

## Hope & Resilience

M. Liu

The journey of an immigrant is not always easy. Sometimes, opportunity comes at a cost. For many Asian Americans, overcoming anti-Asian discrimination and hate is among the many obstacles they frequently experience. This is especially true for Asian immigrants. The story of Wei Liu, who immigrated to the United States in the 1990s, exemplifies this journey.

Mr. Liu's journey to America started in 1990 while he was in college in China. During a recent interview, he says "At that time, China adopted a policy of reforming the economy and opening the door, essentially China was converting into capitalism." Mr. Liu's undergraduate major was Economics and he always wanted to go to the United States, since it had the most advanced program in Economics. When he was a junior in college, he decided to apply for a graduate program in the United States to specialize in economics. "At that time, China was a developing country and I could not afford the tuition so I had to apply for a fellowship and become a teaching assistant. I applied to approximately 30 universities and 2 universities offered me a fellowship. One of them was the University of Virginia and the other one was the State University of New York at Albany." Finally, after Mr. Liu's college graduation in 1994, he bought an airplane ticket and left his country where he had been his whole life and flew to the United States, and began his new life at the University of Virginia.

Shortly after the successful completion of his graduate program, Mr. Liu flew to Sacramento, California for his first job where he analyzed electricity and gas prices. After 3 ½ years, he transferred to a job with Citigroup where he worked on mortgage prepayment and default. After that, he joined a subsidiary of Morgan Stanley to serve mortgage borrowers. Then, he joined a data and analytics company, CoreLogic, in which he built statistical models for mortgages. Finally, today, Mr. Liu is an economist at Freddie Mac and when asked about what exactly he does in his day-to-day work, he says: "I build statistical models to analyze risks in the mortgage market. Freddie Mac is one of the two government sponsored entities in the United States. It plays a key role in ensuring the well functioning of the US mortgage market." Mr. Liu believes that his work at Freddie Mac is one of the highlights of his career so far. He says,

“Freddie Mac’s mission is to make home possible and we are providing liquidity to the \$10 trillion mortgage market. Part of my job is to project house prices and manage risks for Freddie Mac’s portfolio. We’re making meaningful impacts on people’s lives.”

But, Mr. Liu’s journey has not always been so easy and straightforward. It took great dedication, courage and perseverance to keep pushing through hard times. For Mr. Liu, the biggest challenge personally was learning the English language and American culture. He states that “I grew up in China until I graduated from college. So when I first came to the United States, I was able to write English essays but I had a hard time communicating verbally. I remember I couldn't follow my professor during my first graduate class because of my English skills at that time. I had to copy my classmate’s notes after class. That was a big adjustment and obviously, the culture is different so I had to learn a lot of American culture and history.” Mr. Liu also mentions that getting his PhD in Economics was another big obstacle. Not only did he need to take 3 years of graduate classes and pass 2 preliminary exams but he also needed to write a dissertation and defend it in front of the professors! It was a long and grueling 6 year journey. He says: “While it was totally worth it, I don’t ever want to go back to graduate school again!”

From learning English to overcoming hate comments, Mr. Liu explains that some people still have discrimination towards other people. He shares one of his hate incident experiences during the 1990s. He says, “One day, I was walking on the University of Virginia’s campus and I remember a car passed by me. Suddenly, someone threw an egg at me and yelled “Go back to your country.” And they drove away quickly so I couldn’t even see their faces. My classmates, friends, and professors at the University of Virginia were nice but some people are against you because of your race and skin color. This could have been a university student or some random other person but it still reflects people’s bias against others.”

In the workplace, he has also experienced Asian hate before. “Sometimes, not explicitly, but sometimes you can feel that people judge you because you are Asian.” For example, when I was at Citigroup, I was discussing statistical models with some colleagues and we had a disagreement about the methodology. But during the discussion, one of my colleagues mentioned something like “Have you learned

Econ101?” I have a PhD in economics and Econ 101 is the first class you teach college students who are learning economics so this was almost an insult. This colleague is white and I didn’t see him saying this to other people in the group so I’m not sure if that had something to do with my race.”

While he has experienced some Asian hate incidents throughout his life, he shares that most people are interested and open minded. He says “when we have a Chinese holiday, many people are amazed at Chinese food, art and clothes. Usually, it is a very festive time and people enjoy good times together. And sometimes, it is a nice ice breaker during meetings and when introducing myself.” Mr. Liu says that looking back, he thinks coming to America was the right choice and though there were times of hardship and adversity, he believes that you should look at the silver lining of things.

Of course, one of the biggest goals of all immigrants is to pass down their lessons and traditions to their children. Mr. Liu says that personally, learning American culture and assimilating into society is one of the main things future generations should learn. He says that professionally, communication skills and volunteering your efforts come in handy. While many Asian cultures usually ask people to stand back and not speak up, this can prevent Asian-Americans from reaching their full potential.

From college, to work, to family, Mr. Liu has had a range of experiences. As his daughter, I admire the bravery, courage and perseverance that he has demonstrated while overcoming the hardships of immigrating to a new country. It takes a huge amount of resilience to keep going when times are tough. Although, as an Asian-American, people have judged my dad unfairly, he has turned adversity into a strength and has succeeded in spite of the obstacles. Former President John F. Kennedy said: “Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.” As a member of the future generation of Asian-Americans, I feel inspired, influenced and motivated by Mr. Liu to make a difference in our world today.