholars to connect their areas of research with broader global contexts. Influenced by Max Weber, he described institutions and political life as inextricably entwined with cultural and cosmological meaning. He was interested both in cultural exchange and the porousness of borders and the power of cultural identity. Each set of disciplines that he inhabited provided a lens for the next: from classics and humanities to archaeology and anthropology to history and sociology to contemporary international relations.

In parallel his output shifted from academic writing to newspaper editorials to popular books to online videos. Cho-yun had been a regular contributor to editorial pages in Chinese newspapers published in Taiwan from the 1980s

onwards. He valued his role in public life as someone deeply invested in the legacy and future of China and Taiwan, and who could bring a rich perspective to contemporary political circumstances.

Through the last twenty years of his life, he published for popular audiences in China and Taiwan who enthusiastically read his books. He wrote on business management and ethics, on spiritual life in Chinese culture, on his observations on America over sixty years.????(Eternal River) published in English as *China: A New Cultural History* allowed him to extend his knowledge about Chinese history to a 21st century Chinese audience eager to engage with China's past. In a 2010 oral history autobiography, ??,??,???, ("Family Matters, National Matters, the World's Matters"), he told the story of his own life.

Cho-yun Hsu took his role as a scholar seriously, as a duty, and he faced considerable obstacles in his life including discrimination against his disability as well as the practical challenges that his condition incurred. It is extraordinary that he thrived into his nineties with an arc of activity that allowed him to play a part in reshaping the ethos of academia that formed him.

In the last months of his life he was largely paralyzed but could operate his computer and there remained connected to the world. He read the news, wrote to lifelong friends and to strangers who had reached out after reading his books. He enjoyed Wuxia television series from China. He was enraged and discouraged by the news. He spoke with his son Leo about his dream that the family would have a farm, and grow vegetables and raise chickens. Even with his pain, sitting with his grandson Oliver brought him happiness and pride, and he would ignore his physical discomfort to share stories about his own father.

He was always grateful for his friends and greeted their phone calls, especially if from overseas, with joy. He delighted in food that made him remember home. He had a unique bond with his twin brother, often having seemingly shared experiences even when miles apart. He held a deep love for Man-li with whom he found safety, care, and connection.

When his mother was alive, he loved to make pilgrimages to her home in Yong Kang St. in Taipei; he believed in the safety that we all afford each other when we share trust and love, and that this happens nowhere more than among family.

For Cho-yun, his love, gratitude, and sense of responsibility went, more than anywhere else, to his father and mother and his wife. He felt a great duty to give back, for what he had received; this included his academic contributions, providing for his family, and the sense of ceaseless work that was a burden and also a great privilege, to be able to expand and connect stories about China in relation to his own experience. His long life no doubt owed to his own desire to be productive in his studies, thought, and writings, but also to the strength that he received from his family, which he reflected out to the world in his contributions, and his entreatments to study history and to live a life of reflection.

Leo Hsu

A Celebration of the Life of Cho-yun Hsu will be held on Sunday, August 31st at 3pm at the Courtyard Marriott near the University of Pittsburgh, 100 Lytton Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Memorial floral arrangements can be ordered by 8/27 from www.thebeardedirisfloral.com/shop
