

**Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

Interviewee: Don Wang

Interviewers: Mei Leebron, Mary Claire Neal

Date/Time of Interview: June 14, 2019

Transcribed by: Mei Leebron (6/15/2019), Mary Claire Neal

Edited by: Priscilla Li (6/24/2019)

Audio Track Time: 1:18:04

Background: Don Wang was born in Tainan, Taiwan in 1944. He grew up there with his two brothers and three sisters. After attending Chung Hsing University, he moved to the United States to attend graduate school at Utah State University to study nutrition and food science. He did not finish his PhD, but moved to Houston, where he became chairman of the Metro Bank, which serves small and minority-owned businesses. For his work with Metro Bank and numerous other leadership positions, he has received countless prestigious awards, including a place in the City of Houston Hall of Fame. Before retiring, he started the E&M foundation, which supports higher education and foreign exchange. He is married and has two children.

Setting: This interview was conducted on June 14, 2019 in the Digital Media Center of Fondren Library. Don Wang discusses his education, career, family, and legacy. The interview lasted about one hour and eighteen minutes.

Key:

DW: Don Wang

ML: Mei Leebron

MN: Mary Claire Neal

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off, pause

Italics: emphasis

[Brackets]: Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

(?): Unclear word or phrase

Transcript:

ML: Alright today is June 14th, 2019, and we're interviewing Mr. Don Wang for the Houston Asian American Archive. My name is Mei Leebron.

MN: My name is Mary Claire Neal.

ML: Um, so I guess we can start off, uh, with the question: where and when were you born?

DW: I was born in Taiwan. A city called Tainan, 1944 April 29.

ML: Um, did you have any siblings?

DW: I have um, two other brothers and uh three sisters. We have six kids in the family.

ML: So how w—how was that like?

DW: Uh, we have uh, older sister, and older brother, and me, and younger sister, and a smaller sister, and the smaller brother.

ML: Uh huh, so how was your relationship with them?

DW: We are fine. [**ML:** Fine?] Uh we still travel together.

ML: Oh, cool cool! Um so, uh, what did your parents do when you were growing up? What were their jobs?

DW: Um, my brother, no, my father was a uh, pharmacist. So he has uh, a pharmaceutical business [**ML:** Mhm], mainly on manufactures. Start from retail and he get into import pharmaceutical raw material and make some pills and, or injection uh for the doctors, hospitals. We doing okay. My parent's fine. But they were from very poor family, it start with. So.

ML: Okay. Um, so where did you go to school?

DW: I was in Taiwan. At uh Tainan, the city. And uh, we have a very good primary school, was, it was just behind my house. And then we have uh, junior high, you know every level we have to pass three exam for, pick up the, the best students. I'm very fortunate. I was on what they call "Tainan first high school, first middle school." And Tainan first high school is all the best in the South part of Taiwan.

ML: Mhm. Um, did you have any favorite subjects?

DW: I like biology.

ML: Biology? Okay. Um, so where did you go to college?

DW: Oh, I was um, the college exam, I was sent to a university called Chung Hsing University. It's National Chung Hsing University, it is in the middle part of Taiwan. It's "aggie" just like the "aggie" here. And I was in uh, horticulture. But in one year, I changed my major to food science. So I actually, I was graduate as a food scientist, BS.

ML: Okay so what made you change your major?

DW: Uh, my family is a pharmaceutical. [**ML:** Okay] Is a more chemistry related. So my dad say, "either you go to the pharmaceutical department *or* you go to food science." It's easier for me to switch to food science because the university don't have the pharmaceutical department. [**ML:** Mhm]

MN: So did your older siblings also go to college before you? Did you watch them go through that before you came?

DW: I didn't catch you.

MN: Oh, did your older siblings also go to college before you?

DW: Oh yeah, actually, my dad's very, uh, he always emphasized education. 'Cause he's uh, because he don't have too much education. [**ML:** Mhm] He, he got a pharmacist all through exam. Not through university or any education in that time. You're talking about a hundred years ago. So uh, we all go through a very good university or good college or good high school in all my family's—, yeah. My siblings are, are uh all highly educated. My brother is a, is a PhD. My younger brother is uh uh, MD. I'm just honorary doctor. Not real doctor. [**ML** and **MN** laugh].

ML: So, um, so education was strongly emphasized, [**DW:** Mhm] and while you were growing up, were there any other values that your parents emphasized while raising you?

DW: Uh, my parents believed education is the only way that they can do for the children, when they are young. So uh, every day we were so busy in business, he still come back home and make sure that I done

my homework, everything's ready for next day. [ML: Mhm] He never missed it. It means, he watch very carefully on my education. I'm not a good student, but I, [ML laughs] I was watched.

ML: Um, so is there anything else that they emphasized? Or was it just education?

DW: Uh, if you were a good boy, who care? Only education is what they care [ML: Mhm]. Because you were behave and don't mix up with any bad habit you know, they don't worry about it. As long as you have a good education. But we don't learn pianos, we don't learn all those things. Only school. My, my dau—my, my sisters, they learn pianos, they learn all those things. My dad's, believed that women don't have to have high education. They're old-timers. That's what they think. [ML: Okay] Yeah.

MN: Did you wish that you would have learned to play an instrument, or a sport—

DW: No chance. We have a piano in the house, but we just never touch it. They don't let us touch it. Yeah. It's different society, yeah.

ML: Okay. Um so, after studying agricultural chemistry and food nutrition and operating a motel, what led you to co-found, um, the United Ori—Oriental Capital Corporation and Metro Bank?

DW: Oh there was, then, there was in a uh, when I left the university at Logan, Utah, Utah State University, I come to Houston. And I don't have any job, so I have to create my own job. So uh, using a little bit of capital from my p—from my father, so I have to find something to do. So before that I get into United Oriental Capital Corporation, uh, I was in motel business. I was in um, apartment business. Uh, United Oriental Capital is a uh, a small business administration licensed for minority, uh minority small business financing. It is a venture capital and investment company. That's how I get into financing. I'm a food scientist. You could ask me "why I get into financing?" I don't know anything about it. But I learn accounting. That's all I learn. But I don't know anything financing, so I have a partner. He's finance major. He, he was MBA and so, somebody that knowing what to do. That's how we get into the uh venture capital and investment. And then using that technique, we find in—in, in the '80s, in my community, people from Taiwan, business people, they've got a lot of money threw into the United States and doing business. But they need the banking. And the banking that, in the community, they are not doing it right way. So we decided we, we'd better get into it. So we using the uh, the venture capital idea, we uh, we have a um, [inaudible] syndication. Uh, fundraising for open, uh, banking but th—U—United Oriental Corporation is only small. The SBA want us have half a million dollar to start with. Then, the SBA will give us three times the money, so it's 1.5 million to join the company as a partner. So, so it's um, it's a program to help the small business. That's how I learn. So when you get into banking, I know, because I have those investment technique, venture capital things. So we raised about 3.5 million of capital. I have, uh, three, four groups of friends. Every group would generate about a million dollar. But we are the group really generate more than one million. We have been generating almost 2 million dollar. That's why our group become the dominant. The, the group to manage the bank. At that time, a partner said, "Don, you're the chairman." I said, "okay." I was 43 years old. I don't know anything about banking. [ML laughs]. But it is okay. A chairman don't have to run a bank. The president will run the bank, the CEO run the bank. So we just hire a banker. A banker, he's a, he was a uh, Filipino. Work in uh, at a downtown big bank. So uh, we hire him. That's how we get into banking. It was 1987. We start 1985, '86. It take up two years to become a bank, yeah.

ML: Okay, um just to backtrack a little bit, so what made you come to the U.S. versus anywhere else, and specifically why Houston?

DW: Okay. When I was in college, I learned Japanese. I don't have any idea come to United States because my English so lousy. [ML and DW laugh] I know I cannot do it. But my dad, one day my dad told me, "Don, you go to United States, you don't go to Japan." Because he travel around the world for

months, and when he come back, that's all his decision. His son should go to the United States only. Not Japan. Not any other place. Just like we say "a land of opportunity." And only United States will welcome the immigrants. That's what he find out. [ML: Mhm] That's how I have to change everything, start learning English. Fortunately I got it.

ML: So what was it like when you first got here?

DW: I don't know how to talk. [DW and ML laugh] Yeah, I was in Utah State University as a student. A graduate student. For science [ML: Mhm]. It called nutrition and food science. I get my master's degree in two and a half years. The first year I didn't do anything but learn English. And then I spent two years finish my master's degree.

ML: Wow. Um, [MN: S—] Oh, go ahead.

MN: So why, why had you originally planned to travel to Japan, and what was it like to have to change plans so suddenly—?

DW: The Japanese don't like foreigners. [MN: Mhm] You cannot do anything there.

MN: So did you, [DW: That's the difference.] did you know you wanted to leave Taiwan? You just needed to decide...

DW: In that time, Taiwan still not quite stable. Always worry about China. Because the government's—we okay, but the China, the government is not ok. So the comp—the country was very poor, not much you can do. The only way you can do is go out, find something to do. Yeah. So everybody will try to find a way to get out. [MN: Mhm] The best place to go is United States. That's why I get there. Yeah.

ML: So what was your first job here?

DW: In where, here? United States, [ML: Um, just in the United States, yes] or Houston? I was working in the lab [ML: Okay]. Okay and because I'm a scientist, they always had the lab assistants clean up the—the—the bottles, the glass vials, and everything. And doing some lab work for professors. And I'm paid good enough for me to survive. Yeah. But it's legal. They would let you do that as a student.

ML: Mhm. So, how have you seen the city of Houston change over time, and how has your experience of Houston changed as well?

DW: Houston, when we come to Houston it's '74. It was start oil boom. Oil from, uh, two dollar a barrel to ten dollar a barrel and, and up. So uh, I didn't know Houston is doing that. I just come in because my dad have a friend, and their family is here. So my dad say, "why not go to Houston? There's somebody there. In case you get lost you still have person to call and help you." This, this is the way usually, if you live in a foreign country, you always like to live with somebody that you know. That you could, could get help. So I come to Houston. Hey, I'm lucky. Got in the right spot. There's no other reason.

ML: Um so...how was the relationship between Metro Bank or white financial institutions in America in general, and Asian Americans, like how—how—how did it change?

DW: Okay, uh Metro Bank is not a regular bank. It's a community bank. [ML: Mhm] But bigger than community bank. It's kind of a commercial bank. Because the commun—in community, a lot of uh, people from—in that time it's from Taiwan mostly, um, people are not that many from China yet. From Taiwan, from, uh, uh, Hong Kong, Vietnamese, Chinese. Those people, they're doing business, do—they're doing import, export. So this small bank, uh well equipped with all kind of service. It's different from a small bank in general, in—in local Houston. We do international trade, banking, we take care of

letter of credit. This sort of thing is different. So our job, our business many for the community, but their demand, it's a little diff—different from the regular small bank. [ML: Mhm]

MN: So, day to day, what was your job like and who did you interact with during your job?

DW: Since I was the chairman, and I don't know too much about banking, my job at the beginning is very low pay, even no pay. But my job is to watch everything, PR, you know uh make sure everybody working okay, the president of our bank had talked to me, and I worked with the uh board of directors. We have very strong board directors in the bank. The committee are very strong. We have very high quality board directors. So we will control the president's direction. And we are doing very well actually. We have very successful bank for 27 years.

ML: So, how do you see the role of the bank in the Asian community? 'Cause I know in the 1950s, no white bank would loan money to Asians, and is this one of the reasons why you started the bank?

DW: In the '80s, in the '80s we have a hard time to get loans. [ML: Mmhm. Okay] They only like you to deposit money. But loan is hard. So that's why we need a bank that understand that community, and that's how we did. Yeah. And I was the chairman, I have to go out and marketing business and not run the bank, but help the bank to develop, with between community and the bank, yeah.

MN: Do you know what the impact was of, of your bank on that community?

DW: I think we, we have a very successful relationship in the community. That's why we have uh, a successful bank. As the chairman myself, people ask me "what's different between you and other Asian bank - the chairmen? they know you but you don't know them." I told them, I work for the bank full time. And I don't have any business that involve. I only involve the bank. So all my time is serving the community. That's why people know me. I do everything for community. That's why we are different. And I keep telling people: banking is a service business. You serve the community. You cannot just serve their money. You serve what they needs. So besides money, financing, I was very active in the community needs. Yeah. That's why people recognize me. Yeah.

MN: Did you have people, other people in the banking world that you look up to because they did the same thing? Or was that something you were doing that was new and different from everyone?

DW: Not too many people wouldn't sacri—that, sacrifice themself for the bank. They only think money. But not me. I think everything is important. But yeah, we're doing good! So let people look differently. Yeah, the vision is different.

MN: Do you think, um, did you teach others to work that way too? And through that company you started, is that—are they teaching further generations to serve in that same way?

DW: A lot of people don't recognize that, so it's hard to teach. I believe myself, uh, as a bank chairman, uh, as a human being it's not just make money. You earn money, but you also earn your reputation in your life. That is also valuable too. So people only think money is valuable. But they don't realize that reputation also valuable. So they don't want to spend time just like me, for community. So that's different. So when you see my awards, how they recognize me, that is reputation. I earned that. I didn't expect that, I had to earn so many things. But because I know money is not the only thing. Especially you are chairman of the bank, you can do a lot of things that other people cannot do. Only you can do it. But the other chairmen just don't do that. You cannot teach them. They have to realize themself. Yeah.

ML: So, you said you were heavily involved in the community, so can you elaborate on that, like what have you done and what were those awards for?

DW: Okay. Many people involved in community okay. But I involved more than just my community. [ML: Mmhm] I involve a lot of Hispanic community. So the bank, when bank started, I get involved in Hispanic community by buying a bank in the East End area, which is the Hispanic community in Houston. We start develop the banking. We lend with Hispanic. So that's um, it's a little different from other people. It's not just take care of the Taiwanese community, we take care of all the Asians, and besides Asian we're talking Hispanics. It's not very active banking, but we just have to do it, yeah.

ML: So I guess um, so what were some of the awards for, specifically?

DW: You see my awards. Whole bunch of good awards. [ML: Mhm] A lot of awards are very, very prestige, okay. I was the Hall of Fame. City Houston Hall of Fame, which is, only two Asian awarded. One is Dr. Paul Chu, UH. The next one is me. Which is very rare. Mm I have a bunch of awards that you never heard it, but it's—, like, I work with the Greater Houston Partnership [ML: Mhm] which is very prestige, as a board member. And I have that position almost 15 years, until I retire [ML: Mhm]. I quit. That is a uh, a service in the business community. Yeah. And uh, so many things, you could just read it. I cannot tell you everything. [ML laughs] There's just so many. Unless you ask me. There's uh, uh...some of the uh, like uh, International uh no, International uh Executive of the Year, which is very prestige [ML: Mhm]. Uh, ow—is uh, from Kiwanis and uh Greater Houston Partnership. It's very, very prestige. And uh, I got all kinds of awards. But I, I, I'm not, I'm not, I, I enjoyed it, okay because uh people recognize me. Not bad.

ML: So what would you say that your greatest accomplishment is?

DW: I've done my job. [ML: Okay] As the chairman of bank, since the beginning to end. And also, I have done so much for the community and being recognized. The best, the highest award of citizen. [ML: Mhm] Yeah. Well I, I, uh, after, before I retire, after I retire, I was working the last five years after I retire. I work for the university. So I work for St. Thomas University in Houston, and I work for Utah State University. And uh, I work for my alma mater in Taiwan, Chung Hsing University. And those universities give me a distinguished alumni's award, which is not that easy. Utah State even give me a honorary doctor of agriculture, which is only four in that year. They have hundred PhDs, but only four honorary doctors, which is very rare. The only school that don't give me distinguished alumni is my prima—primary school [all laugh]. Which I didn't do anything for them. So it's not, uh, it's, it's, it's, the character on me is willing to work for the education programs [ML: Mhm]. The easier way for me to do is the university that I was attending, see. I even work with the Rice University right now on some scholarships. I have two scholarships Rice University. Those are post-doctors. [ML: Mhm] Yeah. You just have to, willing to, to do something for the community. You could have any kind. I'm interest in higher education. Some people might interest in seniors. You know, I work on a senior program. We build a senior housing project for senior people to live from HUD, yeah. I do, I did that. I've done many things! [ML laughs] It's my job as the chairman of the bank. I serve what community need [ML: Mhm]. It could be anything. So I offer the senior in the housing I, I, the senior housing I offer to all the senior residences. Anybody, any problem, need my help, just call me. [ML: Mhm] And somebody say, "Don, they could call—they will call you! Everybody will call you!" I said "I don't care. Just call me." [ML laughs] But none of them call me. You could offer them but they don't, they, they, they're serious(?) but they don't need it from you. As long as they lived in, in the housing project very nice and very happy, why they have to bother you?

ML: So I guess moving on to your married life [DW: Mhm] um how did you meet your wife?

DW: Oh, very simple. You will never believe that. Uh when I got my master's degree uh in '71, in '71, I went to Taiwan. My mother say "You need to get married." [ML laughs] And I say "Yeah I want to get married but I don't have a girlfriend." So she said "Okay, we arrange for you." So I visit all the girls they are arranged. And I pick one. The one I want. And we start dating. And we dated a couple of weeks. I

decided to marry her. And in two weeks, we get married. [ML: Wow [laughs]] So it's very different from you guys uh, this time. But we arranged it.

ML: So you, so you had an arranged marriage in Taiwan? [DW: Yeah] Um so when did you both come to Houston-

DW: Well so uh, in two months, we get married. Then I go back to Utah State to continue my PhD program. My wife had to apply for the visa to come. [ML: Okay] So it take two, three months. So she went to Logan, Utah with me.

ML: Okay. Um, do you have any children?

DW: I got two. One boy—one girl and one boy. The girl is 45, the boy is 41. [ML: Mhm] The boy get married with three kid. Two girl one boy. And my daughter is not married yet. And I cannot force her. [ML and DW laugh].

ML: Um, do you think that you raised your children with the same principles that your parents raised you upon?

DW: Uh, when I was younger, I live in Houston I have to work pretty hard. So children are raised by my wife. [ML: Mhm] Even though I go home every, every day and every night, but I work day and night, seven days a week. Almost every day for a long time. They're good kids. My son was uh MBA Rice, so is alumni here. Uh my daughter was uh, Smith College and uh law school in downtown, South Texas Law School. So they are highly educated.

ML: Mhm. So just education? [DW: Yeah.] Okay.

MN: And you said your siblings, you all see each other often right? So-

DW: Oh, start from last year, we decided to travel together. So the first, last year we went to Sydney, Australia and a cruise to New Zealand. Uh twelve days. It's all my brothers and sisters and the spouse. Twelve people. And this year, we going to Rome, Italy. Do the same thing for a week. So we decide to kinda, together every, every year.

MN: Do you ever have gatherings with all of the grandkids, and-?

DW: Uh, when somebody get married. [MN: Uh huh] Like uh I have my ne—nephew get married, and he decide go to Hawaii, so we all gather in Hawaii. My kids and all my brother's kids and all their cousins gather in Hawaii. Yeah, something like that. And my son get married in Las Vegas, then we all go to Las Vegas have a good time. Yeah.

MN: Um, do you think your kids have been influenced by the work you do with the bank and in the community?

DW: Uh, I think it depends on different character. My, my daughter might. Uh she, she was, was low education but she worked, she's a business herself with uh, uh her cousin, my sister's son, in Houston. And they, they still young, they still work pretty hard but, maybe in the future. I want them to get involved because, that's life. Not just making money. Community also important. Yeah.

MN: Um, and I was also wondering, so what kinds of challenges did the communities you worked with face, whether the Taiwanese or the Mexican community? Um, what kinds of challenges were they facing that your work would address?

DW: Challenge in which area?

MN: Um, like, what challenges did more access to banking help them address or, um...

DW: Uh, it's different. [**MN:** Mhm] The Chinese people, they save money. The Hispanic are not as saving habit as Chinese. Uh, basically they are in, have a lot entrepreneurship concept. But Chinese is more stronger. So in uh, in the Hispanic community, we have a lot of uh, Ch—uh, Mexican restaurant we finance. Besides that, we don't do any financing that much. But in the Asian community, they get involved a lot more than just restaurant. They have all kinds involvement. Real estate, and import export, and yeah. They are more variety in the Asian community.

MN: Do you think the opportunities they've had in business has changed in your lifetime?

DW: I didn't catch you clearly.

MN: Oh uh, do you think the opportunities Asian Americans or Mexican Americans have in business? Have those opportunities changed in your lifetime?

DW: The idea of getting more Hispanic is uh when I live in Houston I feel that the Hispanic and, and Asian could work together. I could be uh I don't know how but you see the restaurant Chinese restaurant, they always hire the Hispanic helps. Yeah. So, it, it's minority to minorities. It's—but I try many times put business people together, but yeah it just cannot make it still very close. Yeah I tried it. Put the uh the Taiwanese chamber commerce and the Mexican Chamber of Commerce together. Then work. [**MN** chuckles] They maybe one or two times and that's it. Nobody interest. It's—it need a lot of push.

ML: So, I guess going off of like working together and different relationships. How do you view relations between China, Taiwan, and immigrants from those two countries living in America and around the world?

DW: Okay uh, when I was—when I come into Houston, it was uh they all Cantonese Chinese live in Houston mostly. And I find they are helping me a lot they welcome me. They help me to get into like I—I—I want to buy something, they will help me. Even we open a bank there is old Cantonese um, uh help me on the bank. Even though he was retired, he still work with me to develop the relationship. So we were very close. And then the, the Hong Kong Chinese come in. They mostly in business and in restaurants, some profession, I - no problem. And then Taiwanese come in. But they're still kind of uh, separated. But in business, we work together. We have a Chinese Business Association. It doesn't matter where you come from. And now people from China mostly and develop a lot of restaurants. I don't mind. Eventually you know, different time, different region Chinese coming. Old Cantonese and then Hong Kong and then Taiwan and the Vietnamese Chinese also and then uh, China mainland Chinese. So different stage have different group of Chinese coming in. So far in Houston, we don't have that gap. We still work very peacefully in my opinion, very peacefully.

Uh, I personally believe I'm a Chinese. Okay, and uh, if any possibility that we work together is fine. But I don't want to mix up the general community, of Houston community find that Chinese are fighting each other. That make no sense. [**ML:** Mhm] To me, I don't like it happen. But so far, we don't have that kind of thing happens.

ML: So, um what do you worry about and/or hope for in um U.S.-China relations?

DW: This is a temporary issue to me. [**ML:** Mhm] Uh, [clears throat] China is developing. I think uh, they—they work too fast. They could be a little reserved to keep the relationship. It's better for them. Now that the credits break, I'm a banker. Credit is very important. So, the credit problem could cause a very unhappy thing in the future. But this is temporary. And China need improve themselves a little bit. They just don't want to. And they still—they still communism. That's the key. They still communism. It's very hard to change themselves. So I don't know. I'm not politician. And I just hope don't get too much

problems because it hurt the citizen. Um, I don't—it's out of our control. But no matter what, this is a temporary issue. [ML: Mhm] Will not forever.

MN: Um, so how, like, what kind of like for your kids or your grandkids? Um, how do you think they might see the world differently? Or the same from you? How, what do you think they're learning from your generation of Chinese Americans?

DW: I raised my kids and then my grandkid is not my kid it's my son and my daughter in law's kid, okay. So I never get involved that much. They have their way to raise their kids. I raised my kids, hard work. I show them how hard I work, I was working and they know how I involved community. And I told them, I'm a public image. So, as long as my image is a good image, there's no harm to you. You know. My—my son is more shy than me. I told my son, I was shy too. But my job make me not shy. [MN: Mhm] Yeah so, my kids being well educated, they know what they're doing. Yeah.

MN: I was also about to ask, what-, is it hard to be such a public image and to be so well known or has that come naturally to you?

DW: A lot of time, you just had to be *very* careful. What you say, what you talk, what you say and what you do. Because you represent the bank, the bank, people trust. If people don't find out the chairman is no good, then it means the bank no good, then how can you do business with that? [MN: Mm] So was very careful *every* day, every minute. It's not easy.

MN: Mhm.

DW: Mhm.

MN: Did you ever make any mistakes or...?

DW: You what?

MN: Did you [DW: Make mistakes?] ever make mistakes or [DW: Oh yeah] have to learn hard lessons?

DW: Yeah. I just say sorry. [MN: Mhm] It happens. Big issue too. Yeah, but you never—it's nothing you can do with it. Just have to say sorry. I'm sorry.

ML: So, what kind of support do you consider most important behind your success?

DW: I'm a team player. People say we Chinese never put together. Just like a saying. But I told people, "You watch my bank, we work together since the beginning to the end." The whole group still there. It means we work together from beginning to the end. So, if you don't have a good group, you cannot do things, especially banking is, is not just a small business, you talking about 1.6 billion in size. You got to have a good team. Uh, if you don't have a good team, if you fight each other inside, it never work. So, you want to be successful, you have to have a good team and but not easy to put together. The trick is, as a chairman, I have to sacrifice a little bit myself. You have to make everybody happy. If you just yourself happy, never work.

ML: Um so, I know you're involved with the E&M Foundation?

DW: That's what I have set up.

ML: Mhm. So, what is the mis—the mission of this foundation?

DW: Well uh, before I retire, I set this up long time ago to accumulate some of the money that I decide in the future what I gonna do. [ML: Mhm] So when, when I sold the bank, before I sold the bank, I put

some stock into this foundation for a future purpose. So so far, the foundation is about \$1.5 million and uh it means I have—I have about 5% of, of the money that I could use every year for donations. And the name E&M is Emily and Michael. That's my, my kids name. [ML: Aw, that's cute] [laughs] I want my kids understand this is for anything they want to do in a future that's theirs, but *my* time I use that for education. So, I raised a lot of uh money for the universities [ML: Mhm] that I had before. So they uh—and I also uh invite some friends in business. They, they chip in money with me and donations. It depend projects. Yeah. [MN: So—] This is just for, for community service purpose. You gotta do something and you gotta have money to do something. You cannot just do it. [ML: Mhm] You know, people when the people call me they don't call me for volunteer, they call me for money. [ML: laughs] Yeah.

MN: So is education, that's your primary goal and your primary investment?

DW: Okay, I inherit my dad's gene, okay. [MN: Mm] My dad establish a university in Taiwan. A private university. It's a pharmaceutical uh, Technical University. It's about 15,000 students right now. 50 years ago. It was when I was uh in college. So, and my brother, I like education, especially high education. That's why I get involve. Yeah.

MN: What do you think is most important about it?

DW: Uh, what I'm doing right now is uh student exchange. When I find out the uh the uh graduate student from Taiwan, they don't want go abroad. They want to stay in Taiwan because Taiwan have a good life. They could enjoy a good life in Taiwan, a very nice environment. Why they have the go out foreign country to suffer? But that's not the way it should be. So, I work the university in Taichung and the university in Utah, which both are Aggie background. I try to introduce themself to each other. So uh, before I retire in the early [clears throat] 2011, I start working on this relationship with both University. And uh, when I retired, I already set it up a lot of relationship. We support the student from Utah State University to Taiwan, or professors visit each other universities. And I donate some money for this purpose to both universities.

MN: So why do you think that's valuable for there to be that exchange...?

DW: Because they, because they both need it. [MN: Mhm] The university right now they like international relationships, especially Utah State University in the in the mountain area, a remote area that people don't know too much about them. So I create a opportunity for them in Taiwan. So they can visit and from there, they could do a lot of things for. And also, I create the uh Utah State University's opportunity for the Taiwan student. They could go to Utah State University for - after they got a PhD or PhD program. So this is something that they wish to have that I asked them that Tai—I asked Taiwan professors what you need. They said they want professor from United States teach some courses for graduate students. I said okay, oh, fine. So we send professor from Utah State to Taiwan to teach. It could be a short time, two months, or one semesters or two - even two weeks. And, and people like it. So this kind of uh exchange, it's working. The other one is uh St. Thomas University here. The International Studies students, at the beginning I get involved was: they send students to Taiwan for two weeks to visit their political activities and governments, because those students are international studies student, they are future diplomats.

So that's, I get involved that I raise money for the uh scholarship to s- travel abroad. And we also encourage student from Taiwan to visit St. Thomas University here in Houston. So this has been four, five years already. And the young people like you guys have opportunity to visit the foreign students in Taiwan, or some of them go to Japan. I didn't support them go to Japan, but I support them go to Taiwan. And it was a - it's still, still working as a very successful program. And the young - those, the young people, the student really get the benefit of it. And I know that too. They still contact each other, nowadays, email and, and all those, internet. They become very, you know, contact each other very

frequent. And I like that too. Student have the international concept and actually this month, the end of this month, June there will be about nine students from Utah State University to Taiwan. The Chung Hsing University with the dean of agriculture and other two staff go with them. There will be a two weeks gathering, I don't know what they're going to do with it, from the university in Taiwan, also, student from Thailand and student from Philippines. Total 50 students will be in Taiwan. Have a two week gathering maybe conference or visit or whatever. This is the first time of their experience all the cultural background. They will be knowing each other after that and communicate each other. This is good for four countries: United States, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines. If this successful, will become more and more country involved. That's what I support. Yeah.

ML: So, would you say that your legacy is to connect people through education?

DW: Mhm.

ML: Okay so um, how do you envision the future of Asian Americans and young people in our community, especially with the contribution of yours and many, many others?

DW: I don't know. [ML laughs] I believe right now, most e-, uh University have two thing they are, they want to do. One is international connections. Two is work with industry. There's two area that I find out in Utah State University. That's what they want. The reason is internationalized. It could be student exchange, could be professional exchange, global—globalized, you cannot just stay in United States now, you have to go out and get a connection and uh, commercialized. You have any research become successful, become marketable value. So, something they are looking at. I cannot involve too much so I think if I could do something for the university, international cooperation, you could go to certain university in a different country, one year, two years. And you get recognized that the credits or the student from other country, come to United States for couple years and continue education and both university recognized this is what doing now. Dual degree.

ML: So, do you have any advice for um young people and future generations?

DW: I believe you cannot just stay United States. Try to travel. I trained my two kids. My daughter was in Mexico City one year on her college education, so she speak perfect Spanish and Chinese and English. My son was in Hong Kong for six months. And my daughter was in Taiwan for six months too. So I train my kids, live in foreign country to learn something there. Not every country but certain country I think they will be involved. So, I encourage this young people have the opportunity, as long as the facility is set, the turnout is set. All the student will be very convenient to travel to certain university in a different country. That they could get a degree related or they could get, get acquainted with different university in different country. Cannot be just stay United States or stay in Taiwan. I keep tell them that. So we send the post doctors from Taiwan to better university, better medical school. We have one, we have one come to Rice and back to Taiwan now. Then we have another one is still here in this university. That's one of my projects, support by [inaudible] foundations. [ML: Mhm] So I, I like students, especially college students, don't just stay here. Study abroad, if you can. You—if you economically feasible, you don't have to hurry to get Ph—get graduated. Learn something, enjoy younger life. Don't just hurry up to get graduated. [ML laughs] It's not necessary. [MN: So, you—] I spent five years in undergrad under and five years in graduate school. My college life is 10 years and I enjoyed it. And fortunately, financially feasible because dad support me. [ML: Mhm] So, nothing wrong with it.

MN: What are some memories you have from, from that time? What are some of your favorite memories from that time of college?

DW: Favorite?

MN: Favorite memories.

DW: Like what?

MN: Um, like did you have a lot of friends you enjoyed or activities you did? Or was it mostly the learning and opening your mind to new education that you enjoy?

DW: I enjoy in Utah State University. Especially it's the first spot that I live in United States. I learned a lot from there. [**MN:** Hm] And I make a lot of friends. You know, it's classmates and I still have contacts. Everybody is far away but I still have some contact. Uh, my old classmates in Utah State University. It fun. I uh I know boy, a uh, a cowboys in uh... Idaho and all those area. I still contact with him. It's fun. [**MN:** So, what other—] Back to Utah State University just like a family.

MN: What other new ideas did you learn um from traveling to a new country that you wouldn't have learned otherwise?

DW: Travel to wh—what country?

MN: Um, to the United States? What new ideas were you exposed to?

DW: I think uh in education okay, I kept telling student in Taiwan say, "If you if you are not going out to United States, when you learn some subject, you only learn, uh, three out of ten. The other seven you missed it. But you come to United State to learn. You could get ten of the whole thing. That's why I want you to get out. Because you learn only the three you don't learn the other seven. How can you compete with any other people outside?" And people just don't understand that. Here we teach very broad. But in Taiwan, I don't know why. They don't teach that way. That's why they need a professor from United States to go to teach. In Taiwan, I—I encourage Texas A&M sends professor to Taiwan a couple years ago and they start working on the direction. They like it. Both side like it. It's to widen, broaden your, your view. That's important.

MN: Mhm. Do you think American students also can widen their view by traveling to other countries?

DW: Uh, to learn the difference. [**MN:** Mhm.] Why China and, and United States have those comfort? Because basically they are different. They think differently. If you don't know—if you don't understand the other country, then you confused, then you become enemies. But if you understand why they do so, then you understand them. Then you will find a way to solve the problem easier to make the world pea-, more peaceful. Yeah, more friendly each other. Why not?

MN: Um so, how—since you retired, has your life changed? And how do you spend your time differently?

DW: Well, I'm still busy. [**MN** and **ML** laugh] Uh, three weeks, four weeks ago last month, I told you I, I was visit your the - President uh LeBron with the President from Taiwan, and the University from Taiwan. And he, he spent nine days in Texas to visit different university that they wish to work together. And they come to the Rice and I introduce uh—well they were here two, two years ago. And I ask your mom [gestures to **ML**] to help. So it work. So, they visit two lab. One is uh neuroscience; one is bio science, biotech science. And both are very uh famous of Rice University relate with Chung Hsing University so that they start working together. That's good. Slowly. Now they are planning send a post-doc to Rice University now. So um, that's what I'm doing is to introduce the relationship and start working together. Sometime one plus one is more than two, okay.

ML: So if your great great grandchildren were to listen to this years from now, is there any wisdom you would want to pass on to them? Or like what kind of world would you want them to be living in?

DW: It's very hard to say. **[ML laughs]** But I, I always believe your life. Money. Like I'm a businessman. I keep telling people, "Make money is not enough. Make your reputation which is not money. You *earn* your reputation." When I was in Utah State University, my professor - I was a PhD student and I find that my professor always say, "try to find grain here and grain there." I say, "Professor, you are very famous, but you're so poor." It's not my life. I want to be rich and then famous. So I'm going to make money until one day I make enough money, I'll be famous, just like you, but I'm rich. But you are, your professor it cannot be rich you always have a different life. So I say, "It's not my style." My head of department say, "Don, you - it's—you not, no good for professor, you're very good in business. I encourage you to leave." I have one more year to become PhD without any doubt, but they still encouraged me could be very successful in business. So, I decide I quit. That's why I didn't finish PhD. But finally, the university give me an honorary doctorate degree. So it's not bad. So years later, my grandkid, great grandkids, life is not just for money. Life have more meaningful than money. And success is not just how much money you made. It's how you, how people rate you on your reputations. Yeah. So you're not necessarily very rich, but people like you, all of society like you, then you're successful. Yeah.

MN: Um just—I have just one more question, I think, um, but do you like reading any books or listening to any music or—?

DW: I, I, I have read - actually I start reading when I was 55. I like calm down and not that busy anymore. I read all the uh old Chinese philosophies. The Confucius, the Dao, the Buddhisms. All the Chinese wisdoms. I did.

MN: Did you learn new things from that or was it familiar to you already?

DW: Well, it does not necessarily I learn and I have become famous or become professors, but I could feel it: the wisdom, okay. And actually digest also take time, but at least I read it, I read it about it because Chinese wisdom is history, **[MN: Hm]** long history, that's still very effective. And I read a lot of management books, um which is new. I learn how to sing, learn how to sing for many years which is art **[MN: Hm]** that I could enjoy.

MN: When did you start learning to sing?

DW: Hm?

MN: When did you start learning to sing?

DW: Oh, more than 10 years. **[MN: Okay]** I learned the tenors. I retired. I'm still learning. **[MN: Mhm]** Exercise. Keep myself healthy. Yeah. Peaceful life. Traveling. Yeah.

ML: All right. Well, thank you so much for coming in today. We really enjoyed interviewing you.

MN: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or say?

ML: Yeah, Is there anything else you would like to add or...?

DW: I don't know ask you guys. **[all laugh]** Had fun.

ML: Mhm. We had fun too. **[laughs]**

MN: Yeah. All right, thank you so much.

ML: Thank you so much.

DW: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]