

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Xi He

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

William Van Benschoten

at

Harvard Medical School
Boston, Massachusetts

on

12 and 15 August 2004

From the Original Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles

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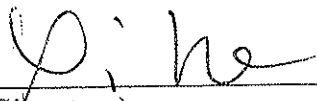
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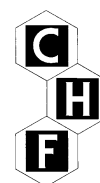
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Xi He

1962 Born in Wuhan, China

Education

1982 B.S., Mechanical Engineering, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China
1985 M.S., Bioengineering, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China
1992 Ph.D., Biology, University of California, San Diego

Professional Experience

1992-1994 National Cancer Institute, Frederick, Maryland
Postdoctoral Fellow

1994-1996 National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland
Postdoctoral Fellow

1997-present Harvard Medical School
Assistant Professor, Department of Neurology
2002-present Associate Professor, Department of Neurology

Honors

1984 Second Prize Winner of The Young Investigator Award, National Conference on Biomedical Engineering (China)
1985 Third Prize Winner of the best graduate thesis (for master's degree), Huazhong University of Science and Technology (China)
1986-1992 Graduate Fellowship, University of California at San Diego
1988 Phi Beta Delta Society for International Scholars
1994-1996 Postdoctoral Fellowship, Breast Cancer Research Program, Department of Defense
1997 William Randolph Hearst Fund Award
1997 Milton Fund Award
1997-2000 Johnson & Johnson Focused Giving Program Award
1997-2001 Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Grant
1998-2002 Department of Defense Career Development Award
1999-2002 Klingenstein Fellowship in Neuroscience

2001-2005	M. Keck Foundation Distinguished Young Scholar in Medical Research
2004	SCBA (Society of Chinese Bioscientists in America) Junior Investigator Award for Excellence in Research (one awardee every two years)
2005-2010	The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Scholar
2005, 2006	Invited to nominate recipients for the Japan Prize 2006 and 2007

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- * equal first authors.
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ABSTRACT

Xi He was born in Wuhan, China during the Cultural Revolution, though he and his family soon moved out of Wuhan into a much more rural area. His father was an associate professor in a medical university—an intellectual—that was targeted during the Revolution. He's early schooling was quite “backward” and “simple,” yet he felt much respect for his teachers. Mao's death in 1976 opened a wealth of opportunities for many and college became a viable option for He. After completing the rigorous national college entrance exam, he returned to Wuhan and attended Huazhong University of Science and Technology, where he majored in mechanical engineering.

He's interest in biology led him to pursue a master's degree in biomedical engineering at Huazhong University, during which time he was fortunate to meet Dr. Sidney Sullivan. He applied to and matriculated at the University of California, San Diego for his doctoral degree, transitioning into not only a different national culture, but also a different academic culture. He chose to work in Michael G. Rosenfeld's laboratory at San Diego and pursued research on transcription factors in the regulation of brain development. He decided to continue his scientific life in the United States and took a postdoctoral fellowship in Luis Parada's laboratory at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). During his time at the NIH, He married and also began studies in the molecular biology of Wnt signaling in cells in Harold E. Varmus's lab at the NIH. After finishing his postdoctoral work, He accepted a principal investigator position at Harvard University where he developed his research on the Wnt cell signaling pathway in gene expression, regulation, and development.

Throughout the remainder of the oral history He discusses laboratory management, competition, collaboration, funding, and his transition from China to the United States (He became a U.S. citizen). The interview concludes with He's thoughts on the role of the scientist in educating the public; the privatization of research; gender and ethnicity issues in science; and the role of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences in his scientific career.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

William Van Benschoten, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., History, University of California, Riverside; M.A., History, University of California, Riverside; C. Phil., History, UCLA

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: He's office, Harvard Medical School.

Dates, length of sessions: August 12, 2004 and August 15, 2004.

Total number of recorded hours: 5.0

Persons present during interview: He and Van Benschoten.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series with Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program in conjunction with the Pew Charitable Trusts's Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Oral History and Archives Project. The project has been designed to document the backgrounds, education, and research of biomedical scientists awarded four-year Pew scholarships since 1988.

To provide an overall framework for project interviews, the director of the UCLA Oral History Program and three UCLA faculty project consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Van Benschoten held a telephone preinterview conversation with He to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed documentation in He's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including He's proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Carol Squires edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

He did not review the transcript. Consequently some names remain unverified.

Carol Squires prepared the table of contents and TechniType Transcripts compiled the guide to proper names.

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