

## A letter from Keith and Anne Moffat

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Dear Ying –

I don't believe we've ever met; I contact you because my wife Anne and I interacted a great deal 20-30 years ago in China with your mother, Prof. Gu Xiao-cheng. We were very sad indeed to learn from Anne Karnovsky of Gu's recent death (we always knew her as "Gu").

Anne and I (with the Karnovskys) were the first set of interviewers for the China – United States Biochemistry Examination and Application Program (CUSBEA) when it began in December 1981. I returned to China as a CUSBEA interviewer in the fall of 1982 and with Anne, once again in 1985, each time under the guidance of Gu. By then the CUSBEA program was up and running well but the first seeds of doubt on the part of the Chinese Ministry of Education were beginning to appear. Chinese students were proving to be extremely successful in their Ph.D. studies in the USA – no surprise there. To the dismay of the Ministry, many of the students, perhaps most, wished to remain in the US to put their new-found skills to best use rather than returning promptly to China. In the late 1980s, the conditions for biomedical research and graduate training in China were not yet very favorable; but of course the situation is now completely transformed. Now, our graduating Chinese students often see even better career opportunities in China than in the west.

A couple of anecdotes about Gu from those visits. On our first visit in 1981, she took us as tourists to the platform above the great gate at the entrance to the Forbidden City, on the north side of Tianamen Square. We were standing there looking out over the view when Gu said with considerable emotion (well, as much as she would ever show): "I was here as a young girl on the day when the Chinese Communists finally took over the country." I believe she said that she heard Mao speak as he addressed the crowds; truly a turning point in 20th century history. And again, Gu was very reticent about her personal background. I eventually discovered that her father – your grandfather – had graduated from Cornell University where at the time I was a professor (I've been at the University of Chicago since 1990.) I delved in the Cornell Alumni archives and found many memorabilia of your grandfather including his alumni records – he was a loyal graduate and regularly voted in alumni elections, and he informed Cornell officially of Gu's birth – and the formal notice of his death. Most interestingly, his Cornell Yearbook included a photo of the Cornell Debate Team of 1916 – including your grandfather. Now, the secret of the origin of Gu's impeccable English was revealed! It must have been truly remarkable in 1916 to have a non-native

English speaker as a prominent member of an Ivy League debate team. I copied the entire file and photos and presented it to Gu when she visited my colleague Prof. Ray Wu (the leader of the CUSBEA Program) and us in Cornell in the mid-1980s. Perhaps the file is still in her papers.

Your mother was a truly remarkable woman whose life spanned the major events in modern Chinese history. She was also a “mother” to her Chinese students and to us. I never saw her flustered even in the face of these uncomprehending westerners – us – or her worried CUSBEA interviewees. There were plenty of them; they well realized that being accepted into a prominent graduate program in the US would be a life-altering event. As you would expect, many have gone on to distinguished scientific careers, in the US and in China. That will be an enduring aspect of Gu's legacy.

Please accept our sympathy, and best wishes.

Keith and Anne Moffat