

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

YI ZHONG

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Helene L. Cohen

at

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

on

30-31 August and 2 September 1999

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Interviewee agrees to participate in a series of University-conducted tape-recorded interviews, commencing on or about August 30, 1999, and tentatively entitled "Interview with Yi Zhong". This Agreement relates to all and all materials originating from the interviews, namely the tape recordings of the interviews and a written manuscript prepared from the tapes, hereinafter collectively called "the Work."

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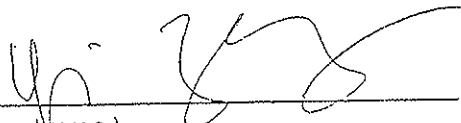
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INTERVIEWEE

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(Signature)


(Signature)

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Date 8/30/99

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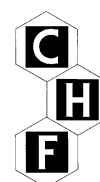
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YI ZHONG

1958 Born in Ji Shou, China on 3 October

Education

1982 B.S., Department of Nuclear Engineering, Tsinghua University
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1991 Ph.D., Department of Biological Sciences, University of Iowa

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Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Biological Sciences

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Staff Investigator
1995-1997 Senior Staff Investigator
1997-1999 Associate Investigator
1999-present Associate Professor

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Selected Publications

Zhong, Y., 1995. Mediation of PACAP-like neuropeptide transmission by coactivation of Ras/Raf and cAMP signal transduction pathways in *Drosophila*. *Nature* 375:588-92.
Zhong, Y. and L.A. Pena, 1995. A novel synaptic transmission mediated by a PACAP-like neuropeptide in *Drosophila*. *Neuron* 14:527-36.
The, I. et al., 1997. Rescue of *Drosophila* NF1 mutant phenotype by protein kinase A. *Science* 276:791-94.
Guo, H.F. et al., 1997. Requirement of *Drosophila* NF1 for activation of adenylyl cyclase by PACAP3 8-like neuropeptides. *Science* 276:795-98.
Wright, N.J. and Y. Zhong, 1998. Serotonin-sensitive leakage channel in *Drosophila* central

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- Sun, Y. et al., 2000. Phylogenetic study of *Artemia* from China using RAPD and AFLP markers. *Acta Genetica Sinica* 27:210-18.
- Zhong, Y. et al., 2000. Guinea-pig sympathetic neurons express varying proportions of two distinct P2X receptors. *Journal of Physiology* 523 :391-402.

ABSTRACT

Yi Zhong was born in Ji Shou, Hunan Province, China, shortly before the Cultural Revolution began. His father had been a sort of director of an Army athletic program and his mother an internist in a government hospital, but when Yi was about eight the Cultural Revolution reassigned his parents, his father to a school for reeducating administrators and his mother to a farm. Yi and his sister and brother lived with their maternal grandparents; their parents visited when they could. Yi feels that he was somewhat isolated as a youngster and sometimes rebellious. At some point the whole family was sent to a farm about forty miles from the grandparents, and they had to walk the whole way there.

Yi felt that his schools were not especially good because education was not valued, except for science classes. He had only basic subjects in school, but because he valued knowledge he studied on his own. He always liked mathematics and physics.

After Yi finished high school he was assigned to a farm to live. There he designed and made a radio, on which he heard about the protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1976, the beginning of the end of the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping came into power and reestablished the primacy of education, reinstating entrance to college by examination. Yi was accepted at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He was so excited he left all his possessions at the farm and hitchhiked home, from there taking to Beijing a train so packed he could not even get to the restroom.

In college Yi had no choice of subject but was assigned to study nuclear engineering. There he also first learned about space exploration, music, philosophy, even Chinese novels. Yi went to the movies (where he met his future wife); he played Go and bridge; he tasted his first beer. He met Mu-Ming Poo, who recommended Yi to Chun-Fang Wu at the University of Iowa as a PhD student. When Yi received his bachelor's degree he wanted to change subjects to biology because he found physics hard and biology more intuitive.

Yi suffered severe culture shock when he arrived in the United States. He marveled at Americans' personal freedom, especially because he could determine his own future, not have it assigned to him. He began his work with *Aplysia*, spending three years analyzing excitability. He was really interested in the brain, however, in learning memory, and switched to *Drosophila*. After finishing his PhD he accepted an offer of his own lab – no postdoc – at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. He visits China once or twice a year; he collaborates and intends to set up his own parallel lab there. Yi feels that it has taken him several years and a number of changes (he gets bored) of subject to reach his professional goals. He likes his coworkers at Cold Spring Harbor and their work; he hopes that opening a lab in China will provide more and cheaper manpower and that the two labs can exchange postdocs. He feels that he has three things he still wants to study: the brain; Alzheimer's disease; and learning enhancement. And, he adds, a fourth thing: he wants to write a book about the nervous system of the fly.

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Helene L. Cohen, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.S., Nursing, UCLA; P.N.P., University of California, San Diego/UCLA; M.A., Theater, San Diego State University.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Zhong's office, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.

Dates, length of sessions: August 30, 1999 (106 minutes); August 31, 1999 (101); September 2, 1999 (108).

Total number of recorded hours: 5.25

Persons present during interview: Zhong and Cohen.

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, Cohen held a telephone preinterview conversation with Zhong to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and agree on an interviewing schedule. She also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Zhong's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including his proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members. For technical background, Cohen consulted J.D. Watson et al., *Molecular Biology of the Gene*. 4th ed. Menlo Park, California: Benjamin/Cummings, 1987; Bruce Alberts et al., *Molecular Biology of the Cell*. 3rd ed. New York: Garland, 1994; Horace F. Judson, *The Eighth Day of Creation*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979; and recent issues of *Science* and *Nature*.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Zhong's childhood in Ji Shou, China, and continuing through his undergraduate and graduate work at Tsinghua University, his doctoral work at University of Iowa, and the establishment of his laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor. Major topics discussed include his childhood during the Cultural Revolution in China, his interest in learning memory in *Drosophila*, and his present work on neural plasticity.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Ji Young Kwon, editorial assistant, 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.

Zhong did not review the transcript and therefore some names have not been verified.

William Van Benschoten, editor, prepared the table of contents. Kwon assembled the biographical summary and interview history. Victoria Simmons, editorial assistant, compiled the index.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Years	1
Childhood in Ji Shou, China. Cultural Revolution and its effect on education and daily life. Reassignment and reeducation. Science classes. Devaluation of education. Assignment to farm life. End of Cultural Revolution. Ascent of Deng Xiaoping and extensive changes he brings.	
College Years	14
Entrance exam for college reinstated. Zhong's acceptance at Tsinghua University. Impressions of Beijing. Learns about many things, like space exploration, music, philosophy, beer. Assigned to study nuclear engineering. Plays Go and bridge. Goes to movies. Meets and marries wife. Finds physics hard; switches to biology for master's degree.	
Graduate School Years	24
Stays at Tsinghua University for master's degree. Interested in learning memory. Aplysia. Meets Mu-ming Poo, who helps him get offer from Chun-Fang Wu to study for PhD at University of Iowa. Begins studying <i>Drosophila</i> . Culture shock. Astonishing degree of personal freedom. Ability to direct his own life.	
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory	44
Offered his own lab even without postdoc. Research in neural plasticity. Also interested in Alzheimer's disease. Parallel lab in China. Collaboration and competition. Patents. Grant writing. Publishing. "Ruling Five" alternative to tenure. Lab management. Goals.	
Outside the Laboratory	72
Sweating as relaxation and brain stimulant. Soccer and basketball games with son. Emphasis on son's academic achievements. More flexible with daughter. Time with wife.	
Index	96

INDEX

- 2 photon, 75
- A**
- acupuncture, 36
Alzheimer's disease, 68, 71, 73, 86
An, Jiabing (wife), 27, 31, 41, 81, 87, 89
Aplysia, 45, 47, 54
- B**
- Beijing, China, 5, 19, 20, 21
Benzer, Seymour, 47
Brandeis University, 67
- C**
- C.W. Post Center, 87
calcium-imaging, 68
Chen, Xiou Ying (maternal grandmother),
2, 31
China, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22,
23, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40,
42, 43, 45, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 64, 67,
73, 74, 79, 90, 93
Clinton, President William J., 24, 51
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, 46, 48, 63,
72, 82
Columbia University, 46
Communist Party, 2, 13, 21
Confucianism, 27
CRAB, 58
Crick, Francis H.C., 75
Cultural Revolution, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15,
16, 18, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 30, 33, 36, 55
cyclic AMP, 58, 59, 85
- D**
- Davis, Ron W., 46, 48, 64, 76, 77
Deng, Xiaoping, 16
Dong, Yu Xiao (mother), 1, 30, 36
Drosophila, 43, 45, 46, 48, 54, 58, 66, 68,
71, 72, 73, 76, 85
- E**
- Eastern New Mexico University, 74
electrophysiology, 70, 74
- F**
- Falun Gong, 28
Fleming, Sir Alexander, 59
- G**
- Goodman, Corey S., 77
Graduate Record Exam, 33
- H**
- Harvard University, 46, 74
Hebb, Donald O., 47
Heer, Winship, 91
Human Genome Project, 86
Hunan Province, 1, 19
Huntington Hospital, 87
- I**
- immunohistochemistry, 70
- J**
- Ji Shou University, 2
Ji Shou, Hunan Province, China, 1, 51
- K**
- Kandel, Eric R., 45, 54
Kline, Hollis T., 82
- L**
- Les Misérables*, 23
Lewinsky, Monica S., 24
Long Island University, 87
long-term potentiation, 69
LTP. *See* long-term potentiation

M

Malinow, Roberto, 54
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 46
MIT. *See* Massachusetts Institute of
Technology
mutagenesis, 72, 74, 75

N

National Institutes of Health, 61, 62, 71, 72,
86
National Neurofibromatosis Foundation, 61
neural plasticity, 47
neuroexcitability, 66
neurofibromatosis, 58
NF1, 58, 59, 68, 71, 85, 86
NIH. *See* National Institutes of Health
NMD receptor, 69
nuclear physics, 21, 22, 32

O

Organization of Behavior, 47

P

Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences,
60, 85
Poo, Mu-ming, 33, 45, 46, 70

Q

Qing Dynasty, 27

R

Red Army, 7
Red Small Army, 7
Russia, 21

S

Stanford University, 46
State University of New York at Stony
Brook, 78

synaptic plasticity, 47, 48

T

Taiwan, 42, 93
Test of English as a Foreign Language, 33
Tiananmen Square, 15, 16, 22, 30, 93
Tonegawa, Susumu, 54
Tsinghua University, 18, 19, 20, 30, 32, 41,
79, 83
Tully, Tim, 45, 46, 48, 58, 64, 70, 74, 76

U

University of California, Berkeley, 77, 83
University of Iowa, 33, 40, 42, 65, 87

W

Watson School of Biological Sciences, 63,
78, 79
Watson, James D., 63, 64, 72, 75, 76, 78
Whitman, Walter, 23, 24
Wright, Nick J.D., 74
Wu, Chun-Fang, 33, 34, 42, 45, 53, 66, 67

X

Xiao, Cai Hong (maternal grandfather), 2,
31, 37
Xingshan, China, 32, 79

Y

Yale University, 33, 79
Yin, Jerry C.P., 83
Yong Shun, China, 11

Z

Zedong, Mao, 3, 4, 7, 16, 22
Zhong, Fan (son), 35, 51, 84, 87, 89
Zhong, Fu Zhi (father), 1, 30, 37
Zhong, Hui (sister), 2, 30, 38
Zhong, Lynn (daughter), 52, 84, 87, 89
Zhong, Zhong (brother), 2, 30, 38