

## China Insight – May 12, 2017

### Chinese Americans continue to contribute

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May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, a month that celebrates and pays tribute to the contributions generations of Asian Pacific Americans have made to American history, sciences and culture.

Like most commemorative months, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month originated in 1978 when Congress passed a law directing the president to issue a proclamation designating the week beginning on May 4, 1979, as Asian Pacific American Heritage Week. On March 28, 1979, President Jimmy Carter issued Presidential Proclamation 4650, which highlighted the significant role Asian Pacific Americans have contributed to American society.

May was the chosen month as it commemorates the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and it also marked the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869, by largely Chinese workers and immigrants who laid the tracks.

In the Twin Cities, there are many Chinese Americans who have contributed to the fabric of American society. China Insight takes this opportunity to feature two of them and their achievements.

#### Weiming Lu

At the 2014 annual meeting of the Chinese American Association of Minnesota, Weiming Lu included a quote he had come across that had stuck in his mind: “no matter how long we live and serve this country, we are regarded by some to be ‘forever foreigners.’” Lu feels strongly that this is one of the challenges Chinese Americans have to overcome.

However, Lu’s message was not meant to be taken in a negative way. It was meant as a reminder that “much challenge remains for us to enter the main stream of America” and the “need to take action in both local and

national levels.” He urged those in attendance to be grateful for the opportunities offered and to be “good neighbors” by engaging in volunteer activities.

He also emphasized the importance of putting Chinese Americans’ bicultural nature to good use in “building a bridge of understanding” for promoting better U.S.-China understanding and relations.

Lu grew up within an architectural-aware environment in China. His father, an architect with deep interest in classic Chinese architecture and literature, and an admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, was educated in China and France, and translated Le Corbusier’s “Urbanisme” into Chinese. Lu senior practiced and taught architecture his entire life. In a 2008 interview with the National Park Service, Lu mentioned that through his father, he learned “it was not enough to design good buildings; architects should seek a proper relationship between buildings and their surroundings.”

Lu is an internationally recognized urban planner and designer. He earned his Master Degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Minnesota in 1954 and in Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 1957. He devoted his entire career working to preserve culture and heritage in the planning of communities. Lu served as advisor to the National Committee for U.S. China Relations for many years. Locally, he served as advisor to the Harbin-Minneapolis Sister City Committee and chair of the Changsha-St. Paul Sister City Committee. He also served on the board of the Minneapolis Foundation.

He worked on numerous projects around U.S. cities and abroad. In the 1960s, he developed a plan for Minneapolis that led to legislation on and the restoration of historic landmarks and districts around Minnesota. His projects centered around revitalization of neighborhoods, using open land and vacant lots, and making them part of the viable community landscape. In 1972, while deputy director for urban design in Dallas, Lu led the initiative to get the infamous Texas Book Depository state historical designation. Lu was one of the honored guests invited to the 50th anniversary of JFK’s assassination. However, the project of note and the one where Lu spent 26 years on is the one he worked on just before retiring: Saint Paul’s Lowertown Redevelopment. It covers one third of downtown St. Paul, approximately 180 acres in area. The rejuvenation generated \$1 billion reinvestment through persistent and creative public/private partnership, and truly laid a solid foundation to the revitalization of Lowertown. The historic district has been called “the national model for the urban village.” It is held in the field as the shining example of successful central city revitalization based on public-private partnerships.

Not only is Lu a successful urban planner and designer, he is an accomplished Chinese calligrapher. Since his 1997 solo exhibit in China National Art Academy in Hangzhou, he was invited to many other international exhibits in China, and Japan. His works are part of the permanent collections at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the China National Academy of Fine Arts, and featured in a 2016 PBS “MN Original” segment.

He served as vice-chair of the National Chinese American Committee of 100 for many years, with two basic missions: (1) in improving U.S. China understanding and relationship, and (2) ensuring Chinese American contribution to mainstream America. For the mission, he joined a 10-day visit to China with renowned cellist Yo-yo Ma, architect I.M. Pei, and other Chinese American leaders in 1994. In 1995, 50 years after the end of the WWII, he and the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota initiated the “Hun Qiao: Bridge of Souls” project to “revive the dead soul; and to build bridge between countries in promoting peace.” Six years later, the world premiere concert by the same name was held at St. Paul’s Ordway Center for Arts and was broadcasted on National Public Radio on International Peace Day, Sept. 18, 2001.

Lu has received many awards, including the first Quadrennial Presidential Award for Design Excellence and the Presidential Award from National Trust for Historic Preservation. He has published “Shan Shui Cities of Oriental Quality,” “The Tao of Urban Rejuvenation: Building a Livable Creative Urban Village,” among other works. “Shan Shui” has been translated into Chinese and Japanese. “Tao” has been translated into Chinese and

is published both in Taiwan and China. He and his wife established the Shan Shui Foundation Fund to support art, urban design and conservation, and U.S.-China exchanges.

“As a person who has spent nearly one third of my life in China and two thirds in the United States, I am a product of two cultures that do not always dwell together harmoniously. Generally speaking, Chinese culture stresses continuity, while American culture values change. As one who has had to straddle both cultures, I often struggle with these competing ideals. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that continuity without change brings stagnation and deterioration, and change without continuity brings instability and uncertainty. The challenge for me is to strike a sensitive balance between the two in my work and my life,” Lu said in his interview with the National Park Service.

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