

Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA)
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Jeff Pan
Interviewer: Sonia He
Date of Interview: May 23, 2020
Transcribed by: Sonia He
Edited by: Ann Shi, Natalie Saenz
Audio Track Time: 1:37:35

Background: Dr. Jeff Gee-shang Pan is a Chinese-American geophysicist with extensive experience in the petroleum industry. He was born in Taiwan and left for the US to pursue his doctoral degree in Geophysics at Princeton University. After a year as a postdoctoral researcher, he joined the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). In 1998, Dr. Pan joined Oryx, which first merged with Kerr McGee and then later with Anadarko. During his tenure at Anadarko, Dr. Pan and his family were expatriated to Beijing, China where he served as an executive who managed their China operations and joint venture partners. Dr. Pan has been involved in the Chinese American Petroleum Association since 2000, where he held a variety of leadership positions, including President and Director of BOD. He also served a two-year term as President of the North American Chinese Geoscientists Association. Dr. Pan encourages future generations of Chinese-Americans to engage in public discourse and pursue leadership positions through hard work and tenacity, and he advises Chinese-Americans to be proud of their heritage and to leave a positive legacy.

Setting: This interview took place over the video conferencing software Zoom.

Key:

JP: Jeff Pan

SH: Sonia He

—: speech stammers

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions - laughs, sighs, etc.

Interview transcript:

SH: Hello. Today is May 23rd, 2020. I'm Sonia He, and I'm here with Dr. Jeff Pan for an interview for the Houston Asian American Archive. So starting off, Dr. Pan, could you please tell us where and when you were born?

JP: Yes. ~~Uh~~ I was born in 1955 in Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

SH: Okay, and could you just kind of describe the household and community that you grew up in in Taipei?

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JP: Yes. Where I grew up, I will describe first as my household. Is a fairly typical kind of middle class family in the 1940s and 1950s. And basically, in terms of neighbors or neighborhood, most of the families are kind of in the similar situation and people are really friendly, and kids of the same age kind of tend to hang around together, playing sports, playing games. So overall, it was kind of fairly homogenous, homogenized neighborhood.

SH: Okay. Um, and you said that it was homogenized. So what did your parents do? And was it similar to what the other people in your community did?

JP: Right, um, my father. My father, unfortunately, he passed away at the end of, of 2018. My father was a civil engineer, civil engineer working for Taipei Municipal Engineering Bureau. And he basically designs and construct the roads and major roads and tunnels near Taipei, and actually for several times, when— when we, when we went back to Taipei, I was telling my children about grandfather's work around Taipei. My mother— [**SH:** Wow.] she was a junior teacher for junior high, but only for a fairly long— fairly short term. Uh she basically stopped working after I was born.

SH: Okay, okay. Um, so what were some of the values you learned growing up?

JP: Well, at the young age, I was realizing that the most important value is-a family. It is important to kind of protect your family and, and keep your family inheritance growing. And I think by and large, each generation has a responsibility to kind of protect or improve the family status from generation to the generation, that's the first thing I learned. The second thing I learned largely is coming from my father. And he basically taught me is that work hard, work hard and never concede and work hard and leave nothing on the table. And if you must fail, let your competitor beat you; don't just throw in the towel yourself.

SH: It's very important. Yes. So [echoes] what did you enjoy doing in your childhood, like any favorite subjects or activities?

JP: Yeah, overall in the free time. Of course, I enjoy hanging around with boys in the neighborhood of the same age and playing sports and playing games. And as far as my favorite subjects are, most of, when I was little, most of the subjects tend to come to me fairly easily. And I particularly like arts and mathematics. And the arts that I like is like a painting or calligraphy. And I was also fairly athletic. And so by the time in my senior year of my elementary school, I was, I was actually playing in four varsity teams. [**SH:** Wow.] In basketball, volleyball, football, in Asia, we call it football. [**SH:** Yeah. [laughs] Soccer.] And then the dodgeball, so overall, the growing experience was quite carefree, and I was enjoying a lot of love from parents and my siblings.

SH: Okay, how many siblings did you have? Or do you have?

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JP: I have one elder sister and two younger brothers. [**SH:** Okay.] I'm basically- I'm basically a first son to my father. And Jason is also the first son. So, in the traditional Chinese family, it implies the special responsibility and the first son and first grandson.

SH: Mhm. Okay. So then how did you become interested in your profession?

JP: What, actually, in terms of the profession as a petroleum geoscientist, I really didn't get into this profession with a pre-developed interest. [**SH:** Okay.] Instead, I kind of developed the interest on the fly when I was working for the oil and gas industry. [**SH:** Okay.] When I look back overall, the 30 years is really a very fun experience. The job actually or the industry actually treated me very well.

SH: Okay. So then what did you study at university?

JP: I, I was in the geology department at National Taiwan University. And so, uh I started with geology and then later on, come to the United States start, start studying geophysics.

SH: Okay. So then how and when did you come to the US?

JP: I come to US after graduate from-after graduate from National Taiwan University. And then I served in the military for two years, it [was] a compulsory position for each man to serve the country. And so, after graduating in 1979, after two years of compulsory military service, I came to the United States in 19-1981.

SH: Okay. And what made you decide to come to the US? Was it just to study or was there any other reason?

JP: Mainly is really to study. I— after I graduate from the college, and during the two years of military service, and I was thinking about what should I do next? So I started applying for graduate schools in the US, and I was actually lucky to get a, a, a few acceptance from the schools. And for that, actually Princeton University, the department of geological and geophysical departments, they were able to offer me with the full scholarship. [**SH:** Wow.] Yeah. And the scholarship actually, on the surface, it appears to be a lot of money. Each year is about 18,000 or 19,000. But you take this full scholarship, you pay for tuition, the only thing remaining is about like \$500 to \$600 per month as a kind of the graduate student's stipend. Nevertheless, it was a really a good help. Help financially, because at that time, nobody's really well off to pay for that kind of [cost].

SH: Yeah. So when you first came to the United States, was there kind of a culture shock? Or what were the main challenges of immigrating just to come over to study?

JP: Yeah, I think cultural shock is probably a little bit too strong. [**SH:** Okay.] Because, but, but I did, I did observe a few differences because as a-as a foreign student and prepare to come to us

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for graduate school, I have largely anticipated the situations in the US. So, talking about cultural shock, I would not probably describe it as a cultural shock, but I did observe a few differences. The first interesting difference is that the professor, professor or your student advisor, tend to treat you as an equal. Instead of uh, instead of treating you as some-with some hierarchical situation of- between teacher and students [in] very typical traditional Oriental society. Right over here, the professors and the students are more like friends. And they— my advisor, Professor Robert A. Phinney, the first time we met I say, addressed him as a Professor Phinney. And he looked at me and said, “Jeff, just call me Bob.” [SH: Okay.[laughs]] Well that was a-that was a very interesting observation to start with.

And then the second interesting observation is basically, I think, it is interesting to see in the US, it is kind of allowed each individual be a lot more self-centered, in terms of pursuing personal happiness. And we grew up in the typical Oriental society, we-we being educated that you need to set aside, or most of the time, you need to be selfless. You need to consider the bigger good. And therefore your personal happiness is not always be a very high priority. But that I was kind of totally surprised to see that while you can be pursuing yourself happiness, you're allowed to be more self-centered, to take care of yourself. So overall really, it's a different value system. There is no good and bad. And later on what I realized is that really, personally, you just have to achieve a kind of a balance between self-centered versus selfless and [the] bigger good. It's just a balance act basically.

SH: Yeah, that's very true. So were there any like—

JP: — before you go. In terms of cultural shock. Even though I did not experience any in the early days, when I come to the United States, I did observe some cultural shock with the COVID-19 situation.

SH: Really? Okay.

JP: We can talk about that later.

SH: Yeah, we can talk about that in a second. [JP: Yeah.] Um, so were there any major challenges when you first came to the US? I know, you said you received a scholarship to Princeton, so, financially, you had some of it covered, but were there any other major challenges communicating socially, or otherwise?

JP: Well, really, I think the, the first, the first, the first challenge is always in a language barrier. And regardless how good you are, because language itself is ultimately kind of part of the living culture and like for instance, the first time like I-I-I went to a bank and tried to open an account. The, the teller basically asked me that, “Okay, Mr. Pan you want to open an account? Do you want to have a NOW account or you want to have a checking account?” Checking account, I understand. NOW account is their internal terminology, in terms of combination of checking and saving. Anytime when you are low in one account, you— they can just automatically transfer

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one to the other. How would I know what is NOW account? [laughs] So the language is basically always the first barrier and first challenge.

But I, I was kind of extremely lucky because we, as a graduate student, we, for, especially first year, very rarely, we were lucky enough to have a single room to start with. So, I was paired up with [an] Indian person. And that was the first year and of course I learned a lot from him. But unfortunately, India-English is with very strong accent. [SH: Yes.] And so I do learn a lot from him but not really really very much. The second year I was extremely lucky to pair up with also a Chinese American. But he is actually a Chinese-American with a lot of foreign background, because he basically attended a US school in Brazil. He was immigrating at very early on in his young age, and so we two pair up, and his English is much better than I did at that time. So I tried to learn with him, and he understand a lot of US culture as well. And he actually gave me a very— a piece of very good advice, say— He basically say, “Jeff, in order to learn the language, the first is that you need to be able to comprehensive in order to understand English first.” And his advice was for me to, basically, when I have time to listen to the three major channels, the US news broadcast. And in a very beginning, I have to listen very, very carefully. And also, I have to turn on the caption. There's caption. He said, “By the time you can turn on the TV, listening to it and go ahead and tend to your own work, and still understand what it is trying to tell you. Basically, your comprehension capabilities is there.” So I do that every day with one and a half hours of major news. And about six months later, I was happy to find out that I really don't have to sit in front of a TV. I could walk around the rooms, and I could understand what the anchorman or anchorwoman was trying to tell me.

SH: Wow, that's amazing. Okay, so you studied geophysics at Princeton. And what made you decide to stay at Princeton as a research associate?

JP: Oh, that's a [laughs] that's a very long story. [SH: Okay.] Maybe if your interests-interested, I will tell you. By the time it was 1986, I was anticipating that I need to kind of finish my degree and graduate from the department. So I uh , started attending the job fairs and start attending interviews, campus interviews. And at that time, in the 1986, oil prices [were] very, very low and most of the earth science related either university department— actually they have already reduced the program, even just close the program. So it is very difficult to find a geoscience related job. However, a few, only a few of the oil companies, they will still hire me. So I was able to sign up with campus interview in a job fair was a few oil company. So I was lucky that I did get a few offer from oil companies, and of the-the few offers the one that I particularly like is offer from Texaco. [SH: Okay.] I don't know how familiar you are with— because Texaco is no longer existing. It-Texaco merged with Chevron later on. So it's become Chevron now.

So out of the few offers, this is the one I particularly liked. So I turned, basically, turned down the rest of trying to keep this offer. And in the offer letter they said, I have three weeks to decide. [SH: Okay.] Get the job. And during the time my advisor, Professor Phinney, he was-he was on summer vacation in Canada and I figured, I have three weeks, and I'll wait for him to come back and I'll sit down and talk with him and get his blessing to accept the job. I never realized in the

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summer of 1986, oil price all of a sudden dip down to \$12. [SH: Wow.] And-and the company, Texaco, they had to call me, they have to call me and backtrack the offer. [SH: Okay.] So I-I was really, really depressed. And when Professor Phinney come back, I told him about my experience. And-and being a real gentleman, he basically said, “Jeff, don't feel bad. And don't get frustrated, don't worry about the situation. Let's write a proposal, we will get a grant to support you as a postdoc.” [SH: Okay.] “And just staying in with Princeton, don't worry about the situation.”

So together we did write a few proposals, send it off to different foundation, like NSF. And one particular one went to Office of Naval Research. And we got a two years grant from the Office Naval Research. And so with that, I stayed one additional year as a postdoc. And later on, the oil industry kind of turned around. And I didn't really trying to interview for a job, but one guy is about two years senior to me from Princeton University was working for ARCO and he came back to conduct a campus interview. Due to my previous experience with the oil company, I was not very enthusiastic working with any oil company, but I kind of bump into him in a, in the, in the hallway and he said, “Jeff, come interview for ARCO. Why don't you come and interview with me or at least talk to me right?” I said “Well... “ His name is Jay, Jay Namson. I said, “Jay, at this point, I'm really not interested in finding a job with oil company. And, and besides, I really don't have my updated or brushed up resume to come and talk to you.” [laughs] And Jay said, “Jeff, nevermind, don't worry about the resume. Just come and talk to me tomorrow, okay, tomorrow.”

So I did go and talk to him, went and talk to him. I did go and talk to him the next day. And the interview was very smooth. And he said, he basically say, “Jeff, we need people like you to work for ARCO and why don't you come for plant inter-interview? I arrange that. If you really don't like the job, at least you can come to Dallas. The first day will be a job interview. The second day we will show you around Dallas.” And so I did that. I was more kind of interested in seeing Dallas, then really getting the job. I never realized that one thing leads to the other, and I cannot see Dallas at all because the first day I interview-I was interviewed the group originally signed up to talk to me and during my presentation— traditionally you-you go for a plant visit and then present your thesis topics. And there were several groups of people presented in my presentation. One of the gentlemen realized that I was interviewed with one specific group, and he insists I need to interview with his group as well. So I ended up using the second day interviewing with the second group, [SH: Okay.] and did not see Dallas at all. And really they were kind of internal competition. And long story short is that I end up working for the second group with-with a job offer that is kind of really nice at the time. But at the time I really did not look for oil industry job, kind of-kind of stumbled into it.

SH: Okay. That's really interesting. Um, so you-you already mentioned that your first initial job was uh— didn't succeed because of the fall of the oil markets. But after you enter the Atlantic Richfield Company or ARCO, how was the experience? Was there any more fluctuation in the oil markets and how did that affect your work?

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JP: Yes, speaking-speaking of oil industry, unless— unfortunately, the oil and gas industry is kind of a cyclic commodity market. And it is completely determined by the price, it is completely determined by the supply and demand. So, when you look back in terms of history, there are actually significant up and downs of the oil price, but whenever there is up or downs, it creates instability. When is [up] too much unfortunately, it kind of hinders the-the growth of the economy, when it is down very much, then the oil company start of a reduction of the workforce. And a lot of times they call it a layoff or sometimes company preferred to call it company reorganization, but they all reduction of workforce anyway. So, speaking on my working experience with ARCO, I ended up working for ARCO for 10 years. It was between 1988 and 1998. And during the-the 10 years of time, I actually experienced thirteen layoffs or thirteen reorganization. So the, the frequency is really a lot higher than once every year. [**SH:** Oh, okay.]

So it was— the first few layoffs it was pretty scary experience for me because you don't know what's going to happen. Additionally, the company tells you that each one stay in office, then your manager will come by to your office to tell you, “Jeff, you have a job with us. Jeff, we're sorry, unfortunately, we cannot keep you.” And so the first few ones it was really, really scary. But then by the time you get into the later ones, I pretty much realized that-that this layoff or reorganization something is that is out of your control. It's out of your control, anyway. so, I was able to kind of keep it out of my mind, basically focus on things I can have control. So maybe because of that, I was able to kind of remain my focus and still have kind of a high performance in job. But to tell you the least, is that 10 years with 13 reorganization. It was really a period of very, very volatile time. So, I am my colleague or I am my co-workers that we work for ARCO, after that period of time, when we look back now we kind of tend to joking with each other. “Hey, we survived the ARCO days. [**SH** laughs] ARCO days. So, either we are technically very, very strong. Or, we have very, very high EQ.” [**SH:** Okay.] To survive the situation. The department that I worked for in ARCO days was called ERTS, E-R-T-S Exploration and Reservoir Technical Service Group. In 1988, when I joined ARCO, the department has more than 1000 people. [**SH:** Wow.] Time, by the time it gets to 1998. And I actually I, I leave ARCO because of work opportunities, another work of opportunity of Oryx. So I left ARCO to join Oryx. By the time I left ARCO to join Oryx, the department had 94 people. [**SH:** Oh, wow.] Yeah, so it was a, it was a period a very volatile time. But overall, what I learned is that really, whenever there's a layoff coming, there is a company reorganization coming, if it is out of your control, just shut it down. Don't think about it [**SH:** Don't worry.] Focus on things you have control.

SH: Yes. Um so how would you describe the diversity in your kind of career or community at ARCO? Um, in terms of like people of color or different genders, what was the like kind of diversity like?

JP: Yeah, the majority, the majority, the majority of the makeup of the group is really white and most of the managers and executives are white as well. And the percentage of non-white, the percentage of the color people is probably in total makeup about 15% of the total workforce.

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SH: Wow. So did you experience any kind of discrimination or being looked over for promotion or anything during your time in the field?

JP: Yeah. Specifically, specifically ARCO and later on with the oil industry. I work for industry for almost like 30 years. And unfortunately, the answer is yes. [**SH:** Okay.]And the answer is yes. But, but to me, I think it's-it's- it's probably more of a more of a-more of a human nature than a deliberate malicious kind of discrimination. Okay? The reason why I say that is because as the old sayings of birds of the same feather, flock together, right? And for people like you and me, we tend to-we tend to promote people like us or we tend to-we tend to hang around [people] like us, we feel more comfortable of hanging around people similar to us. [**SH:** Yes.] So, so in a way, in a way, the oil and gas industry, most of the managers and executives, non-colored people, so, it is inevitable they, they tend to promote people like that. Unfortunately, yeah, during the 30 years of time, I do have a few occasions being look over.

SH: Okay, so how do you-how do you like maintain your positivity or maintain your work ethic knowing that some people or you're being looked over by your manager or executives?

JP: Well, I think the way that I keep my motivation is like the way I just, you know, you understand the situation. And the-the look over is probably not trying to— or it's a deliberate act with an intention to let it happen. So, in a way, I just kept telling myself that well, work hard, focus on things you have control, and good things will follow. And and it did.

SH: Nice. Okay.

JP: In certain things. In certain things. [**SH:** Yeah.] It is not- it is not a smooth road. I wish I could be a rising star, right? To greet everybody, like, I have my tenure for two or three, three years in each department and there will be promotion year after year. But most of the things don't work that way. It is what it is I guess.

SH: Yes. So what do you think the impact of a petroleum geoscientist is on a community in the world or the impact of the oil industry on the world in general?

JP: Yeah, speaking of that. Contrary to the-to the general belief, the oil and gas is gonna run out like the peak oil & peak gas theory. The remaining oil and gas reserve is really quite large. So, it is in quantity so abundant that it's gonna, it's gonna be here for a long, long time with the current world consumption rate. So in terms of that, I think the petroleum scientists' responsibility is to—is to locate— first locate the resources, and then try to extract them with the most efficient and most environmental friendly way to provide the world with the affordable energy. In a way, I think as long as the world is needing energy, to keep the civilization going, to maintain reasonable living standards. We need to have some sort of— or some form of energy and at this point, at this point, I just really don't see any replacement energy that is in scale is large enough to replace oil and gas.

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SH: Mhm. Okay, and just really quickly related to COVID-19, how do you think a pandemic will affect the future of oil and gas?

JP: Well in the near term, yes. Long term, no. [**SH:** Okay.] The reason why I say that is, as I just mentioned that, as long as the world is needing an energy to keep the civilization going, or to maintain a reasonable living standard, in the foreseeable future, the world still needs a oil—a healthy oil and gas industry to provide the affordable energy.

SH: Mm hmm. Okay, so you worked at ARCO for 10 years and then you transferred to a better opportunity. When did you start working for Anadarko in China?

JP: Okay, that's another long story. [**SH:** Okay.] [Both laugh] That is another long story. I mentioned I work for ARCO for 10 years and then an opportunity presented itself. So I left ARCO, join this company called Oryx, and at that time, it seems to be a very good idea because both ARCO and Oryx, and they both in Dallas and the opportunity in Oryx was able to presented me with a very significant enhancement of the benefit package. And so with a much higher pay, and kids stay in the same school, family live in the same house, it's a, it's offer I cannot refuse. So I joined Oryx, I left ARCO and joined Oryx. I like what I did not I realize in six months later, Oryx merged with this company called Kerr McGee. [**SH:** Okay.] And Kerr McGee is a company in Houston. [**SH:** Oh, okay.] So they—they want to have all the critical members all in Houston. So I have to move—move from Dallas to Houston mainly for reason of job, or for job reason. And— and Kerr McGee actually merged with Anadarko in 2006 so I end up working for Anadarko, and after the merger, they needed to have somebody to go to Beijing office to take care of the subsurface and operations. So I was— was chosen to to be the one is taking care of the subsurface and operations. So I left Houston for Beijing, April 2007. [**SH:** Okay.] So that's kind of a long winded answer to your question. [Both laugh]

SH: No, that's really interesting though there were so many mergings going on while you—when you—when you wanted to stay in Dallas, but ended up going to be Beijing.

JP: Right. But for me, for me, actually, personally, I only changed my job once and that was from ARCO to Oryx. And then later on the job changes all with company mergers.

SH: Mm hmm. So as a ex-executive expatriate for Anadarko in China for a long time, how big of a change in China's energy in industry did you witness?

JP: It was quite, it was quite large. I don't know how you— how much do you familiar with the—the oil and gas industry, especially the offshore oil and gas industry. Offshore, basically, we call it offshore is—is is non land, is marine oil and gas industry. The offshore oil and gas industry actually is kind of categorized by water depths. Shallow water oil and gas, deep water oil and gas, and, and the definition of deep water was a bit of evolving definition. It used to be like anything is deeper than 200 feet, it's called deep water. Later on, it evolves into anything that's deeper than 1000 feet. [**SH:** Wow.] 330 meters depths is called deep water. So uh, overall the

offshore oil and gas industry for China, China kind of started late in offshore oil and gas business. So, in the early days uh, in order to catch up they have to basically conduct like joint venture or development with foreign countries, and particularly with Western countries to learn the technology know-how— to know how to operate. So by the time in 2007 when I was in Beijing, the China offshore oil and gas business is pretty much learn how to explore and develop and produce in the shallow water. The only thing that they have slightly de— slightly deficient is in the front of integration. But that, they actually quickly learn how to do that as well. And what's, what, what is interesting developments is that by the time it is 2012, China came of it's first ultra-deep water drilling rig. It's called 海洋石油 [981]. [SH: Okay.] One and so, China actually got into deep water in during the time I was in Beijing. And so it was a huge progress because from shallow water to deep water is huge progress and huge leap. So it's a significant-very significant progress. [SH: Wow.] In the time, by the time I left Beijing, it was 2014. I think the only thing that in terms of offshore exploration, development, the only thing that China has yet to prove or learn is the deep water development and integration. [SH: Okay.] So it's a fairly significant progress and huge progress to the Chinese oil and gas industry.

SH: Okay. So what do you think contributed to their rapid growth?

JP: I think mainly-mainly two things. I think the first thing is a very highly educated-highly educated geoscience related people that is coming over from typical universities or the petroleum universities in China and they basically generated very highly educated and efficient workforce working in the oil and gas industry. That's first thing. The second thing is the is a policy, government policy. Government policy is in such a way that it-it encouraged and also provide enough incentive for the foreign or Western countries to come and conduct the joint venture, provide the capital or investment.

SH: Okay. So since you worked in Dallas and America for a long time with the oil industry, how did you have to adapt or did you have to adapt to working with your Chinese and Beijing counterparts while you were there?

JP: Yes, quite a few things, quite a few things. Uh I-I quickly learn when I, when I talk with my, when I talk with my direct reports, even I talked with my counterparts that in CNOOC, CNOOC stands for Chinese National Offshore Oil Company, [SH: Okay.] [Both laugh] yeah, so in China, basic-basically all the foreign companies cannot conduct development or production alone, to be joint venture with a Chinese company. And for the offshore oil businesses, counter part is CNOOC. So I have my counterpart walking working in scene. I come to a very quick realization is that a lot of times they will say, "Yes." But— or they will be appeared to be agreeable. [SH: Mhm.] But the yes turned out to be a not a true yes. [SH: Okay.] And agreeable can be actually "no.". They've been-they've been so-they being so polite. They will not say some certain things to negate you or to disagree with you in the open meetings. And you almost always have to find each individual's true intention with one-on-one meeting. [SH: Okay.] And-and-and it actually takes me a few lessons to learn that. And so you kind of have to kind of sit down with each individual to find out the true answer. That's kind of the first thing.

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The second thing is that despite that each individual is very very strong techni-technically in their own, in their, in his own or her own view, the teamwork is just not-not guaranteed. [SH: Okay.] Yeah uh, each individual is very strong in their personal area. But then they tend to keep what they know very close to their chest. It is not an automatically sharing. So, it takes a long time for me to let the people in my department understand that there is really no individual success as there's a team success. So if the team cannot achieve it's goal or objective, it reflects the— it reflects failure to each individual. So it takes that kind of concept and keep telling them about teamwork to truly foster the teamworks there.

SH: Okay. So um, how did your family adjust to life in China?

JP: Well actually you're talking about three of us, [SH: Okay.] I, my wife, and my son. When I, when we were transferred to Beijing, my son was ready to attend his last year, senior year of high school. So there was debate to debate of, of leaving him behind in United States to attend the last year of high school and-and-and then he will go to college or university and without take him to Beijing. But then I and my wife decide, we decide that it's probably going to be a life-enhance experience for him, so we-we took him to Beijing. [SH: Okay.] The night, the night before he left the United States, six of his classmates come to see him. And it was three boys and three girls, talking with Jason and then bid him well, farewell to-to Beijing. And after the after Jason's classmate left, Jason went into his room, closed the door.

And he started crying. [SH: Mhm.]

And my wife and I look at each other. We thought, “Oh. What have we done?” But things pretty much already decided. [SH: Mhm.] We went, three of us all together.

So the long story short is that Jason attended school in Beijing called WAB. It's a-it's a western-Western Academy of Bei— Western Academy of Beijing, the school especially prepare for foreign students. And the long story short, Jason applied for US university, he got accepted, and the day before he was ready to leave Beijing for US, he came to us, come to me and my wife. And he said, “Dad. Mom-Mom. I just wanted you to know to me, the Beijing experience was pure fun.” [SH laughs] And it was a such a big relief for us. We-I and my wife, we thought, “Oh, thank god. We did the right thing.” To kind of insist he came with us.

And for me and my wife of course is a much easier adjustment. [SH: Yeah.] My wife, she's also Chinese. We learned the language. We-we know the language. We know the culture well enough to fit in. Particularly, if you wanna, if you want to talk about adjustments, they were all really, really very minor adjustments. It's basically adjustments of that you have a little bit smaller personal space because population. And uh the uh the secretaries or the-the drivers tends to be-tends to be more involved in terms of your daily life. It's not like that in US. You go to work and when you come home this only your family. [SH: Yeah.] You have-you have the secretaries, you have the A-yi's, the drivers, they tend to be kind of part of your daily life and that's different.

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And for the Americans, they tend to be very, very emphasize on their privacy. [SH: Yeah.] Emphasize on personal life, and over there, that you kind of-kind of have to open up a little bit. You have a few more people in your daily life and that's kind of adjustment. And other than that, some minor adjustment with the traffic congestion in Beijing. And-and some of the kind of air quality issues. [SH: Yeah.] Those are really, really minor adjustments. And for me, I and my wife, and even including Jason, we actually enjoyed our experience in Beijing very very much in a very very positive way. And I and my wife actually come across this list of about 500 sites or places in Beijing or near Beijing, must go, must go list. So we, of course after the first year, Jason left for university and leaving Beijing is only, the family is only I and my wife. We made a— so we made an effort to kind of visit going down the list, visiting this different sites, a kind of historical sites or scenic area and we had really have a blast of staying Beijing. [SH: That's nice.] Very, very positive experience.

SH: So did your son come to visit you every summer after school was let out, or did he stay in the US for university over the summers?

JP: He-he stayed in-he stayed in the university, and for most of the time during— but the arrangement from a company is that they provide-they provide travel fundings for-for-for children or for kids are in university to come and visit parents twice every year.

SH: Wow. That's nice.

JP: Yeah. So once in the summertime, once in the wintertime. Only for the-only for the first winter that Jason decided to spend his winter vacation and Thanksgiving with his friends. In the- in the rest of time he-he actually came and visit us [SH: Okay.], the remaining seven times.

SH: That's nice. Um so, what do you think are the best parts of a Chinese workplace? you already mentioned some of the disadvantages or some of the things that you needed to work on like teamwork. But what are some of the pros?

JP: Pros is like what I mentioned early on is that the-the-the Beijing workforce or the Beijing local workforces is a group of very, very highly educated people. And they are very highly educated, and they are very, very devoted. They are willing to put in long hours to get the work done. So, and these are kind of the very positive aspect of the-of the local work is they are-they are intelligent, they're smart, very well educated, very dedicated. And once we let them understand that the spirit of teamwork is very important and the US working culture is that you need to be upfront and communicate early on. And it is, it is-it is okay to take risks. It is okay to have a failure case, and failure case is part of the learning process, and they work beautifully. They are very, very productive.

SH: Okay, so what are your major takeaways from your time in China? It can be anything, doesn't have to be work related.

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JP: Yeah. I think the major takeaway of my experience in China is that, China is very rapid progressing. It's-first of all, the most impressive part is that the rapid progress of China, and China is, is a very vibrant country, with very highly educated and devoted workforce. So I think China will be one of the top countries very soon.

SH: Okay. Um, and so you mentioned a lot of the younger generation or the people who graduated from petroleum universities or the big universities in China, they're very highly educated and they're very productive and very effective, they're willing to put in a lot of work hours. How does that differ from the younger generation in the US?

JP: Well, I think in general the differences between, I think, first of all, I mentioned early on about this self-centered, self-centered and and kind of a pursuer of the personal happiness. In general, I think the, the younger generation between China and US is that, in China, the younger generation, I could say, they have more sense of the, the self-less, more sense of the bigger good. In terms of motivation-in terms of motivation, these group of people in China, they're very, very motivated in terms of pursuing higher education or going after certain success. The motivation is definitely there. And in terms of motivation, the-the young-younger people, the youngsters, the youth in US is more like pursuing their personal happiness, and it is a lot like, if you're not happy-if you're not happy now do something for a change type of situation. So, in terms of comparison, I think-I think that China, Chinese you-Chinese, are more, more endurance, they are more enduranced to pressure. I think this maybe, even though I don't like-I don't like Entrance Examination determines what university you attend or what high school you attend. But because of this entrance examination, I think most of the Chinese young people, they are no doubt a lot more endurance to pressure, [**SH:** More competitive or—] more competitive and more kind of endurance and can perform under pressure because ultimately exam itself is pressure.

SH: Yeah, that's very true. So, um, when you went to China, your son was already in his senior year of high school, but does your experience in China change any of the expectations you have for him?

JP: Not, not really from the very beginning I and my wife, we, we kind of fairly consistently trying to educate my children to be-to be a responsible world citizen. And from the very, very, very, very beginning, we-we keep both of my kids bilingual. As it's Chinese and English at the same time. So when they grow up, both of them could speak fluent Chinese. Reading is a very tough [**SH** laughs] reading is a little bit different. But my daughter, she was able to kind of— for most of time, was able to read most of the the simple articles and she was able to at least watch Chinese soap operas to enjoy. And Jason Of course, he also speaks fluent Chinese but his reading and comprehension capability is a little bit less than his sister. [**SH:** Okay.] So overall-So overall, I think our China experience actually either confirm or enhance their experience because they realize that extra language, or additional language is beneficial. There were able to go around the city without we being accompany them, they could speak Chinese, and they could get on public transportation and talk to people in the streets and trying to go places they want visit, the things they want, doing the things they want. And also, we, we, we, we teach them early on to be kind

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of an open minded towards different races and being able to be in China to kind of witness that different exposure culture actually enrich their life, and so it's pretty consistent with the way that we were trying to educate them from the very beginning.

SH: That's good. Um, so now moving on to your of your experiences in Houston you came to Houston after the companies merged with Anadarko or with um—

JP: With Kerr McGee.

SH: With Kerr McGee, yes. [Both laugh]

JP: Yeah. It's fairly complicated.

SH: Yeah. So, um, could you kind of describe your involvement with your— with the community nowadays?

JP: With the community nowadays is that really we, I and my wife, we kind of split up our community responsibility. I was more involved with— I am more involved with kind of community but related, also relate to my profession. And my wife, she is taking of kind of a general community facing type of community involvement. So we split up, and that's part of the reason why my involvement is is kind of always was is Chinese American Petroleum Association, CAPA, or North America-American Geoscience-North America Chinese Geoscientists Association. It's kind of more profession related.

SH: Okay, so how did you become involved with the Chinese American Petroleum Association or CAPA?

JP: Yeah, I think that's another long story. [**SH:** Long story. Okay.] [laughs] We, when-when the company moved us, moved us down to Houston late in 1999. And so by the time in year 2000, we find our house and move the hou— or move the family and kind of trying to re-establish, trying to reach out, trying to re-make our connections. And one of my co-workers introduced me to this CAPA organization, and we started to attend CAPA activities. And CAPA being a professional association, it really not only organizes professional related activities, it also organizes member activities that are suitable for family to attend [**SH:** Okay.] Like for every year, they have a spring picnic, and they have several luncheon-luncheon type of meetings and they invite people, not necessarily from petroleum industry, a lot of times they-they invite people on for topics is how to manage your wealth, how to invest, how to kind of enrich your life with paintings or calligraphy, so, so not only professional activities, there is also family oriented activities.

So it is very easy for us to join them and start attending activities, because we just moved down to Houston, and we'll try to make our new friends and trying to reach out to different places. Start attending their activities. And we like the way this association operates. So we started to

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join as a member. And by the time it gets to 2001, they said, “Jeff, we welcome you to join as a member, but we want you to contribute more. We want you to be the officer, to be part of the—this subcommittees and organize events and service the members.” At that time I was thinking, “Man, I got have real time-full time job and no doubt his service will provide additional hours that I have to put in for volunteer society.” But when I look at it, most of the people, they are all—they all have their daytime job. It's a, it's a group of really selfless people. And during the two years of time that between 1991— year 2000 and 2001, I really made a few really, really good friends within the Association. And these are—these are friends I still keep contact with.

So they wanted me to step up [laughs] borrow my, my, my time in service, so I said, “Okay, I could provide my time and service, but I don't want any title [SH: Okay.] any titles with the Association.” So, I start providing my time and service with the organization. By the time it gets to 2003, the—the president approached me and said, “Jeff, just—just contribute your time is not good enough. We want you to be part of us. [SH: Okay.] We want you to be officer.” And it was a very big struggle because I realized that when you get into officers then, the only way is up. [SH laughs] You cannot kind of gradually reduce your responsibility. This organization has a very good—it's a very good setup is that they have a core team—core team is the core leadership team. The leadership Team is the first step is you become treasurer, treasurer of this organization. And then by the time you fulfill your responsibility, next year, you've been promoted to Vice President. And after you serve as a vice president, you promoted to president. [SH: Okay.] So it's kind of a commitment of a three years term that [SH: Okay.] once you get into the leadership team, and I need to kind of clarify why is this such a time consuming job is because at that time when I joined the group, we have members of about 1400 people.

SH: Wow. That's a lot.

JP: It's a—it's a huge, it's a huge Association. You could imagine, imagine whenever you organize activity, it is almost like a—almost like a full time job. [SH: Yeah.] Imagine you organize activity with such a big population attending, and and the association actually evolved very quickly by the time. Speaking of now, we almost have 1800 members. [SH: Wow.] It's a huge, huge organization, it is also very successful organization. So speaking of that, they—they convinced me to be the treasurer. So, by the time it gets to year 2005, I become the president, and so it's a long answer. And after the Presidentship, they asked the past president to step into the board of directors and that's a—that's another topic.

SH: Okay. So you made the journey of a treasurer to Vice President to President, and then you stepped into the board of directors. Um, what did you do as— ? Um, I mean, obviously as a treasurer, you just manage finances but what do you do as a vice president or president or as a member of the board of directors?

JP: Yeah. The Vice President is of course is is help—help the president keeping things organized and get things executed. Particular responsibility for the Vice President is that the—the association has an annual meeting. The annual meeting is for technical meetings. So this annual meeting is

almost like a professional meeting. Where are you you are you sending the meeting brochure early on and ask for people to submit abstract for their presentation, and you organize technical program. You go program usually have attendance of 200 to 300 members. [SH: Wow.] For technical meeting. And the technical meeting usually is a one day meeting with the keynote speeches in the morning. Con-current technical sessions of five to six in the afternoon. So you could-you could imagine it's-it's almost like a presentation close to 100 technical presentations, come up with the program and get the brochure ready, get the technical program ready, arrange a meeting place and

SH: All sorts of things.

JP: All sorts of things from the meeting menu and then in the meeting itself, provides coffee and tea and lunch and stuff like that. And then reception, basically so the vice president's responsibility is that it organized the-for that specific year technical symposium, which I mentioned. And then the annual meeting, the annual meeting is where you pass on the torch. It's the transition, it's a transition, usually is a dinner very close to the Chinese New Year time. So you might hold membership to a dinner. And then the the the executive committee presented what has been done for this year with the Association. And then-And then during the dinner you elect president of next year, Vice President next year, Treasurer next year. And of course, in tradition is that if you have done a good job as a treasurer, then they-they elect they elect you into vice president. Done good job, then the vice presidential elected as president. And so usually again is a dinner banquet or get together about- around 200-250 people. It's a huge event and then-and then the rest of you have some subcommittees to help you. [SH: Okay.] So vice president is mainly helping the president. And then once you become a president, then you are, you are no doubt a fi-figurehead of the association, you know, association to all outside entities, and you'll also be the person kind of responsible for the success and failure of the organization for the specific year.

SH: Okay. Then you said you were also a part of the North American Chinese Geoscientist Association. [JP: Right.] What kind of work— what do you do with that association?

JP: This association is really most of members-most of our members are in academia. These are group of geoscientists among Chinese American geoscientists that is working kind of like US, US or Canadian Geological Survey or American universities or Canadian universities. So a lot of them are researchers, a lot of them are professors. [SH: Okay.] So there are a lot more academic. The CAPA Association is more kind of industrial oriented. Getting to the area of oil and gas business or energy business. It's most America Chinese Scientists Association is more like professors, researchers working in the-in the in a-in - in the public services agency. So they are different.

SH: Okay. All right. So now we're going to move into the COVID-19, Coronavirus interview section. It's kind of a special section because the times are pretty special and pretty significant. So how has the pandemic affected your daily life?

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JP: Oh, it's— very much. [**SH:** Yeah.] It's almost like a-my daily life is totally upside down. We, we really, rarely go out now. Unless it's-unless it's absolutely necessary, like, for grocery shopping. We have no choice but going out. I know there are kind of online services like Instagram Insta-cart or delivery to door type of service, but it's just different because when you—when you need to pack a meat or when you need to have some apples or you need to have something... you just have to see them. [**SH:** Yes, feel them.] Yeah and then feel them and buy them. So unless it's necessary we don't go out, other than grocery shopping, doctor's visit, we don't really go out much anymore.

SH: Okay. Um, how has the pandemic changed your perspective about the future? How society will change?

JP: Well, actually, to me, I think not much in terms of long term.

SH: Okay.

JP: Yeah. Because if you look back in history, we had been through Spanish Flu, SARS, Ebola, N1H1. And, and we always—we always overcome. I think the situation will get back to its normal-normalcy, once the vaccine arrives, [**SH:** Yes.] don't know when, but eventually it will. So I think we will eventually overcome and prevail.

SL: That's very positive thinking. Um, have you engaged in—

JP: Don't-don't you agree?

SH: Yes, I definitely do think so about like the entire situation will be better, but just kind of some people just don't think that even with a vaccine, many people, I think think that we still might need to maintain social distancing or more people will be more inclined to wear masks, or stay at home from work if they're more sick than usual just because of this entire situation has affected everybody in the country.

JP: Right right right. Yeah. Speaking of that, I agree with you that certain-certain things probably forever changed. But hopefully, these are-these are probably minor things. Like, for instance, people will probably change habits of handshaking. But we're coming from the Oriental society, we tend to bow [**SH:** Yes.] as our—. So there is a very, very, there are- there are different ways of saying “hi”, are there different ways of showing your- showing your friendliness. So, so yeah, certain things will change forever but they don't-they don't bother me that much.

SH: Yes. So have you engaged in any active response activities regarding the outbreak such as any like volunteering or fundraising?

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JP: Volunteering is a lot more difficult now [**SH:** Yes, staying at home.] because you don't go out, you stay at home. But we-we did participate early on with the-with the fund raisings or or donate or any money or mask toward Wuhan. But now it's very little involvement. It's all in the early days. [**SH:** Yes.] Early days in -n February and March.

SH: Mhm. So how much of your daily life is conducted through digital communication tools and how do you think it's different from personal in person communicational experiences?

JP: Well, now almost everything-everything in my daily life is, they are committed-they are conducted with digital electronic device now. And in terms of the difference, I think for the person that you are communicating with, if you have at least met them once before, it really doesn't make much difference. For the person that you have never met; and, and then— then you have to conduct communication or business through phone or videoconference, it— it kind of is kind of challenging you to understand this person first, and you can communicate with him digitally.

SH: Um, so, what do you miss most about the life before the pandemic?

JP: Well, of course you know I'm a very out door type of person. I like sports. I like outdoor activities. So of course I miss all the outdoor activities. [**SH:** Yes.] I miss very much of that. And in terms-in terms of people to people interaction. I missed the eye-contact. [**SH:** Yes.] I miss the handshake part.

SH: So, yeah. Um, and then now relating to as a Asian American or as an Asian, how do you think the pandemic has impacted others, other people's views of Asians and Asian Americans?

JP: Unfortunately, I think there is- there's some, there's some impact. In terms of the view on Asian-Asians or Asian Americans, Asian, American-Chinese. But hopefully this is only to a very small-small group of people and, and due largely to the influence of politicians irresponsible comments. So I'm hoping that this type of negativities or negative views will go away as, as COVID-19 is behind us. In time it'll gradually restore the right image of Asians and or Asian Americans.

SH: And you mentioned very early on in this interview that that you think there's a major culture shock now because of the pandemic. Could you kind of expand on what you meant by that?

JP: Yes. The culture shock to me of this one is comes in several different fronts. The first one is that the current economy of of US, I did not realize the economy of US is especially is its makeup workforce is so shallow. Like only with a few, only with a few weeks of not going to work that that alot of families, millions of families have run out of their savings. [**SH:** Yeah.] And even have trouble providing food on the table. This is a completely cultural shock. This is almost like a— to me this only happens in the third world country. And we're talking about

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America is its deemed as the number one nation of the world. So that's the first culture shock. The first one.

The second one, that I mentioned is that I realized that Americans, they tend to allow each individual to pursue-to be self-centered, to pursue self-happiness. But I was thinking of the quality, the general quality and-and the education of the Americans is setting a bar that is never too low in such a way that even though they pursue self-happiness, they will-they will not disregard other's safety or other people's rights or privilege. And during this COVID-19 pandemic, I was really, really surprised to see people come out in protest of this stay at home policy with with slogans says that with slogans says that "I need a haircut." [SH: Yeah.] And what slogan says that "open up and let the weak die". And totally— This is totally a cultural shock to me. I was thinking in general, the bar of the quality of Americans is set pretty high. These are people is generally, generally courteous and are polite and, and wealthy. But I totally— that that image or that protest totally changed my view. And I could imagine people go out in protest, say, "open up, I need to work." "I need to feed the family." Never realize people go out and say, "Open up. I need a haircut. Open up, let the weak die." So it's just-just totally blow my mind.

SH: Mhm. Alright, so just kind of wrapping up the rest of this interview, how would you identify yourself? Asian American, Asian, Chinese American, Taiwanese American?

JP: I will identify myself as Chinese American. [SH: Mhm.] As Chinese American with deep roots in in Chinese, in Chinese culture.

SH: Mhm. Um and what are your hopes for the Asian American community or Chinese American community in the US?

JP: My hope for the— for the Asian American, Chinese American is that you need to you need to work hard, need to work hard and be success. But I also think that for the most of the younger generation, they need to, they need to be prepared. They need to be prepared to develop-develop the capability so that they could step up, step up to the leadership type of position, or step up to lead the initiatives. Um, in general, there is a typical image of the Asian American or Chinese Americans about being a group of people that are very good in in technical work. College. But this is a group of people who can only be a supporting staff or follower, but not leaders. I think, I think the younger generation definitely need to shake off that image and and seize every opportunity to step up, become a leader, or take the leadership to start any initiatives. And get involved in the US political system and try to join the mainstream, become the mainstream of the political power force. Uh, don't be a group of voiceless people.

SH: Definitely. So do you have any advice for future generations or anything you would tell your great-great-grandchildren if they were to find this Archive?

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JP: Yeah, that's a very interesting question. To me, again, I would advise that the younger generation to work hard and leave nothing on the table. Never give up. Never concede. If you have to fail, as I said early on, let your competitor beat you. If you must fail, then let the competitor beat you; don't just throw in the towel yourself. And never concede. And in terms of if I have to tell my uh [laughs] great-great-children, great-great-grandchildren something, I would tell them "Hello." "I am your great-great-grandfather. I'm speaking from a time of the 21st century. And personally I strongly believe there is a, there is a responsibility or there is a mission in terms of passing down in terms of heritage. I think the mission of each generation is that you need to work hard and provide and improve—and improve or better environment for the next generation. And for me, I think I work hard and pretty much fulfill my mission. Now, it's your turn to do the same. And I think, you can do better than I do. So work hard. And never give up."

SH: Very nice. Um, is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't already mentioned?

JP: Oh I think, really appreciate that Rice Univ-University is providing this opportunity, and I particularly appreciate that Rice University and the students or interns are devoting their time and efforts to do this Asian American Archive. And I think this is a very, very valuable thing. And I wish you and the organization every success [**SH:** Thank you.] in keeping the work, keep up the good job.

SH: Thank you. Thank you so much for giving us your time and answering all the questions for the Archive. Um in that case, thank you for your time, and we'll just conclude the interview here.

JP: Okay. When you turn off the recording, I do have a question to ask you.

SH: Sure. Okay.

[Interview ends.]