

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THE VILCEK PRIZE  
IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE  
DR. HUDA ZOGHBI**

**THE VILCEK PRIZE  
FOR CREATIVE PROMISE  
IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE  
DR. HOWARD CHANG**

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## **Dr. Huda Zoghbi**

to Receive

### **2009 VILCEK PRIZE IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH**

## **Dr. Howard Chang**

to Receive inaugural

### **VILCEK PRIZE FOR CREATIVE PROMISE**

ANNUAL AWARDS PRESENTATION

Thursday, April 2, 2009

New York,  
February 9, 2009

Internationally renowned scientist **Dr. Huda Zoghbi**, a pioneer in the study of Rett Syndrome and related autism spectrum disorders, will receive the 2009 Vilcek Prize in biomedical science. "We have been awarding these prizes annually since 2006," said Dr. Jan Vilcek, President and Cofounder of the Vilcek Foundation, "and this year I'm proud to announce the expansion of our awards program with the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise, to recognize the successes of foreign-born individuals in the early stages of their careers in the arts and biomedical sciences." Biologist **Dr. Howard Chang** has been named the first Creative Promise Prize recipient in biomedical science.

Of the new prize category, Marica Vilcek, Vice President and Cofounder of the Vilcek Foundation, explained, "We have always wanted to honor and publicize the contributions of a younger generation of immigrants working in the arts and sciences, to help them maximize their potential. Jan and I were in the early stages of our careers when we immigrated to the United States, and the professional support we received here was pivotal to our success." The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise are presented to foreign-born individuals, 38 years old or younger, in the fields of biomedical science and the arts.

At the awards presentation, to be held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York City, Thursday, April 2, 2009, Dr. Zoghbi and Mike Nichols, the 2009 recipient of the Vilcek Prize in the arts, will each receive a \$50,000 cash award and a commemorative trophy created by designer Stefan Sagmeister. Creative Promise Prize winners Dr. Chang and Ham Tran, the 2009 recipient of the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise

in the arts, will each receive a \$25,000 cash award and a plaque, also designed by Mr. Sagmeister.

The Vilcek Foundation, in meeting its primary purpose, to call attention to the accomplishments of immigrants currently working in United States, also serves to remind the public of the immeasurable contributions of the foreign-born to this country throughout its history. Dr. Vilcek points out, "Much of the advancement of science in the United States from the first half of the twentieth century onward rests on the achievements of foreign-born individuals. The outstanding work of this year's science honoree, Dr. Huda Zoghbi, underscores the importance of remembering this fact."

This year's Vilcek Prize recipients demonstrate the truly global influence of America's immigrants: Mike Nichols was born in Berlin, Germany; Dr. Huda Zoghbi in Beirut, Lebanon; Ham Tran in Saigon, Vietnam; and Dr. Howard Chang, in Taipei, Taiwan.

The 2009 biomedical science winners were chosen by independent panels of experts. The jury for the Vilcek Prize included: **Dr. Claudio Basilico**, Professor and Chairman in the Department of Microbiology, NYU School of Medicine; **Dr. Bruce Cronstein**, Professor of Medicine, Pathology and Pharmacology, NYU School of Medicine; **Dr. Rudolf Jaenisch**, Member of the Whitehead Institute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; **Dr. Joan Massagué**, Chairman of the Cancer Biology and Genetics Program, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center; **Dr. Inder Verma**, American Cancer Society Professor of Molecular Biology, the Salk Institute; and **Dr. Jan Vilcek**, Professor of Microbiology, NYU School of Medicine.

The jury for the Creative Promise Prize included: **Dr. Heran Darwin**, Assistant Professor of Microbiology, NYU School of Medicine; **Dr. Laurie Dempsey**, Senior Editor, *Nature Immunology*; **Dr. Peter Palese**, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Microbiology, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine; **Dr. Jan Vilcek**, Professor of Microbiology, NYU School of Medicine; **Dr. Leslie B. Vosshall**, Investigator, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and Chemers Family Associate Professor, The Rockefeller University; **Nicholas Wade**, Science Reporter, The New York Times; and **Dr. Jedd Wolchok**, Associate Director, Ludwig Center for Cancer Immunotherapy, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

## About the Vilcek Prize Recipient

**Dr. Huda Zoghbi** HUDA ZOGHBI'S first semester of medical school at the American University in Beirut was shattered by civil war. Determined to finish the year, she and her fellow students and their professors lived in the basement of the medical school building, attending class in "safe" rooms, with double-thick walls. Perseverance was to become a hallmark of Dr. Zoghbi's character, and be instrumental to the achievements of this internationally renowned child neurologist and molecular geneticist — notably, the discovery of the gene responsible for Rett syndrome.

Forced by the escalating war in Lebanon to complete her medical studies in the States, Dr. Zoghbi received her MD from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1979. She joined the pediatric residency program at the Baylor College of Medicine and, during a rotation in neurology, became "fascinated by the brain." A three-year residency/fellowship program in pediatric neurology followed, in 1982, at Baylor.

Intending to become a pediatric clinician, an encounter with a five-year-old girl at Texas Children's Hospital and an article on Rett syndrome in the *Annals of Neurology* redirected Dr. Zoghbi's professional path. Realizing that solving the problem of this mysterious disease would require research training, Dr. Zoghbi went back to school, in molecular genetics. Rett syndrome, would have to wait, however, as too little data was available at the time to make it the launch point of her new career. Instead, she focused on spinocerebellar ataxia type 1 (SCA1), a crippling, neurodegenerative disease that affects balance and coordination. In 1988, she set up her own laboratory at Baylor College of Medicine, and began a close collaboration with Dr. Harry Orr of the University of Minnesota, who was also working on SCA1. Astonishingly, in 1993, both cloned the SCA1 gene on the same day. Behind the scenes, Dr. Zoghbi continued to work on Rett syndrome. In 1999, sixteen years after first learning of the disease, she and her collaborators identified mutations in the MECP2 gene as the cause of Rett syndrome.

Today a professor of Pediatrics, Neurology, Neuroscience, and Molecular and Human Genetics at Baylor College of Medicine, and an investigator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Dr. Zoghbi says her ultimate professional goal is “to actually make a patient better” through treatments resulting from her discoveries in research.

Dr. Zoghbi is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine; she is also a trustee at the American University of Beirut. She has been honored with the E. Mead Johnson Award for Pediatric Research, the nation’s most distinguished pediatric research award; the Kilby Award for Extraordinary Contributions to Society through Science, Technology, Innovation, Invention, and Education; the Sidney Carter Award; and the Bristol-Myers Squibb Award for Distinguished Achievement in Neuroscience Research.



## About the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise Recipient

### Dr. Howard Chang

WHY DO LONG HAIRS GROW ON OUR SCALP, but not on our palms or the soles of our feet? How do cells decide where they should be located in the body? Unconventional questions such as these – in particular, those with a direct connection to human diseases – drive the research of Dr. Howard Y. Chang, a practicing dermatologist and Associate Professor of Dermatology and principal investigator in the Program in Epithelial Biology at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

With a disciplined mind even as a teenager, Taipei, Taiwan-born Dr. Chang remembers well the shock of his first day in junior high school in southern California, where his family had moved when he was twelve years old. He went on to earn his AB in Biochemical Sciences, from Harvard University, in 1994. He then joined the Harvard–MIT MD–PhD program, and together with MIT Professor David Baltimore discovered several key biochemical control mechanisms of how cells self-destruct (a process called programmed cell death), which have important applications in the study of cancer, autoimmunity, and degenerative diseases.

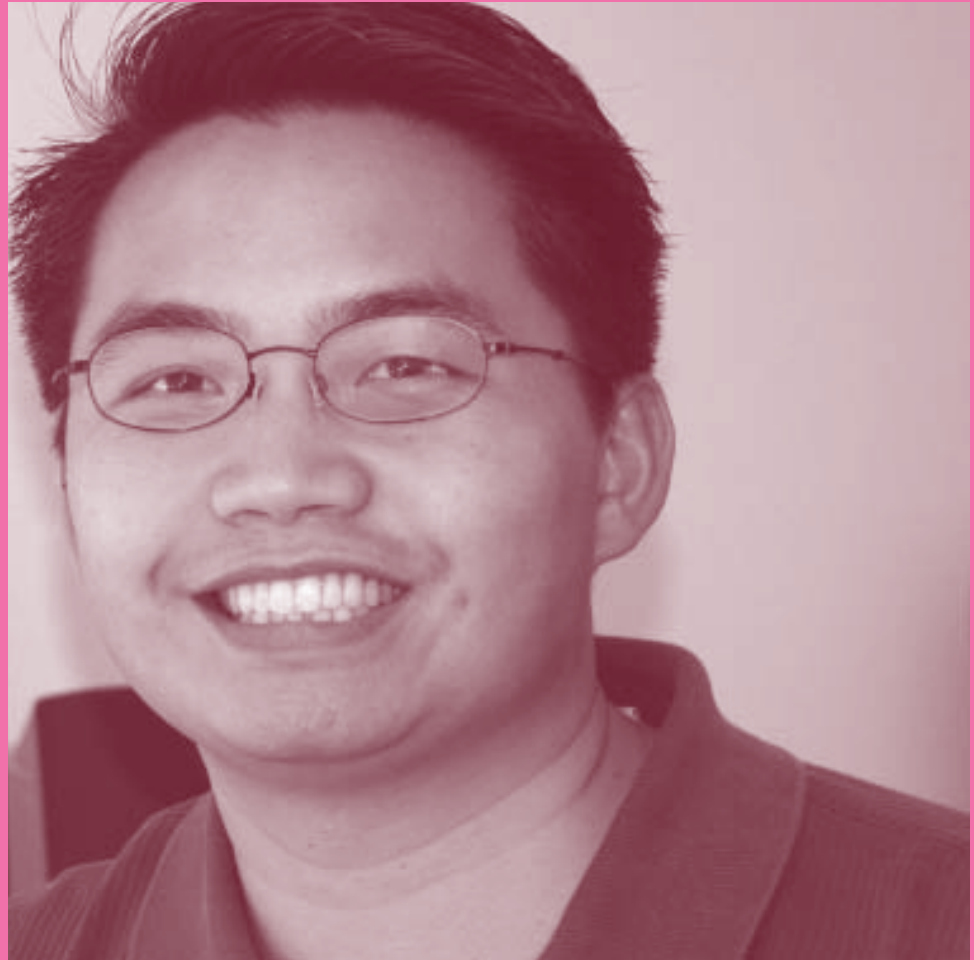
Dr. Chang completed his PhD in two years, and while pursuing medical training in dermatology, began to pursue his postdoctoral research in Professor Patrick Brown's lab at Stanford University. There, he began a new research program to understand the basis of site-specific differences in human skin, resulting in novel modes of gene control that extends from cancer treatment to aging.

To understand why skin cells in diverse parts of the body have different characteristics – how cells know their “positional identities” – a fact that guides the diagnosis and treatment of many skin diseases, Dr. Chang and his colleagues are seeking to define in molecular terms how the expression of different genes in stromal cells determines their ability to affect the development of skin cells. The answers they have discovered so far reveal critical information about gene regulation; specifically, that cells are used to record the positional identity in human tissues, and that the “perturbation,” the disturbance, of such



programs plays a major role in cancer progression, especially in metastasis, whereby cancer cells spread to other parts of the body. These breakthroughs may suggest new approaches for the treatment of malignant tumors.

Dr. Chang is a highly productive researcher. He has published more than 60 papers in such journals as *Nature*, *Cell*, *Science*, *Nature Genetics*, *PLoS Genetics*, *Genes and Development*, and *Genome Research*, with more in press. Dr. Chang has received the American Academy of Dermatology Young Investigator Award, the Damon Runyon Scholar Award, and the American Cancer Society Research Scholar Award. He is a member of the Stanford Comprehensive Cancer Center.



## About The Vilcek Foundation

THE VILCEK FOUNDATION AIMS TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS of the contributions of immigrants to the sciences, arts, and culture in the United States. The Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the Foundation was inspired by the couple's careers in biomedical science and art history, respectively, as well as their personal experiences and appreciation for the opportunities offered them as newcomers to the United States. In addition to awarding annual prizes in the biomedical science and the arts, the Vilcek Foundation showcases the work of innovative artists, filmmakers, and others, many of them immigrants who have yet to achieve critical or financial success, at its headquarters at 167 East 73rd Street, New York City.

Former recipients of the Vilcek Prize in the arts are: architect/urban planner **Denise Scott Brown**; artists **Christo and Jeanne-Claude**; and classical music composer **Oswaldo Golijov**. Previous recipients of the Vilcek Prize in biomedical science are: **Dr. Rudolf Jaenisch**, founding member of the Whitehead Institute at MIT; **Dr. Joan Massagué**, Chairman of the Cancer and Biology Genetics Program at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center; and **Dr. Inder Verma**, a professor and researcher at the Salk Institute.

For more information about the Foundation, please visit [WWW.VILCEK.ORG](http://WWW.VILCEK.ORG).

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