

Statement of Purpose: OSU

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About Me

As an undergraduate student in astrophysics, I have a strong urge of pursuing a Ph.D degree to continue my adventure on mystery outside our tiny planet.

Though having been fascinated by astrophysics for long, the strong faith of being an astronomer, I believe, dates back in my freshman year in biology major. Though I got the highest GPA (3.87/4) among 120 freshmen in biology, I was finally tired of cumbersome taxonomy and test-tube-washing. Fortunate enough, after taking several fundamental courses on physics & astronomy, I realized that for me, the subtle balance of astonishing physical pictures and beautiful mathematical structures is so well attained in astrophysics, when I decided to switch to astronomy major. Since my sophomore year, I have kept in the first place in GPA (3.83/4) among 28 students in astronomy. More advanced astrophysics courses (spectroscopy, cosmology, general relativity, gravitational-wave astrophysics, etc.) have equipped me for conducting research.

One of my greatest pursuits is to combine state-of-the-art observations with powerful computational methods to understand complex astrophysical environment. This sweet ‘temptation’ has driven me to explore observational/computational astrophysics from various binary systems to astrochemistry & astrobiology within interstellar medium.

Research Experience

My first scientific project started at the end of my second year under the supervision of Prof. Xian Chen in Kavli Institute for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Peking University and Prof. Fujun Du in Purple Mountain Observatory, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Starting from a ‘crazy’ implication of recent observations that the supermassive black hole in the Milky Way was active about 2-8 Myr ago, I worked as an ‘archaeologist’ digging out the astrochemical history of our galaxy with numerical methods. During such an ancient AGN event, tremendous hard X-ray radiation should be able to efficiently penetrate the dusty Galactic disk and lead to the synthesis of complex molecules related to the origin of life. To run the long term astrochemical simulation, I built our chemical network based on a classic gas-phase model (`osu_01_2007`) developed by OSU’s astrophysical chemistry group. For self-consistency, I included necessary surface processes important for molecule formation. Under a detailed AGN and galactic absorption model, I carefully embedded X-ray ionization at various distances from the galactic center in the network. The simulation was executed with the KROME package, a widely-used library-like code for astrophysical simulation with chemistry included. We are extremely excited to see that several typical prebiotic species show observable changes in abundance distribution in galactic disk given former AGN events. Our paper is under final revision and will be submitted to ApJ soon.

My research was not limited to one single subfield. In the summer of 2019, I went to Caltech as part of the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program and touched the field of transients for the first time under the mentorship of Prof. Shrinivas Kulkarni. With light curves from Zwicky Transient Facility (ZTF), a state-of-the-art optical time-domain survey with unprecedented field of view and survey efficiency, I conducted a systematic search for periodic white dwarf binaries. Starting with a population of 486,641 WD candidates identified in *Gaia*, I performed a cross match between the so-far most complete catalog and ZTF data, selecting a subset of 90,000 sources with over 100 observations in ZTF. My carefully designed periodogram based on Lomb-Scargle method was then applied to the extracted light curves. A sample of 81 periodic white dwarfs (WDs) with periods between 1 and 3 hr to our surprise stood out. With combined analysis of both shapes of light curves and color information from *Gaia* and PanSTARRS, I classified several sources of interest including a contact binary candidate with possibly the shortest period known and an unusual strongly ellipsoidal-modulated double white dwarfs system with an extremely low-mass (ELM) component. A catalog of the 81 sources with our preliminary classification has been made. Our paper will be updated with continuing follow-ups before submission to ApJ.

After an attempt to reveal the nature of various stellar systems with degenerate components in observational way, I grow intensely interested in exploring more on the intrinsic physics of compact binaries. At present I am a visiting undergraduate student at UC Santa Cruz working on my thesis on the mass transfer in compact binaries with Prof. Enrico Ramirez-Ruiz. We focus on the so-called AM CVn binary systems, of which the components are white dwarfs so close to each other that the mass transfer flow from the donor directly strikes the accretor. Gradually getting familiar with the numerical setup, I have been trying to conduct hydrodynamical simulations with the radiation MHD simulation code FLASH to test the long-term stability of direct impact mass transfer. In the long run, we will try to work out how light curves and even gravitational radiation properties for AM CVn systems are constrained by model parameters with simulated data.

Conducting research in all these most advanced facilities around the world, I have taken a bite in various cutting-edge astronomical subfields, from astrochemistry to compact objects, and have developed general skills of data analysis, visualization, and simulation on supercomputers. My proficiency in English communication and academic writing has risen to a new level after working overseas for months. Frustration is somehow inevitable for a researcher at certain stages. Still, I gradually get to learn how to stay out of anxiety and loneliness.

Why OSU? - Academic Interests

OSU is well-known for both width and depth of advanced astronomical research. As one of world's center for astronomical instrumentation, OSU has world-leading observational sources. Having been impressed by the power of time-domain survey in understanding the physics of transients, I really appreciate the efficiency of ASAS-SN in discovering SNe and more. MDM observatory, which is designed for bright sources nearby and long-term follow-ups, generously serves for student training and would enable my further study in variable stars and high energy sources. For graduate students in OSU, research is highly emphasized. I am shocked at a typical publication of 8-15 refereed journal articles for Ph.D candidates in OSU. I would definitely benefit from such academic training. As a member of a spontaneously organized journal club of astrophysics within us undergraduate students, I deeply understand how OSU's journal club and Daily Astro Coffee can serve as a great opportunity to meet with faculty and to pick up academic speech skills.

I am not too surprised to find that OSU meets so perfect with my research experience since the interests of faculty cover considerably subfields. With high enthusiasm in evolution of compact objects and hydrodynamics as well as chemistry inside interstellar gas, I really appreciate Prof. Laura Lopez's work on morphology and kinematics of supernova remnants to connect multi-wavelength observations with supernovae simulations. I admire Prof. Adam Leroy's work with powerful imaging methods of ALMA and VLT on molecular gas in local dwarf galaxies to study the star formation. Besides, I am also interested in Prof. Todd Thompson's theoretical study on supernovae and Prof. Krzysztof Stanek's work on variability and transients with ASAS-SN.

I do appreciate it that you could consider my application. I am looking forward to meeting with you for a more detailed talk soon.