



Einstein photo (source: Caltech) is one of three wall-size photos of theoretical physicists installed by Chau in the 1980s on the fourth floor of the physics building, assisted by Glen Erickson and Roderick Reid.

Snapshot Sisters Photography

A PHYSICIST'S QUANTUM LEAP

PROFESSOR EMERITA OF PHYSICS Ling-Lie Chau (喬玲麗) was 10 years old in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party took over much of China and her family fled from Shanghai to Taiwan.

“Looking back, I actually have benefited from this historical upheaval,” she said. “I received an excellent education from the Tainan Girls’ High School. Many of our teachers were elite intellectuals uprooted from mainland China and an outstanding science teacher got me interested in physics. I still remember the joy I had when I could understand centrifugal force!”

Chau’s passion for physics blossomed. She went on to blaze trails in the field—the only female student in her graduate physics program at UC Berkeley, where she earned her doctorate in 1966; the sole female physicist at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and the Theory Group of Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York; and in 1986, the first woman to join the UC Davis physics department faculty—and the only one until 1994.

Through her estate plan, Chau has endowed a chair

for an outstanding female professor in theoretical physics until there is a faculty gender ratio of 1:1 in the field.

Chau said she never personally experienced any gender or racial prejudice and was always recruited to her job positions, although she lived through the racial prejudice her son faced during his youth and made major efforts to help him overcome.

She feels fortunate for “always having been in the right place at the right time.” And for nearly three decades, the right time and space have been on campus.

In transitioning from solely research institutions to UC Davis, Chau embraced the new challenges and opportunities of teaching—bringing visiting theoretical and mathematical physicists to campus to do research and give talks; organizing international conferences on mathematical physics and publishing proceedings; participating in faculty hiring; creating new materials for mathematical physics courses; and bringing the excitement of frontier physics to nonscience students.

In addition to the physics chair, she supports a fellowship for physics graduate students and an award for brain research.

“UC Davis is the one place where I can pursue my passion for research in theoretical and mathematical physics,” said Chau, “and my compassion by making charitable contributions.”



Read more at go.ucdavis.edu/chau.