



## Experts from U.S. and China Collaborate To Develop Intriguing Interactive Exhibit on Ancient Chinese Astronomy

— *Multi-city U.S. tour of **Dragon Skies: Astronomy of Imperial China** opens July 10, 2004 at Oakland's Chabot Space & Science Center* —

OAKLAND, CA (March 31, 2004) — This summer, the culmination of a joint effort between American and Chinese museum curators will come to fruition when an intriguing and unusual new exhibit, **Dragon Skies: Astronomy of Ancient China**, opens a seven-city United States tour here at Chabot Space & Science Center.

Reflecting Chabot's mission to broaden the general public's understanding of science and astronomy as well as China's interest in establishing cooperative scientific and technological relations with other countries, the new exhibit brings to light the influential, but relatively unknown, astronomical discoveries made by Imperial China's Royal Astronomers as far back as 5,000 years ago.

Recently, at an honorary reception for the new exhibit, Peng Keyu, Consul General of the People's Republic of China to San Francisco said, "I hope that more and more American friends will get to know China more deeply through the *Dragon Skies* exhibit and that this will be one of many cooperative ventures between the United States and China."

**Dragon Skies: Astronomy of Imperial China** was developed by a team of researchers, educators and designers at the Chabot Space and Science Center in conjunction with the People's Republic of China. The efforts are supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation. The exhibit tells the 5,000 year old story of ancient China's astronomical achievements which include documented observations of solar and lunar eclipses from as early as 1600 B.C., the earliest record of Halley's Comet in 500 B.C. and a record of a supernova explosion in 1054 A.D., the remnant of which is the Crab Nebula.

**Dragon Skies** will enlighten the general public about early China's contributions to the science of astronomy which remain largely unknown to the lay person but are of vital importance to today's astronomers. For example, by analyzing ancient Chinese oracle bones containing accounts of solar eclipses nearly 4,000 years old, contemporary researchers at Jet Propulsion Laboratories were able to determine to within few thousandths of second the rate at which the Earth's daily rotation has been gradually slowing down.

"We are honored to be bringing this intriguing portrayal of ancient Chinese astronomy to the United States," said Alexandra Barnett, Executive Director of the Chabot Space and Science Center. "One of our goals here at Chabot is to foster an appreciation of other cultures' contributions to science and **Dragon Skies** is poised to accomplish that with exceptional results."

Astronomical observations were a vital component of everyday life in ancient China. Emperors relied on accurate predictions of celestial events to prove their divine right to rule and their right to the title “the Son of Heaven.” Additionally, China’s agrarian society depended on forecasts of seasonal changes and an accurate calendar to guide agricultural activities. From ancient oracle bones used to predict the future to stone carvings that depict Chinese myths and legends, visitors to *Dragon Skies* will learn how the ancient Chinese people looked to the heavens for guidance and how the study of these past events provides today’s scientists with clues to the future.

The exhibit employs a host of unique and appealing elements in its presentation including 32 artifacts spanning thousands of years alongside 20 specially commissioned interactive exhibits. Visitors will be guided by a virtual Royal Astronomer who will open the Imperial Chinese doors into what was once highly guarded territory controlled by the ruling emperor. Numerous child-centered educational activities as well as a planetarium show are also included.

*Dragon Skies: Astronomy of Imperial China* opens on July 10, 2004 at the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland, California. More detailed exhibit information along with views of artifacts and replicas can be seen at [www.dragonskies.org](http://www.dragonskies.org).

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### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Chabot Space & Science Center is located at 10000 Skyline Blvd. in Oakland’s Joaquin Miller Park. Public hours: Friday, 5 pm–10 pm; Saturday, 10 am–10 pm; Sunday, 12 noon–5 pm. General admission, including free parking and a Planetarium show, is \$11.00 for adults, \$8.00 youth and seniors. Children under 3 are admitted free. *The Sky Tonight* planetarium shows and movies in the MegaDome Theater are \$6.00 adult, and \$5.00 youth and seniors. Telescopes are open for Free Public Viewing Fridays & Saturdays from dusk – 10 pm, weather permitting. Tickets may be purchased at the door, or by calling (510) 336-7373.

**For more information, call (510) 336-7300, or visit [www.chabotspace.org](http://www.chabotspace.org)**