



Chentao Lin (1957-Present)

Professor

**University of California, Los
Angeles**

"Do what you really like and want to do." Chentao Lin, 2006.

Overview

Chentao Lin has long been interested in studying plants and their interactions with the surrounding environment. The oldest of three children born to high school instructors, Lin graduated from the South China College of Tropical Science with a degree in agronomy. He furthered his study of plant biology during his graduate studies in the U.S., earning his master's degree in botany from Iowa State University and a Ph.D. in genetics from Michigan State University. Since joining the faculty at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1996, Lin has quickly moved through the ranks to become a full professor, and has earned substantial recognition for his work in plant genetics and their response to environmental cues.

This interview was conducted in 2015.

Career

Lin says that he has taken "a very conventional career path" for someone in his corner of the environmental science field: advanced degrees followed by post-doctoral research positions at Michigan State and the University of Pennsylvania, followed by professorship at UCLA. Lin says that as a professor and research leader, he is happy to provide a platform for his students to get the same kind of experiences he had. "I provide an environment for them that models how to conduct research," he explains. "What questions do we [scientific researchers] ask? How do we answer these questions? These are the kind of things for which a mentor is invaluable." Lin notes that his own mentors, Ethan Hack, Mike Thomashow and Anthony Cashmore provided that kind of environment for him, where he gained the skills to both conduct research and garner funding for it.

Lin's research efforts started when he was a research assistant at Iowa State where he tried to clone a gene responsible for fungal disease in corn, center on specific plant genes. Lin has broadened his interest to include other plant genes with various functions; in 1997, he was able to clone a gene mutation that causes plants to flower at the wrong time, an accomplishment Lin

calls the most significant of his career. His current research is focused on photoreceptors and plant development; specifically, how a photosensory receptor called cryptochrome affects biological processes, including flowering time in plants.

Mentoring Others

Lin says that he has advised many minority undergraduates in the environmental sciences. He notes that human beings have yet to fully understand our environment and the impact of many environmental interactions, and he would like to see more minority students considering a career in the field. However, he advises it only if they have a true curiosity about the natural world: “Do what you really like and want to do. Work hard to pursue that goal, and you will succeed.”