

Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu

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Nicknamed the "First Lady of Physics," Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu made many important contributions to the field of physics. She also achieved many firsts during her lifetime.

Wu was born in a small town near Shanghai, China, in 1912. In the early 1900s in China, girls did not typically attend school. Many people believed that it was not necessary for girls to go to school and learn. Wu's father, however, believed that education was important for everyone and decided to start his own school for girls. This was where Wu began her schooling.

In college, Wu studied physics. One of her professors had also worked with Marie Curie, a famous female physicist. Wu graduated at the top of her class in 1934. Afterwards, she moved to the United States and earned her doctorate degree in physics from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1940.

After she graduated, Wu had a hard time finding a research job at a university. Instead, she accepted a teaching job at Smith College and later at Princeton University. At the time, Wu was the first female instructor ever to join the faculty at Princeton.

In 1944, Wu joined the Manhattan Project, the project which led to the development of the atomic bomb. She was the only Chinese American who contributed to the project. She figured out how to enrich a uranium ore in order to create large quantities of fuel for the bomb. This was a very important step in the project. Wu also improved the instrument that scientists used to



Acc. 90-105 - Science Service, Records, 1920s-1970s, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

This is a photo of Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu in 1958.



Acc. 90-105 - Science Service, Records, 1920s-1970s, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

This is a photo of Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu in 1963.

measure radiation.

After World War II, Wu joined the faculty at Columbia University. During the 1950s, she made important contributions to the work of two male colleagues, Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen Ning Yang. Lee and Yang won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1957, but Wu was not recognized for her work with a Nobel Prize.

Wu went on to become the first woman to serve as the president of the American Physical Society. She also received many awards throughout her career in physics.

Aware of the challenges that she faced as a woman in the field of physics, Wu encouraged other women to persist in pursuing careers in the sciences. Her passion for physics and perseverance in the face of many obstacles are inspirational. She is considered a role model for young women everywhere, showing what heights they can achieve.