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I Am Living Proof Of The American Dream: With Dr. Ming Wang



"This is a country that obeys the laws. Laws before people. This is a country that provides 3 most important basic things that we as human beings are

all searching for: peace, security and fairness. This is a country with a strong Judeo-Christian faith, that encourages people to do good. Overall, America is the greatest country on this planet today? Why? Well, the resounding proof is that while we do have an immigration problem (where everybody comes to come here!), but, we do NOT have an emigration problem at all (where everybody just wants to leave!)”

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I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Ming Wang, Harvard & MIT (MD, magna cum laude); PhD (laser physics), CEO of Aier-USA, a healthcare venture that brings in investment from China and create American jobs, and director of the internationally known Wang Vision 3D Cataract & LASIK Center, Nashville, TN, USA.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us the story of how you grew up?

I was born in 1960, in Hangzhou, China, a coastal city. We were a family of 4 (I have a younger brother) and we were very poor, the combined income of my parents every month was only \$15. I grew up without a toy, since we could not afford one. Education was everything, education was the only way to get out of poverty. I remember dad used to tell me: “Ming, if you can master mathematics, physics and chemistry, you can go anywhere in the world!”

It was in such a family that focused intensely on education, where education was everything, when in 1966, disaster occurred. In 1966, the communist dictator in China decided that the best way to keep on dictating, is to keep people ignorant, and the best way to keep people ignorant, is to shut down all colleges and universities of the entire country, and forcefully deport every high-school graduate, to the poorest part of the country, and condemn each of us a life sentence of poverty and hard labor, earning \$2–3 a month for the rest of our lives. If any of us dared to escape back to the cities, we could be jailed. Over

10 years of Cultural Revolution (or Cultural Holocaust), they destroyed future of 20 million young people.

In 1974, I was 14. I graduated from the 9th grade with a straight-A grade. But, that made no difference, the deportation order came down to me. I was not allowed to continue my education into the 10th grade and beyond, and like 20 million others, I faced with the devastating fate of being deported to a labor camp and being condemned of a life sentence of hard labor. In a desperate attempt to avoid that, I picked a Chinese violin (er-hu) to play, and started practicing dancing, since if I could play er-hu or dance well enough, I might be able to get into the communist song-and-dance propaganda troop and thus being exempted from labor camp and being allowed to stay in the city, since the communist government still needed musicians and dancers in the cities.

However, my er-hu playing and dance practice was discovered by the government, and they figured out that I was playing a music instrument and practicing dancing, with an ulterior motive, i.e., not for music and dance per se, but to avoid the labor, so they stopped my er-hu playing and dance practice. Everything that I tried to avoid the labor camp all failed, and my fate was deportation and life sentence of hard-labor and poverty.

When I was about to be sent away, to labor camp, the communist dictator Mao died (1976). So, China woke up, realizing what a tragic mistake that it has made, by having shut down all colleges for 10 years (1966–1976) and having destroyed future of 20 million young people. They stopped the Cultural Revolution and re-opened all the colleges. I remember my parents came home one day and said:

“Ming, you might be able to go back to school!” I thought I would never be able to hear that, in my life!

“Really? When?” I asked.

“Maybe tomorrow!”

“Should I start at after the 9th grad, since 3 years ago when finished my 9th grade, I was kicked out of the school, and in the last 3 years I have not been studying. I have been playing er-hu and learning dancing all to

avoid deportation and labor camp. Now there is a chance to go back to school, should I start at 10th?”

“No, higher”, dad said.

“11th?”

“No, higher!”.

“12th?”

“Yes!”

“Why?”, I asked.

“Only 12th grade graduates are allowed to take the college entrance exam, the first such college-entrance exam in China in 10 years”, since all colleges in China were shut down for 10 years.

“Why can’t I start at 10th grade, and participate for the college-entrance exam 3 years later, rather I have to kill myself like this, trying to do something so impossible, having already suffered so much in the last 3 years, from age 14 to now 17. Now you are going to make me jump 3 years over night. You all are crazy!”

Paused, my mom said: “Ming, we are not crazy”. She continued: “How long did the communist government shut down colleges?”

“10 years, from 1966 to 1976”, I replied.

“OK, now are in 1976, they did re-open all the colleges alright. But, is there a guarantee, that they won’t shut down colleges again, next year, for another 10 years?”

“I guess you are right mom, they can do whatever they want, there is no freedom”, I said.

“That is correct. Either you try to go to college this year in 1976, or, you may never be able to!”

I knew that I had to do it, but, jumping 3 years overnight was an impossible task, I was so stressed out. I asked my parents: “How could I

do that?" "We will help you".

At night, they came home from work, and borrowed many old exams. But we were so poor that we could not afford Xeroxing them (since the combined income of my parents was only \$15 every month). So my parents found scraps of pieces of paper and hand-copied the old exam questions on them, drilled me every night. I was studying 19, 20, 21 hours a day, almost killed myself studying. But I did not want to return to the dark past, I wanted to have a future, however slim that chance was.

I did get into college, but I wanted to come to America, for freedom!





Was there a particular trigger point that made you emigrate to the US? Can you tell a story?

I met a visiting American professor, who lent me \$50. So, in 1982, with that \$50, with relatives pooled money together for me for one-way airplane ticket (I did not have the money to go back, if it did not work out!), with a student visa, I was dropped off at the National Airport, Washington DC, with that \$50, with a Chinese-English dictionary in my pocket, knowing no one in this country, could hardly speak English, but, with a big American dream in my heart.

Can you tell us the story of how you came to the USA? What was that experience like?

I came this country as a near penniless student, had to share a \$100-a-month windowless basement apartment room with two other students (we split the \$100 rent three ways). Even though I was still poor, but, I was free! I learned the English and American culture quickly and I worked very hard to excel.

I did faced some racial discrimination, met professors who judged my ability based on the color of my skin rather than my ability. They did not believe that a Chinese student could excel in American universities. I studied very hard. At the end of Cultural Revolution, I studied very hard, to jump 3 years ahead to get into college, but that was for myself. Now, I studied very hard, in America, not only for myself, but also, for all who experience racial discrimination anywhere in the world, through my own action, to do a good job in what I do, to prove that racial discrimination held by these people were wrong.

I was able to complete my doctorate degree in laser physics and completed my MD (magna cum laude) from Harvard Medical School and MIT, and became an eye surgeon. My last 36 years of work, in taking care of my patients, was inspired by the appreciation of America, the appreciation of freedom.

Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped make the move more manageable? Can you share a story?

The visiting American professor, Professor James McNesby, who lent me \$50, and who arranged a teaching assistantship (\$400/mo) for me here in America, that was how I could come to this country and support myself.

So how are things going today?

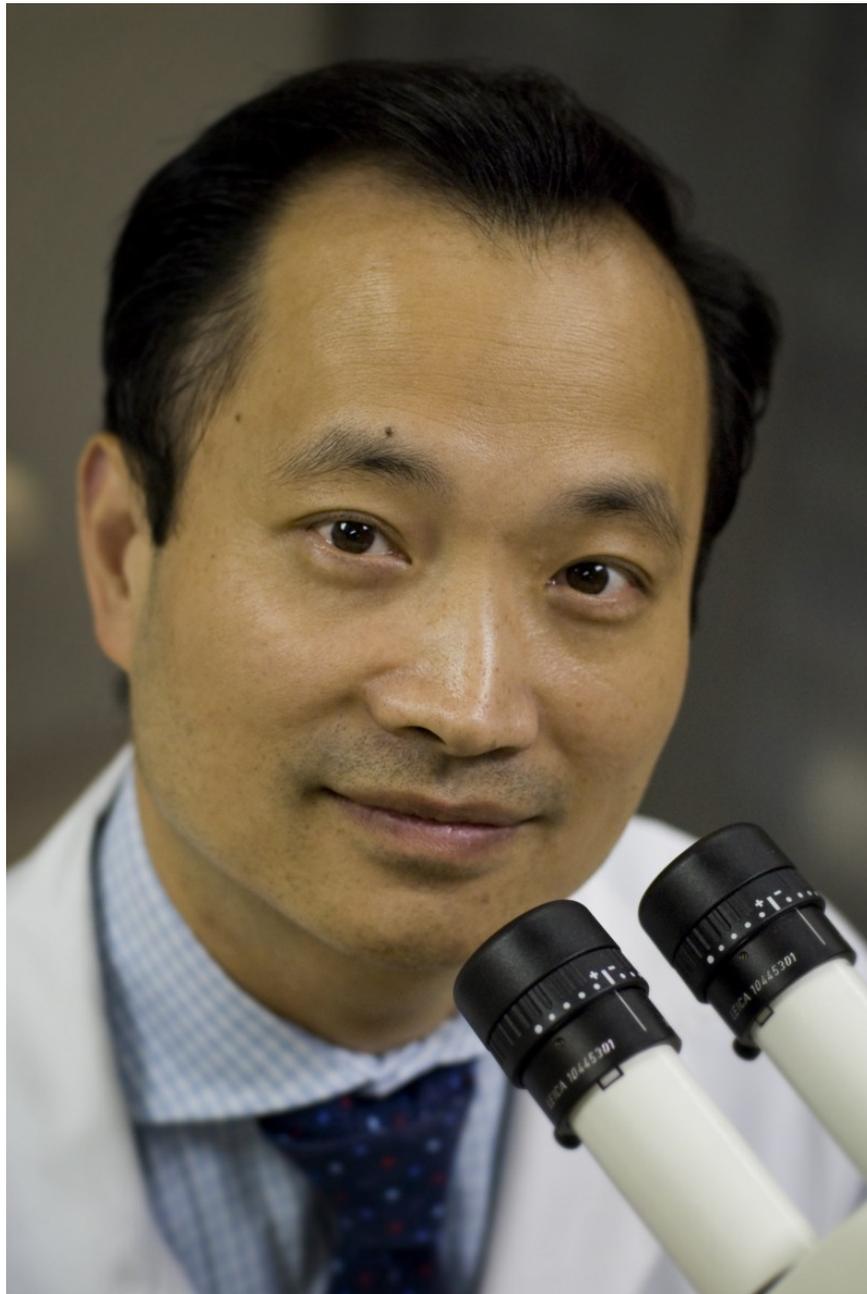
Today, I am the CEO, of Aier-USA, a new healthcare venture that brings in investment from China and create jobs here in America by building new eye clinics. I am particularly excited at this work, since not only it brings a good return of investment for the Chinese investors, but also and more importantly, it creates American jobs, since all of the employees that Aier-USA has hired are all Americans. And this is project led by an immigrant. I always feel that as an immigrant, I am indebted to this great country America, which has given me the freedom, to study to become a doctor, so I should pay back, to help keep America strong. I think all immigrants we all have that responsibility.

In Nashville, TN, I have founded a world-class vision center, Wang Vision 3D Cataract & LASIK Center, where we provide the best 3D laser vision treatments for our patients, from around the country and the world. I have published 9 textbooks, over 100 articles including on in the world-renowned journal "Nature". We hold several U.S. patents, and performed the world's first laser artificial cornea implantation. We have performed over 55,000 laser vision procedures (including on over 4,000 doctors). The honors that I have includes the Honor Award from the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Chinese American Physicians. Last year, I received Kiwanis Club's Nashvillian of the Year Award for our work over the decades, in helping blind orphan children from around the world.

How have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?

I have found that I could help America and the world in 3 ways:

- Form a 501c(3) non-profit charity, Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration, which to date has helped patients from over 40 states and 55 countries, with all sight restoration surgeries performed free-of-charge.
- Lead Aier-USA, to bring in Chinese investment, to create American jobs in healthcare.
- Found Tennessee Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Tennessee Immigrant and Minority Business Group, to help American companies increase our export to countries like China, to keep America strong.



You have first-hand experience with the US immigration system. If you had the power, which three things would you change to improve the system?

1. Communicate more effectively and clearly our laws to the immigrants, and set a cut-off date.
2. All those who were already here, before that day, have a pathway to citizen ship (but only through education, work, and paying taxes, for a

number of years).

3. All those who entered illegally, after that date, should not be allowed to stay.

Can you share "5 keys to achieving the American dream" that others can learn from you? Please share a story or example for each.

1. Love your parents and listen to them. Fortunately I did, at the end of Cultural Revolution, even though the task was impossible (jumping 3 years ahead overnight), but fortunately I did listen to them, now I have today.

2. When opportunities come in life, don't squander it, since it may not come again! At the end of Cultural Revolution, when the (even though very small) opportunity to get into college came, fortunately did do my best to capture it;

3. When faced with discrimination, stand up, do an even better job, in your own work, to show them, through your action, that discrimination was wrong. I did face discrimination in this country, and I did that.

4. The key to success in life is education. Study hard, the world is what you make of it.

5. Believing in God, believing that each of us has a duty, to pay back, the blessings that we have received, gives us a purpose for our lives. For me, that purpose is to help others. Because I have suffered, now I feel that I am emotionally connected to those who are in the darkness and suffering today, and I want to help them.

We know that the US needs improvement. But are there 3 things that make you optimistic about the US's future?

1. This is a country that obeys the laws. Laws before people.

2. This is a country that provides 3 most important basic things that we as human beings are all searching for: peace, security and fairness.

3. This is a country with a strong Judeo-Christian faith, that encourages people to do good.

Overall, America is the great country on this planet today? Why? Well, the resounding proof is that while we do have an immigration problem (where everybody comes to come here!), but, we do NOT have an emigration problem at all (where everybody just wants to leave!)



Some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might see this. :-)

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook. Not only he is a visionary, but also, he is emotionally connected to the East (having married a Chinese wife and he himself speaks Chinese). In today's World, not everything from the West is the best, and nor the East. It is in the combining of the

best from both the East and the West, where we will find the true gem, of human nature, tradition and behavior. The future of mankind does not belong to the East, nor the West, it belongs to the East and the West TOGETHER!

This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for joining us!

