

RESTORING THE HISTORY PUZZLE

Who's Who of American-Educated Chinese (Pre-1949)

還原歷史拼圖

重現留美之路



SIGNIFICANT POPULATION

The Chinese who studied abroad between the late 19th century and the early 20th century represent a unique and historically significant group. Motivated by the ideal of saving and advancing the nation, hundreds of thousands of determined students went overseas to pursue education and explore pathways to political reform (Chen, 2017; Dow, 1975), economic development (Zou et al., 2012), industrial modernization (Wang & Yang, 2019), and cultural advancement (Villard, 2019; Pripas-Kapit, 2015). Upon graduation, many returned home and devoted themselves to applying the advanced knowledge and technologies they had acquired abroad. These returnees became key contributors and change-makers in fields such as politics, legislation, economics, education, science, engineering, medicine, the military, the arts, and the humanities. It is no exaggeration to say that they were a driving force behind China's modernization. At the personal level, Chinese individuals with pre-1949 overseas education often gained high social and professional status upon their return. While some rose to prominent positions in modern China, many led more modest lives, maintaining a low profile while enjoying moderate professional success and stability.

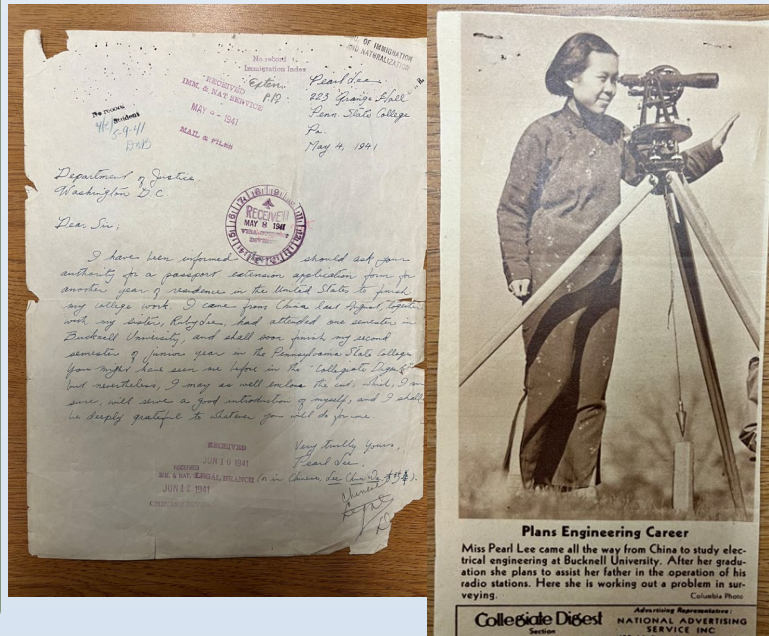
Did the twin sisters become a scientist and an engineer, respectively?



Lee Chun Wa
李珍华 1917-?



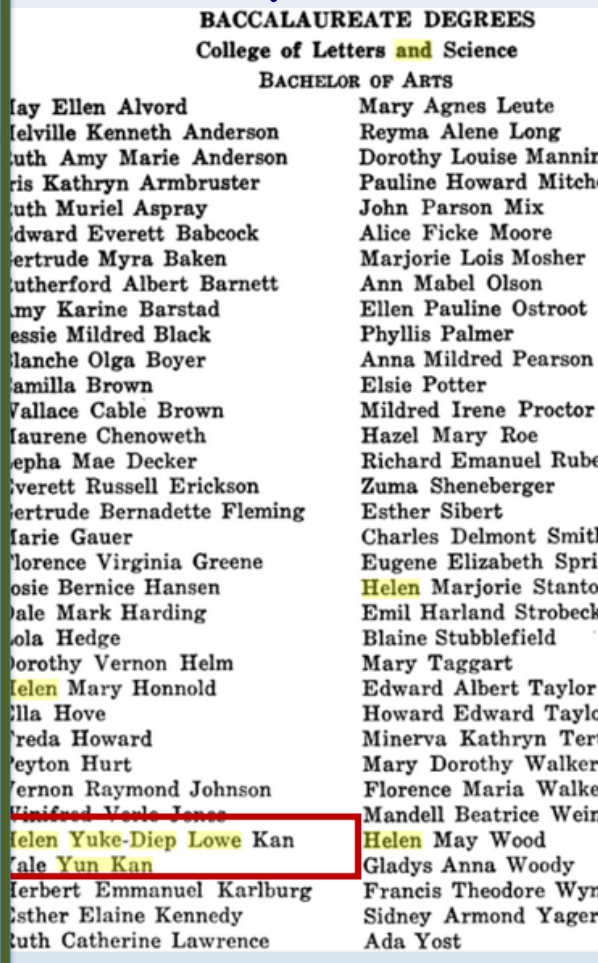
Lee Pao Wah
李宝华 1917-?



Was 徐志摩 born in 1897 or 1898?



After graduation, which country did this college sweetheart couple move to?



FORGOTTEN MAJORITY

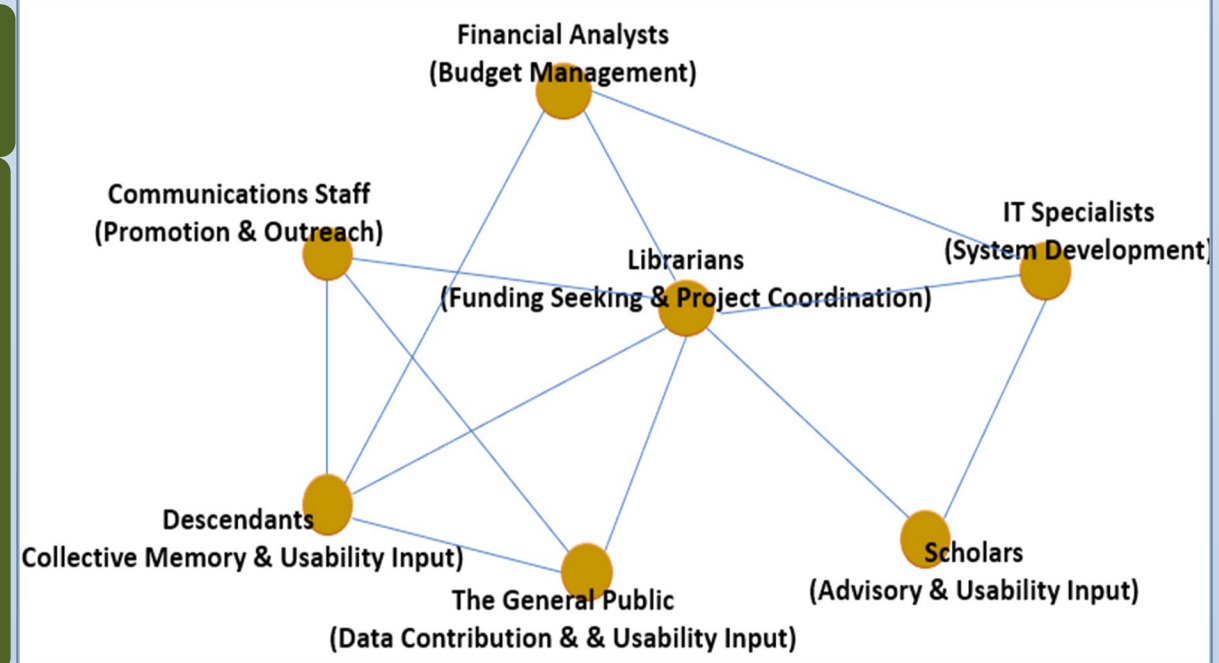
Over a span of almost a century, approximately 150,000 Chinese individuals embarked on educational journeys, with the United States as a major destination (Wang, 1995). However, only a fraction achieved notable social and professional status and left well-documented legacies, like the six prominent individuals on the top of the screen. Most lived in obscurity, leaving behind limited traces in university archives, immigration records, gray literature, and personal recollections from their descendants. The fading family memories of these individuals add urgency to the project, necessitating immediate participation from surviving children and grandchildren to contribute information that might otherwise be lost.

How many of these students from the 1920s can you recognize or find in existing literature?



COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE

Back in 2023, a group of Chinese studies librarians launched a collaborative project aiming to establish a digital infrastructure and platform for uncovering and preserving biographical data of American-educated Chinese (pre-1949) from various sources, including archival records, historical documents, and crowd-sourced contributions from descendants, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. The systematically collected data will be made available in an online open-access directory, serving public and scholarly information needs. What makes this project unique is the outreach to and engagement of the Chinese and Chinese American communities and the broader public in contributing collective memories. The biographical directory built upon historical documents and collective memories will serve both public and scholarly information needs.



CORE COMPONENTS

- 1. Metadata/Ontology Infrastructure:** with 50 or so metadata fields across five categories, it adopts widely accepted standards (e.g., RDF, OWL, and schema.org), supports biographical relationships (e.g., family lineage, professional network, and mentor-student relationships), and facilitating linking with external datasets (e.g., WikiData, and VIAF)
- 2. Data Collection & Processing:** biographical data are collected at national and university archives, from existing literature, as well as through crowdsourced collective memories from community and family members.
- 3. The Biographical Database:** In addition to searching and browsing functions, the database features API integration for data exchange and crowdsourcing, allowing registered users to add and review data. Registered family members will have the option to opt out of publicly displaying perceived sensitive information. Peer reviewed site users is enabled for quality control.
- 4. Project Promotion & Public Outreach:** In the first two years, efforts will be made to build project awareness and call for representatives from local communities, especially surviving family members, through personal and professional network. Immediately upon the launch of the system, we will purchase media advertisements and promote the project on social media and via community organization websites and listservs, calling for public attention, data contribution and general feedback.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOME

- 1. The biographical database:** the open-access directory provides a comprehensive resource for generations of descendants, scholars, and the public to explore the lives of American-educated Chinese, while also functioning as a crowdsourcing system. It should have far-reaching impact on civic engagement, community networking and resilience through sharing family history, preserving cultural identity, and historical legacy. It sets an example for uncovering the lives of lesser-known individuals. The large and structured dataset can also support traditional and digital humanities research at the individual, group, and population levels.
- 2. The technical infrastructure:** both the metadata solution and system source code, along with detailed documentation, will be made available as open source on GitHub for replication and adaptation. The built-in API functionality will also facilitate long-term data exchange and interoperability between this database and other existing systems, such as [WikiData](#), [FamilySearch](#), and [Ancestry.com](#).
- 3. The methodological framework:** featuring an interdependent workflow, multigroup and cross-institutional collaboration, multidimensional data sources, bilingual data representation, as well as community engagement as content contributors and users.

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Multipronged Data Source



PHASED TIMELINE

- P1. American-Educated Chinese**
- P2. Expand the project scope to other countries, including**
 - a. Japan
 - b. France, U.K., Germany, Belgium, Russia and other European nations
 - c. Australia
 - d. Other Asian nations, such as the Philippines and India

Interests? Questions? Referrals? Suggestions?
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