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## **Cross-Cultural Studies from the Perspective of Civilization Mutual Learning: A Review of Ms. Chang Phong's *Harvard Academic Dialogues: 30 Years of Conversations with Harvard Professors***

**Huang Wanhua**

**Abstract:** Chang Phong, Chinese-American writer, Honorary Chairman of the World Chinese Writers Association, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award, host of the Harvard Chinese Culture Workshop, Master's degree in History from Michigan State University, served in the cataloging department of the Harvard-Yenching Library for 25 years, and has lectured and hosted over a hundred literary conferences. She has served as the vice president of the North American Chinese Writers' Association, witnessed its founding, and was the founding president of the New England Chinese Writers' Association. She was also the 16th president of the Overseas Chinese Women Writers' Association and the host of the Harvard Chinese Culture Workshop. Her major works include *Harvard Academic Dialogues: 30 Years of Conversations with Harvard Professors*, *Headlong into Harvard*, *Harvard Connections*, *Harvard Reflections*, and *Selected Essays by Prominent Overseas Chinese Women Writers: Harvard Impressions*. She has won the first prize in the Chinese Literature Creation Award for essays and the China Literature (May Fourth) Medal. Chang Phong' *Harvard Academic Dialogues: 30 Years of Conversations with Harvard Professors* is a work that focuses on the academic exploration and cultural inheritance of Chinese scholars at Harvard University. Through a prose style and with rich first-hand experiences and historical materials, the book showcases the struggles of Chinese scholars at Harvard and how they broke through cultural barriers to promote in-depth exchanges

between Eastern and Western academia and cultures. It delves into the challenges and opportunities of cross-cultural academic research from the perspective of mutual learning among civilizations, inspiring more scholars to contribute their wisdom and strength in the tide of globalization. At the same time, the book provides profound thoughts and inspirations for readers interested in Chinese scholars and cultural integration, prompting people to reflect on how to find a balance among cultural identity, language barriers, and social expectations at the intersection of diverse cultures.

**Key words:** Mutual Learning Among Civilizations; Cross-Cultural Studies; Chang Phong; *Harvard Academic Dialogues: 30 Years of Conversations with Harvard Professors*

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**标题：**文明互鉴视野下的跨文化研究——评张凤女士《哈佛问学录——与哈佛大学教授对话 30 年》

**摘要：**张凤，华裔作家，世界华人作家笔会荣誉主席获终身成就奖，哈佛中国文化工作坊主持人，密西根州立大学历史硕士，曾任职哈佛燕京图书馆编目组 25 年，主讲及主持百余文学会议。曾任北美华文作家协会总会副会长、见证创会，纽英伦华文作协创会会长、海外华文女作家协会第 16 届会长。主要著作有《哈佛问学录——与哈佛大学教授对话 30 年》《一头栽进哈佛》《哈佛缘》《哈佛心影录》《域外著名华文女作家散文自选集——哈佛采微》等，曾获华文著述奖文艺创作散文类第一名、中国文艺（五四）奖章等。张凤女士的《哈佛问学录——与哈佛大学教授对话 30 年》是一本专注于华裔学者在哈佛大学进行学术探索与文化传承的作品。该书通过散文式的笔触，借助丰富的实地亲炙往还和历史资料，展现了华裔学者在哈佛大学的奋斗历程，以及他们如何打破文化隔阂，促进东西方学术与文化的深度交流。深入探讨文明互鉴视野下跨文化学术研究的挑战与机遇，能够激励更多学者在全球化浪潮中贡献自己的智慧与力量。同时，该书也为那些对华裔学者与文化交融充满兴趣的读者，提供了深刻的思考与启发，促使人们反思如何在多元文化的交汇点上，在文化认同、语言障碍及社会期望之间找到平衡的支点。

**关键词：**文明互鉴；跨文化研究；张凤；《哈佛问学录》

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Against the backdrop of globalization, cultural exchange and dialogue require a cross-cultural perspective. How to cultivate this perspective and promote diverse exchanges in cultural inheritance has become an urgent key issue for researchers in the cross-cultural field. In this context, *Harvard Academic Dialogues: 30 Years of Conversations with Harvard Professors* (Chongqing Publishing House, 2015) (hereinafter referred to as *Harvard Academic Dialogues*), written by Chang Phong and published by Chongqing Publishing Group, is a

work that deeply explores the academic achievements and cultural inheritance of Chinese scholars at Harvard University. Based on Chang Phong's 25 years of work and over 30 years of academic research at Harvard, the book uses delicate prose narration and detailed first-hand experiences to demonstrate the remarkable academic achievements of Chinese scholars at Harvard and how they built bridges for the exchange and integration of Chinese and Western cultures in the context of globalization. As David Der-wei Wang, a renowned Harvard professor specializing in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, praised in the preface: "The pursuit of knowledge and the dialectics of truth are the cornerstones of the century-long cause of cultural construction." (Chang Phong, 2015, p.4) He also contributed the term "Wenxue" (academic inquiry) in the book's title, which carries profound meaning. "Wen" (inquiry) represents doubt and reflection, while "Xue" (learning) signifies the pursuit and accumulation of knowledge. Beyond mere academic pursuit, "Wenxue" symbolizes doubt, reflection, and innovation in academic exploration. Against the backdrop of the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures, this concept is particularly important, revealing the dynamic relationship between cultural collision and innovation in globalization and cross-cultural exchange, and demonstrating the commonalities and differences in academic pursuits between Eastern and Western cultures. In this context of cross-cultural communication, "Wenxue" further embodies academic diversity and inclusiveness, advocating dialogue and collision between different disciplines to promote the continuous progress of the global academic community. This philosophy echoes the term "dialogues" in the book's subtitle, forming a harmonious resonance.

*Harvard Academic Dialogues* was published at a time when globalization was deepening and cultural exchange and mutual learning were particularly crucial. The book's exploration of scholars' contributions not only provides rich research materials for the academic community but also widely presents the complexity and profound significance of cross-cultural exchange to society. As Professor Wang noted, Chang Phong conducted in-depth research on various academic schools and scholars, revealing how academic activities serve as a powerful tool for cultural dissemination and how cultural identity influences the production of academic achievements. Especially in the context of globalization, academia does not exist in isolation; it is closely linked to cultural collision, exchange, and integration.

As an interdisciplinary work combining academic rigor and humanistic care, *Harvard Academic Dialogues* has received high praise from renowned critic David Der-wei Wang: focusing on scholars as the main subjects and academic ideas as the core of discussion, each essay rigorously presents the scholars' spiritual outlook with accessible, vivid, and touching content that is highly readable.

### **1. Chang Phong and *Harvard Academic Dialogues***

*Harvard Academic Dialogues* is the crystallization of Chang Phong's wisdom from over 30 years of academic accumulation and life experience, profoundly integrating her understanding and reflection on Chinese and Western cultures. As a Chinese-American scholar, Chang Phong, from a cross-cultural perspective, deeply explores the academic achievements of Chinese scholars at Harvard and how they constructed their personal academic positions and cultural identities under dual cultural backgrounds. The book reflects the complex process of the dissemination and recognition of Chinese culture in the context of globalization. Through this

work, Chang Phong offers a unique perspective on academic research amid the interweaving of Chinese and Western cultures, bringing a classic work with both academic depth and cross-cultural vision to the global academic community.

### **1.1 Thirty Years at Harvard: An Irreplaceable “Local” Experience Lays the Foundation for Creation**

Chang Phong’s connection with Harvard is the core premise for her to write this classic work. In 1982, she moved to Harvard with her husband, Dr. Huang Shaoguang, who was invited to leave Cornell University to serve as Director of Harvard’s Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Laboratory (later concurrently serving as Director of the Center for Advanced Instruments). This opportunity marked the beginning of Chang Phong’s in-depth bond with Harvard. Over the next 33 years, her life became deeply intertwined with this top university: she first worked in the Cataloging Department of the Harvard-Yenching Library—a core hub for Western sinological research—for 25 years, and later took over the Harvard Chinese Culture Workshop, hosting hundreds of academic lectures and becoming an important link between Chinese scholars and the academic community.

This “dual identity” experience endowed her with unique creative advantages. As a library cataloger, she was well-versed in the historical materials system of Harvard’s sinological research. From early archives of Ge Kunhua’s Chinese language education at Harvard to Eileen Chang’s research manuscripts at Radcliffe College, gifts exchanged with Professor Patrick Hanan, employment contracts of Chinese scholars, and manuscripts of academic works, she sorted through these materials through her work, accumulating a wealth of detailed and authentic “historical” materials for the book. As a host of the cultural workshop and a colleague of her husband, Chang Phong transcended the limitations of documents and established long-term, frequent close contacts with Chinese professors across various disciplines at Harvard—including Chao Yuen Ren, K.C. Chang, Tu Weiming, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and David Der-wei Wang. The academic spirit, scholarly demeanor, and life stories of these top scholars were transformed into vivid materials in her writing through years of deep friendship formed in daily exchanges. Chang Phong’s unique experience, combining “depth of documents” and “warmth of human connections,” made *Harvard Academic Dialogues* both academically rigorous and full of humanistic feelings, becoming an irreplaceable foundation for creation.

### **1.2 Cultural Mission: Writing “Biographies” for Chinese Scholars to Fill the Gap in Academic Dissemination**

Chang Phong studied history and possesses the inherent sense of mission of a historian (Chang Phong, 2015, p.325). A strong cultural awareness and sense of responsibility have always run through her creations. She keenly observed that since the 1980s and 1990s, both in the overseas Chinese literary circle and the Chinese-speaking world, elite writing has mostly focused on political figures, business tycoons, or entertainment celebrities. However, Chinese scholars who silently worked in Western academic circles and made remarkable contributions to the dissemination of Chinese culture have long been “neglected.” Far from their hometowns, they endured setbacks and discrimination caused by cultural differences in the Western academic system, yet with unwavering perseverance, they promoted sinological research to the world, making Chinese culture heard and recognized in an academic community dominated by Western thinking. This lack of “academic

biographies" deeply regretted Chang Phong: "If we look back, who still remembers the emperors of Tolstoy's time or the wealthy merchants contemporary with Sima Qian?" (Chang Phong, 2015, p.328) In her view, the ideological wisdom and life spirit of academic figures are the cultural wealth that transcends time and space.

Behind this cognition lies Chang Phong's deep concern for the inheritance of Chinese culture. As a scholar who graduated from Taiwan Normal University and pursued advanced studies at the Department of History, Michigan State University (earning a master's degree), Chang Phong has always held the sentiment of "cherishing the motherland and facing the world," and particularly "empathizes with outstanding figures, seeing beyond their superficial luck to admire their profound inner aspirations." (Chang Phong, 2015, p.327) She deeply understands that overseas Chinese scholars are not only promoters of sinological research but also bridges for dialogue between Chinese culture and Western civilization. Their academic practices at Harvard are both a perseverance of traditional Chinese culture and an innovation in cross-cultural research, whose value deserves to be known by readers in the Chinese-speaking world. Therefore, she regarded writing about Chinese scholars at Harvard as an intellectual's responsibility to culture, hoping to use her pen to sketch a collective portrait of these renowned scholars who worked diligently and achieved great fame on the podium of the world's top university, allowing readers in the Chinese-speaking world to approach them and feel the spiritual charm of their dedication to scholarship and the distinctive styles of their academic achievements.

Tu Weiming, Harvard-Yenching Professor of Chinese History, Philosophy, and Confucian Studies, commented: "With deep affection and sincere goodwill, Chang Phong uses a warm and praiseworthy pen to depict a concrete image of a group of intellectuals overseas who evoke the spirit of 'Cultural China' yet wonder where their own souls belong." (Chang Phong, 2015, p.2) This sense of mission to "fill the gaps in history" for academic figures became the core motivation for her to persist in creation despite numerous difficulties.

### **1.3 Identity Advantage: The Position of "Bridge Builder" from a Cross-Cultural Perspective**

As a Chinese-American, Chang Phong's unique cross-cultural identity enabled her to write about Chinese scholars at Harvard more objectively and comprehensively. She is familiar with the spiritual core of traditional Chinese culture and can deeply understand the academic pursuit of Chinese scholars at Harvard to uphold their cultural roots; at the same time, she has integrated into Western society and academic systems, allowing her to clearly perceive the innovative breakthroughs of Chinese scholars at Harvard amid the collision of Chinese and Western cultures. This perspective of "being both inside and outside" enabled her to capture Chao Yuen Ren's academic innovation in studying Chinese using Western linguistic methods, appreciate Ye Jiaying's cultural feelings in spreading Chinese classical poetry on Western podiums, interpret the awareness of civilizational dialogue behind Tu Weiming's Confucian modernization, and understand the cross-cultural comparative thinking in Leo Ou-fan Lee's research on urban modernity.

This cross-cultural perspective elevates *Harvard Academic Dialogues* beyond a mere "academic memoir" to an academic text demonstrating civilization mutual learning. In fact, Chang Phong does not simply recount the life stories and works of Chinese scholars in the book; instead, through their academic practices, she presents how Chinese culture achieves inheritance and innovation in Western academic circles, and how Western academic concepts inject new vitality into sinological research. This two-way cultural observation is

the unique value of her role as a “cross-cultural bridge builder,” endowing *Harvard Academic Dialogues* with timeless academic significance from the perspective of civilization mutual learning. Professor Liu Jun, Director of the Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Overseas Chinese Literature Research Center at Nanjing University, commented: “Chang Phong’s *Harvard Academic Dialogues* brings literature and academia out of Harvard classrooms into the ‘public sphere,’ expanding the influence of Eastern culture and Chinese civilization, and enriching the ‘Chinese connections with Harvard’.”<sup>1</sup>

From her more than 30 years of local experience at Harvard, to her cultural mission of writing biographies for Chinese scholars, and her unique advantage of a cross-cultural perspective, the process of Chang Phong creating *Harvard Academic Dialogues* is not only a sorting out of the history of overseas sinology but also the realization of her personal academic ideals and life values. The reason why this work has become a classic in the field of cross-cultural research lies in its rootedness in real life experiences, its bearing of profound cultural feelings, and its condensation of Chang Phong’s persistent pursuit of civilizational dialogue.

## **2. Specific Presentation of Cross-Cultural Research in *Harvard Academic Dialogues* from the Perspective of Civilization Mutual Learning**

In today’s era of rapid globalization and informatization, exchanges and interactions between different civilizations have become an important way to promote world peace and common development. General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the Global Civilization Initiative at the CPC and World Political Parties Summit, emphasizing that in an era when the destinies of all countries are closely intertwined, the inclusive coexistence, exchange, and mutual learning of different civilizations play an irreplaceable role in advancing the modernization process of human society and prospering the garden of world civilizations. As a discipline that understands and analyzes the mutual influence and integration of different civilizations, cross-cultural research has become an important field of contemporary academic research. By sorting out academic achievements and ideological systems under different cultural backgrounds, *Harvard Academic Dialogues* presents the complexity and depth of cross-cultural dialogue.

The book covers a wide range of research content, including the mutual influence between traditional Chinese culture and modern Western academia, especially the rise and contributions of Chinese scholars in the global academic community. It reveals how cultural differences are constantly intertwined in academic research, educational systems, and social practices, gradually forming a unique cross-cultural academic discourse. It provides a new perspective for us to understand the symbiotic relationship between different civilizations in the world, serving as an observation and summary of Sino-US cross-cultural exchange phenomena and a profound reflection on the path of future cultural mutual learning.

### **2.1 Exchange and Interaction Between Chinese and American Academic Thoughts**

In the book, Chang Phong uses intellectual biographies to deeply explore the academic journeys and

<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from the internet, “Harvard’s Chinese Connections—Reading Chang Phong’s Harvard Series Essays” by Professor Liu Jun, Director of the Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Overseas Chinese Literature Research Center at Nanjing University. Originally published in Wenyi Bao and Duowei Shibao, cited in the online article: Chang Phong’s New Book “Harvard Academic Dialogues” Evokes the Spirit of “Cultural China” (April 23, 2018). Retrieved from: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dcV\\_YEfKMNNxKPyPNymm2Q](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dcV_YEfKMNNxKPyPNymm2Q).

ideological evolutions of Chinese scholars at Harvard. Combining various materials such as archives, letters, and oral history, she presents the collision and integration of Chinese and American academic thoughts through vivid prose narration, adhering to the writing principles of “no estrangement” and “historical authenticity” while avoiding the tediousness of abstract theoretical stacking. Through her in-depth exchanges with Professor Tu Weiming, a representative figure of Neo-Confucianism, Chang Phong profoundly reveals the differences in the concept of “li” (ritual/propriety) between Chinese and American cultures. In American culture, “li” is regarded as a standardized code of conduct, emphasizing individuals’ compliance and obedience to social norms with a certain degree of coercion and standardization. In early Chinese culture, especially under the influence of Confucianism, “li” is more seen as an internalized moral cultivation and social practice, focusing on individuals’ conscious reflection in specific situations and the mediation of interpersonal relationships. In his series of works such as *Modern Spirit and Confucian Tradition*, Professor Tu Weiming explains the relationship between Confucian ethics and East Asian modernity (Zhang Chonggang, 2016, p.12). In his courses, he often emphasizes that studying Chinese culture must have three premises: first, a diversified cognition; second, inheriting the critical spirit of the May Fourth Movement; third, a realistic consideration (Chang Phong, 2015, p.37). He proposes the theory of “Cultural China,” advocating a methodological dialogue between Confucianism’s concept of “harmony in diversity” and deconstructionist philosophy from a cross-cultural perspective. This integration reveals the essential differences between Chinese and Western ethical systems in the dimension of “obligation-contract,” such as translating “li” as “ritual propriety” and conducting semantic field comparisons. In the book, Chang Phong introduces and evaluates Professor Tu Weiming’s Confucian research: “Can our culture and Confucianism, like other ideologies, become components of modern civilization? It depends on whether we can understand and learn from Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and other great Confucians of all dynasties, who continuously created humanistic values through conscious criticism in each era.” (Chang Phong, 2015, p.40) Professor Tu Weiming is committed to promoting Confucianism to the world, actively engaging in dialogue with Western civilization, discussing the modernity and universality of Confucianism, and enhancing the global influence of Confucianism. Meanwhile, through the unremitting efforts of many Confucian representatives over the years, various misunderstandings of Chinese Confucianism in the West have been gradually clarified, the confidence of Chinese people in Confucianism has been boosted, and the sense of identity with Chinese culture has been strengthened.

In addition, in his book *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, Professor Leo Ou-fan Lee, mentioned in the book, breaks the boundaries of single cultural research by integrating urban sociology, visual cultural theory, and literary criticism. He places literary texts in the network of global cultural interaction, generating original cultural interpretive discourse. When introducing and evaluating his research in the book, Chang Phong wrote: “Listening to him freely discuss the literary media of Hong Kong and Shanghai, or calmly talk about multiculturalism and Cultural China, all are new and admirable grand topics.” (Chang Phong, 2015, p.56)

There are many similar cases in the book. For example, K.C. Chang broke the dualistic framework of “Chinese history and world history” through his research on Chinese archaeology, further promoting the in-depth integration of Eastern and Western academia; Ge Kunhua went to the United States to launch the first Chinese language teaching chair; Ye Jiaying interpreted classical poetry from a modern perspective; C.T. Hsia made achievements in international sinology through The Classic Chinese Novel. All these reflect the exchange and two-way interaction between Chinese and Western academia. This two-way civilization mutual learning not only embodies the expansion of Chinese thought in the global academic system but also highlights the inspirational role of Western academic tools in reinterpreting traditional Chinese thought, jointly promoting the formation and development of the academic community.

## 2.2 Cross-Cultural Innovation from the Perspective of Civilization Mutual Learning

In *Harvard Academic Dialogues*, based on her in-depth exchanges with Chinese scholars at Harvard over 30 years, Chang Phong uses delicate prose to depict a group of Chinese scholars' academic practices in the Western academic system. These portraits are not only biographies of scholars but also vivid presentations of cross-cultural innovation. The Chinese scholars at Harvard depicted in the book do not regard themselves as “passive recipients” of Western academic paradigms; instead, they base themselves on the profound traditional Chinese culture, actively shuttle between Eastern and Western academia, skillfully integrate Chinese cultural elements with Western disciplines (Chen Yaling, 2025, p.149), and ultimately create academic achievements with Chinese local characteristics and international perspectives.

First, in the book, Chang Phong takes Mr. Ye Jiaying's research on ancient Chinese poetry as an example to demonstrate innovation and expansion in cross-cultural research and literary fields. Mr. Ye believes: “Eastern culture is only an ornament in the West. If Chinese youth uproot themselves and blindly imitate the West to an extreme, it will not be better. Especially for the literary and artistic traditions, losing one's national characteristics is equivalent to losing our culture for the entire world culture.” (Chang Phong, 2015, p.152) This sense of cultural awareness has always run through Ye Jiaying's academic practices. In her book *Collected Essays on the Study of Poetry* by Jialing, Ye Jiaying engages in dialogue and integration between the traditional Chinese poetic theory of “*xingfa gandong*” (inspiration and emotion) and Western phenomenological theory. She retains the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese classical poetry while drawing on Western phenomenological theory to integrate it into the appreciation of Chinese classical poetry, making the two complement each other and broaden the dimension of interpreting poetic texts. She profoundly interprets the academic philosophy of “taking China as the mainstay and the West as a supplement”: focusing on the construction of the artistic conception of Chinese classical poetry in topic selection, introducing Western interpretive tools in methodology, and ultimately achieving an innovative interpretation of the modern value of classical literature. As Professor Miao Yue quoted in the book: “She has extensively read ancient and modern works, integrated Chinese and Western learning, savored the essence of literature, pursued truth with dedication, put forward innovative insights with deep thinking, commented on poetry with unique

subtlety, and established her own system." (Miao Yue, 1983, p.197)

Second, in *Harvard Academic Dialogues*, Chang Phong also mentions Professor Cheng Peikai's academic contributions, especially in his research on Tang Xianzu and Late Ming Culture. From the perspective of civilization mutual learning, Professor Cheng emphasizes how to uphold the core values of one's own culture in cross-cultural research, especially how to maintain the independence and sovereignty of the Chinese language and Chinese culture in the context of globalization. When analyzing The Peony Pavilion, Professor Cheng not only uses Western new historicist cultural interpretation methods but also deeply explores local resources of late Ming opera theory, placing Tang Xianzu in the context of late Ming cultural changes. In cross-cultural dialogue with Western literature, he always takes the linguistic characteristics and aesthetic spirit of Chinese literature as the foundation. Through this literary exchange from the perspective of civilization mutual learning, he not only continues the academic context of traditional Chinese culture but also emphasizes the value and significance of upholding Chinese culture in a broader cultural dialogue. In the book, Chang Phong evaluates: "Due to his understanding of Chinese culture, he always adopts an open and innovative attitude in research, does not stick to rigid methodologies, integrates various disciplines, and even incorporates poetic imagination to explore the spiritual world of ancient people and their specific living conditions in historical contexts." (Chang Phong, 2015, p.201) It is worth mentioning that Professor Cheng Peikai also pioneered online teaching, art demonstrations, and cultural fieldwork at the Chinese Cultural Center. It can be seen that his research takes his own culture as the origin, extends the historical depth of cultural traditions vertically, expands the theoretical perspective of cross-cultural dialogue horizontally, and ultimately achieves cultural innovation through multi-dimensional interaction.

Finally, the book also discusses K.C. Chang's innovative integration of "Eastern and Western archaeological methods" in the field of archaeology. In 1963, K.C. Chang's English work *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, published by Yale University Press, changed the interpretation of the origin of Chinese civilization from the previous unilinear theory to a multi-dimensional understanding of regional types (Zhang Chonggang, 2016, p.11). Faced with cognitive biases about the origin of Chinese civilization in Western academic circles, he integrated archaeological, anthropological, and literary research methods and innovatively proposed the theoretical framework of "continuous civilization." In his research on the origin of ancient Chinese civilization, K.C. Chang did not neglect either side: he used scientific Western archaeological methods to conduct precise analysis of the strata and artifacts of sites such as Erlitou and Yinxu, establishing an objective chronological sequence; at the same time, he combined the traditional Chinese method of "mutual verification of documents," comparing archaeological discoveries with records of Xia and Shang history in documents such as *The Book of Documents* and *Records of the Grand Historian* to interpret the social structure and spiritual beliefs behind the archaeological materials. This cross-border integration of Chinese and Western methods avoids the defect of Western archaeology's "emphasis on technology over interpretation" and breaks through the limitation of traditional Chinese epigraphy's "emphasis on documents over materials." Ultimately, he constructed the important viewpoint that "ancient Chinese civilization is a 'continuous civilization'." Different from the prevalent view in Western academic circles that takes Western civilization as universal,

this viewpoint not only reflects his academic spirit of courage to explore truth and not follow the crowd but also contributes a research paradigm with Chinese characteristics to world archaeology.

The numerous cases of academic achievements of Chinese scholars at Harvard depicted in *Harvard Academic Dialogues* reveal that from the perspective of civilization mutual learning, true cross-cultural innovation is not a one-way “cultural export” or “theoretical import,” but a two-way mutual illumination. It requires innovators to have both cultural confidence rooted in their own traditions and academic inclusiveness that looks to the world. Only in this way can we achieve two-way illumination in the dialogue between Eastern and Western civilizations, promote the formation and development of the academic community, and allow different civilizations to make common progress through exchange and common prosperity through integration.

### **3. The Value and Enlightenment of *Harvard Academic Dialogues* for Cross-Cultural Research from the Perspective of Civilization Mutual Learning**

In the context of deepening globalization and coexisting civilizational dialogue and conflict, cross-cultural research urgently needs to break through the predicament of “Western-centrism” or “local closure.” Chang Phong’s *Harvard Academic Dialogues*, from her perspective of 30 years of personal experience, depicts the cross-cultural practices of Chinese scholars at Harvard in the Western academic system, tells how scholars constructed an independent space for the expression of Chinese culture in the Western academic environment, and reveals the profound connotation of two-way innovation between different cultures through exchange and collision.

#### **3.1 Living Historical Materials**

For a long time, historical materials for cross-cultural research have mostly focused on theoretical dialogue or macro cultural exchange, with insufficient records of individual scholars’ cross-cultural practices in specific disciplinary contexts. In particular, there is a lack of detailed presentation of how overseas Chinese scholars achieve cultural integration and academic breakthroughs in the Western academic system. The historical value of *Harvard Academic Dialogues* lies in filling this gap with “micro-narration,” providing authentic and rich materials for cross-cultural research.

The book’s elaboration on the practices of Chinese scholars at Harvard is not a simple list of achievements but an in-depth restoration of details in academic scenarios. For example, when recording K.C. Chang’s debate with Western scholars in Harvard’s Department of Archaeology on “the path of the origin of Chinese civilization,” it details how he used the “religious symbolic meaning” of the bronze vessel decorations at Yinxu as evidence to refute Western scholars’ view that “Chinese civilization has no spiritual core.” (Chang Phong, 2015, p.27) Another example is when tracing Ge Kunhua’s launch of Chinese language courses at Harvard in 1879, it not only sorts out his teaching manuscripts, correspondence, photos, etc., but also includes a unique Chinese contract in Harvard’s century-old archives, restoring the scene of “the first Chinese person to teach at Harvard,” which opened the history of Chinese language education and Chinese studies at Harvard University. These detailed historical materials make cross-cultural research no longer abstract and distant but concrete and perceptible.

More importantly, these historical materials construct a multi-perspective academic history of Chinese scholars at Harvard. Quoting Professor David Der-wei Wang's comment, Professor Xu Zhixiao from the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Fudan University wrote in "Approaching Harvard Scholars" in Wenhui Reading Weekly: "This is the first account of 'academic karma' among Chinese people in North America." (Chang Phong, 2015, p.326) In the past, overseas sinology research was mostly dominated by Western scholars' narratives, and the contributions of Chinese scholars were often simplified as assistants or cultural translators. Through materials such as Chinese scholars' self-statements, traces of academic exchanges, research manuscripts, letters, and photos, *Harvard Academic Dialogues* highlights their role as subjects of cross-cultural innovation. This historical narrative centered on Chinese scholars at Harvard (and thus in North America) enables cross-cultural research to more comprehensively and objectively understand the dynamic two-way interaction between Eastern and Western cultures, and understand that Chinese culture is not only an object of research but also an active force promoting the development of Eastern and Western cultures.

### 3.2 Cultural Confidence and Inclusiveness

Wang Yichuan, Dean of the School of Arts at Peking University, commented: "With the calmness of a historian and the warmth of a writer, Chang Phong outlines the academic and research history of Chinese scholars at Harvard over a century."<sup>1</sup> Through a interdisciplinary writing method centered on figures, *Harvard Academic Dialogues* depicts a generation of Chinese scholars associated with Harvard, showing their outstanding contributions to promoting the integration of Chinese and Western cultures on the international academic stage.

Against the background of the long-term dominance of Western academia, the Chinese scholars in *Harvard Academic Dialogues* neither fell into blind obedience due to cultural inferiority nor moved towards bigotry due to cultural closure. Instead, they insisted on taking the accumulation of Chinese culture as the foundation and conducting research in combination with Western academic norms. Through "dialogue" rather than "confrontation," and "integration" rather than "separation," they built a bridge for equal exchange between Eastern and Western cultures.

In the book, the cultural confidence of Chinese scholars at Harvard does not stem from cultural supremacism but from a profound understanding of the inherent value of Chinese culture. As Professor Tu Weiming called for in his article criticizing the prevalent trend among Taiwan students of valuing the West over China in Taiwan's University Magazine: "We must systematically understand ourselves first, then seek dialogue between China and foreign countries, and make our voices heard." (Zhang Chonggang, 2016, p.12) In the book, Tu Weiming's promotion of Confucian modernization stems from his belief that Confucian ideas such as "benevolence" and "harmony in diversity" can provide solutions to the dilemmas of modern society; Ye Jiaying's perseverance in classical poetry research comes from her recognition that the emotional power of "endless life" in poetry has universal significance across time and space. It is this confidence that enables

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<sup>1</sup> See the back cover of *Harvard Academic Dialogues*, also cited in Zhang Juan (2017): "The Historical and Biographical Prose Writing in Chang Phong's *Harvard Academic Dialogues* and *Harvard Connections*." *Masterpieces Review* (04): 104-110.

them to not blindly follow or compromise in the Western academic system, and dare to carry out cultural innovation based on Chinese culture.

At the same time, Chinese scholars at Harvard adopt an open and inclusive attitude towards Western culture, not regarding it as an opponent but as a partner in dialogue and exchange. They are good at absorbing its essence and discarding its dregs. For example, in the book, we can see that David Der-wei Wang does not seek to counter “de-Sinicization” or “linguistic instrumentalism”; instead, he regards Chinese as an active tool and carrier, aiming to expand the boundaries of Chinese literature, embrace diversity, build a bridge between the “world” and “China,” include more literary and cultural topics, and face up to diverse voices. (Li Li, 2025, p.12) This confident and inclusive attitude avoids two extremes in cross-cultural research: one is one-way dependence caused by cultural inferiority, and the other is the interruption of dialogue caused by cultural closure.

*Harvard Academic Dialogues* reveals that cross-cultural research requires both the determination to “root in the local” and the vision to “look to the global.” It is necessary to maintain the subjectivity of cross-cultural interaction in the balance between upholding traditions and innovating, achieve equal exchange with other civilizations, and make cross-cultural research a real force for promoting civilization mutual learning.

In summary, in the tide of globalization, cross-cultural research has increasingly become a key force for promoting academic progress and fostering the coexistence of civilizations. Chang Phong’s *Harvard Academic Dialogues* is precisely an indispensable guiding work in this field. Through a prose style, the book presents the journey of a group of Chinese scholars at Harvard who, based on cultural confidence, embraced diversity and blazed new trails in cross-cultural research. The publication of *Harvard Academic Dialogues* not only fills the gap of “vivid practical historical materials” in the field of overseas sinology and cross-cultural research but also builds a bridge between Eastern and Western academia and public cognition in the realistic context of civilization mutual learning. Its significance goes far beyond that of an ordinary academic work, exerting a profound impact on academic development, cultural dissemination, and social cognition.

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