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23. Feng Xinde

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Personalities in Polymer Research



Feng Xinde

Feng Xinde has significantly contributed to the creation and development of Modern Polymer Chemistry in China. In the late 40's he was the first Professor to offer a course in Polymer Chemistry and helped in the dissemination of Polymer Science through the organization of meetings and Symposia involving Chinese scientists.

Feng Xinde was born in Tong-Li, a famous spa near Suzhou, on October 12, 1915. At that time, he spelled his name in the old Chinese way, Sing-Tuh Veong. He went to Elementary School in Tong-Li, to a Middle School and High School which were associated with Suzhou University.

In 1933 Feng Xinde enrolled in Suzhou University but transferred to Tsing-Hua University in Beijing after his freshman year. At Tsing-Hua he studied chemistry and received his B.S. in 1937. In 1945 he decided to go abroad to receive a higher degree. He obtained a U.S. Fellowship from the University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, Indiana through a National competitive examination. He studied under the guidance of Professor C. C. Price; his American classmates at that time called him Steve. During this time he was awarded a Fellowship by the General Tire and Rubber Company. He received his Ph.D. in 1948.

In 1948, Feng Xinde returned to China and became a Professor at the Chemistry

Department of his Alma Mater, Tsing-Hua University in Beijing, a position he held until 1952. He was then offered a position of Professor in the Chemistry Department of Beijing University, Beijing, which he accepted. Feng is still Professor of Polymer Chemistry and Director of Polymer Research at the Chemistry Department of Beijing University.

From the early part of his career, Feng has been interested in vinyl polymerization, photochemistry and biomedical polymers. In the years 1956-1966 he held a position as Senior Scientist at the Institute of Chemistry of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, a position which was interrupted during the cultural revolution. In 1977 he was offered the position of a Senior Scientist at the Institute of Photography & Photochemistry.

In subsequent years, Feng Xinde spent some time abroad. In 1984, he was a Guest Professor at the Research Center of Biomaterials & Biomedical Polymers, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan and from 1986-1994 he was affiliated with the Center of Bioengineering at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, USA.

Feng's scientific contributions came from various areas of polymer chemistry. He investigated: a) The role of amines in redox and photo-induced polymerization; b) The role of Ce^{IV} in graft copolymerizations; c) Living ring-opening polymerization of lactones and lactides and the role of O₂-CCT in polymer aging and biological aging processes.

The work of Feng Xinde has been published in about 200 papers both in English and Chinese including reviews and books. He has served as Editor-in-Chief of the "Chinese Journal of Polymer Sciences", (in English) and of "Acta Polymerica Sinica" (in Chinese).

Feng is highly respected in academic circles in China and has significantly contributed to the foundation of Polymer Chemistry in China. In 1949, he was the first Professor in China to offer a course of "Polymers and Polymerization". In 1989 Feng received the "Talent Award" from the Chinese Chemical Society, the Lecture Award in 1984 and the International Award of the Society of Polymer Science Japan in 1997. Since 1980, he is a

Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Academia Sinica) in Beijing.

Among his professional activities in polymer science are the organization of International Symposia that opened China to the scientific world in Polymer Science: The first important undertaking was the Kunming National Symposium on Functional Polymers in 1981. Soon other Symposia were organized under Feng's leadership: the Guilin National Symposium on Specialty Polymers in 1984; the Guangzhou National Symposium on Fine Polymers in 1986; the US-China Symposium on Biomaterials in 1987, Seattle, WA; the Kunming International Symposium on Biomaterials in 1988; the Guilin Symposium on Biomaterials in 1991; the Wafan International Symposium on Biomaterials in 1994; the Xian International Symposium on Bioclated Polymers, Drug Delivery Systems and Bioactive Polymers in 1997.

Feng was also involved in the organization of other Symposia related to polymer science: the Bilateral China-Japan Symposia on Radical Polymerization, in 1980, 1984, 1988 in Osaka, Japan, in 1982, in Beijing, 1986 in Chengde, and 1991 in Guilin. From 1993 this program was extended to Asia Symposia on Polymerization and Related Processes; 1993 in Osaka, 1995 in Kaileng, China and 1997 in Taejeon, Korea.

Since he was in Middle School, Feng was interested in Gymnastics, and developed an expertise in parallel bars. Later he was active in sports in Suzhou and Tsing-Hua University. He is still interested in sports and watches Gymnastics, both High-Low Bars and Parallel Bars. He also watches important International soccer events.

Feng has another hobby: he is interested in culinary arts. He considers cooking an significant part of chemistry; artistic chemistry.

In 1948, just before Feng returned to Beijing from the US, he married the former N. (Jane) Yeh of Jiangsu.

This article was prepared by Otto Vogl*, Kyoto Institute of Technology, Matsugasaki, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606, Japan and Zhou Qifeng, The Graduate School, Beijing University, Beijing 100871, China.

*In this article we are following the Chinese custom and use the family name first, for the use of oriental names see also Dong Van Layen, Daig Mai-Huong and Otto Vogl, Polymer News, 20(17), 399 (1995).