

Lucie Cheng: Ahead of Her Time

Russell C. Leong, M.F.A.

Lucie Cheng was a person whose research was ahead of its time, as she herself was a person ahead of her time.

I remember in the early 1980s she, together with Renqiu Yu and Liu Yuzun had done work on looking at the Sunning Railway in Guangdong, one of the very few railways in pre-1949 China that was built with money from overseas Chinese, most of whom were from America. Lucie Cheng was one of the few Chinese American scholars, besides Him Mark Lai and Wang Ling-chi, who were truly bilingual and could use primary Chinese-language sources.

At that time, she had given me the article to edit and to put together her footnotes, which needed to be done in romanization, or pinyin for the journal. My romanization was not good, and so I grudgingly did the footnotes and so forth, but in the process I actually began to improve my Chinese--as I myself had learned a different system of speaking and writing in Taiwan where I had studied.

Through small daily experiences working with her and her colleagues on various U.S.-China related projects for over a dozen years, my sense of "linkages and boundaries" the term she coined, began to create new linkages and resonances in my own work, both with *Amerasia Journal* and even in the stories and poems I later wrote.

As well, working with her gave me a better sense of the complex relationships between mainland China, Taiwan, and Chinese Americans and the Chinese in other countries. So through her example, through work and experience, I became better at what I did, though I did not know know this or recognize it at the time.

Her strong character and toughness also taught me a few lessons, and I am sure she would have laughed heartily if she had known that I often had to refer to Sun Tzu's famous treatise on "The Art of War" to work with her at times! We did not always agree, but we did agree that each other was worth dealing with in order to get the job done. Lucie was a complex mixture of idealism and pragmatism, and she taught me, and countless others, a great deal about life and politics in her unique and inimitable way. I'd like to end my thoughts with a line from the poet, Rabindranath Tagore: "We live in the world when we love it."

Lucie did love the world she found herself in. And so she never tired of studying the world, its tugs and tides, its conflicts and contradictions. Thus, who could ask for anything more?

Russell C. Leong, M.F.A.

Editor, *Amerasia Journal*, UCLA Asian American Studies Center
Adjunct Professor, English and Asian American Studies, UCLA