Internationally renowned Chinese American historian Him Mark Lai's extensive research collection provides a mother lode of source material on the experiences of Chinese in America, including their districts of origin in Guangdong Province, their detention at Angel Island Immigration Station, the development of community organizations and newspapers, and the political left. His groundbreaking writings—10 books and more than 100 articles—are models of scholarship. His commitment to his bicultural heritage, democratic principles, passion for history, and generous spirit are an enduring inspiration to future generations.

Born Nov. 1, 1925 in San Francisco's Chinatown, Lai escaped the confines of his family's 8'x10' home by reading Chinese novels and a diverse range of English books borrowed from the Chinatown Branch Library. By middle school, he held down a part-time job in a sewing factory yet still excelled at both the Nam Kue Chinese School and SF public schools. He received a B.S. in engineering from UC-Berkeley in 1947 and worked for Bechtel Corp. but continued his interest in Chinese history, culture and politics.

In 1960, he enrolled in a University of California extension course that exposed him to the histories of Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos in America. He joined the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA) soon after its founding in 1963. These events, coupled with the Civil Rights movement, led Lai toward developing a Chinese American identity and pursuing further studies in this field. In 1967, he accepted a proposal from the weekly East/West to write a series of articles on Chinese American history. These articles became the cornerstone of the classic, *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus*, and the basis for the first Chinese American history course in the U.S., which Lai taught at SF City College and at UC-Berkeley.


In pursuit of source material, Lai climbed into dumpsters, combed through thousands of newspapers, unpublished manuscripts and documents, traveled to archives on both sides of the Pacific and conducted scores of oral history interviews. To share his discoveries, he not only wrote and taught but provided text and translations for exhibits; compiled bibliographies of Chinese newspapers and other materials; served as a consultant on historical projects in the U.S. and China; and spoke at conferences in Asia, Australia and the U.S. Lai worked for decades on the editorial committees of *Amerasia Journal* and *Chinese America: History & Perspectives*, the annual CHSA journal that he co-founded. Authors, artists and political activists for 30-plus years have noted their indebtedness to Lai and footnotes often reference the data and material he unearthed. He was also available around the clock as a reference source to all librarians in the Bay Area public and academic libraries.

In 1989, Lai helped organize the first symposium on Chinese American family history and genealogy at the Chinese Culture Foundation (CCF) in San Francisco. Two years later, he co-founded the "In Search of Roots" program for youth, enabling hundreds to locate ancestral villages and learn about their family histories. For 13 years, Lai produced *Hon Sing*, a weekly radio program. He served multiple terms on the boards of many organizations including the Chinese Culture Foundation and Chinese Historical Society of America. His community work and prodigious scholarship garnered many awards, including the Association for Asian American Studies Award for Lifetime Scholarship and Outstanding Service Awards from the Chinese for Affirmative Action, CHSA and CCC.