

## Chinese American Scientists: A Historical Study

Zuoyue Wang

California State Polytechnic University Pomona

I am currently pursuing a book-length historical study on *Chinese American Scientists: A Historical Study* and would like to share with fellow members of the CSA about some of my thoughts on this topic. I also like to take this opportunity to appeal to everyone for assistance in collecting relevant materials on Chinese American scientists, including yourselves.

This project is an outgrowth of my long-standing interest in the history of American science, Chinese science, and in Asian American scientific community. When completed I hope it will help open an entirely new area of research in my field of history of science where virtually no scholarship has been devoted to Chinese American scientists, except for the excellent biography on Qian Xuesen (*Thread of the Silkworm*) by my friend, the late Iris Chang. It will also fill a critical gap in the field of Asian American studies where scientists and engineers are also seldom studied.

To fully understand the history of science and technology in the twentieth century, historians have increasingly felt that national framework is inadequate and we need to pay much more attention to its transnational and global contexts. As a growing number of Chinese Americans join and become prominent leaders in American and international science and technology, there is increased interest among Chinese Americans as well as among scholars in the experiences of Asian American scientists and engineers. The recent Wen Ho Lee case also indicates the need to correct the widespread public misperception of Chinese American scientists as disloyal aliens or security risks. This book will hopefully help to demolish such stereotypes by highlighting the contributions of Chinese and other Asian Americans to many fields of American science and society.

In this project I propose to examine the experiences of Chinese American scientists and engineers in the US-China transnational context, focusing especially on their roles in scientific exchange and cooperation. Specifically the book will trace the origins of the Chinese American scientific community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, follow its growth and setbacks during World War II, the Chinese Civil War, and the McCarthy era of Red Scare following the outbreak of the Korean War, and then the professional prominence and the rise of the Model Minority myth during the Cold War years and especially in the 1960s, the impact of the US-China rapprochement following Nixon's trip to China in 1972, and, finally, the maturing of the community into a transnational network of science and technology in the more recent decades.

There is a special urgency to this project. Many of the first generation of Chinese American scientists are near or past their retirement. Indeed, several prominent Chinese American scientists have recently passed away. If not contacted or interviewed soon enough, a chance will be lost to rescue valuable history from many of the more senior Chinese American scientists and engineers.

It should be noted that this study covers not only those who are famous, such as C. N. Yang and T. D. Lee, but also those who are not yet widely known; not only those who spent all or most of their careers in the US but also those who have had a more varied transnational experience, e.g. those who studied in the US in the 1940s, returned to China in the 1950s, and now live in the US, or those who came to the US in the 1950s-1980s but then alternate between the US and the greater China region - the mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

How can you help with this project? I would be grateful for copies of any letters, diaries, journals, newspaper clippings, interviews, videos, biographical and autobiographical writings, or birthday celebration volumes (festschrifts) related to Chinese American scientists, engineers, physicians, and other researchers. MP3 players usually have a recording function, and they are wonderful in recording interviews. I will be grateful for any such materials sent to me.