

2015 Diversity in Business Award goes to China Insight contributor Chang Wang

By Elaine Dunn

Chang Wang, attorney and chief research and academic officer of Thomson Reuters and a regular contributor to China Insight, is one of the honorees to receive 2015 Diversity in Business Award from Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. The award recognizes some of the Twin Cities' leading business leaders, owners and executives from ethnic minority community and the GLBT community. The winners are those who play strong leadership roles inside and outside their jobs and serve in industry associations or community organizations. China Insight interviews Wang as he reflects on important persons and events in his life and career.

China Insight: Congratulations on receiving another award – this time from the business community – in addition to the two awards you recently received: China 100 Distinguished Chinese Alumni Award from the University of Minnesota and the Asian Pacific Distinguished Contribution Award from the State Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans. Please tell us how you settled in Minnesota and came to work for Thomson Reuters?

Chang Wang: I grew up in a scientific and technological family and community in Beijing. Both my parents are senior scientists at Academia Sinica, the national academy of science in China. I was born and raised in the Zhong-guan-cun neighborhood, the “Silicon Valley” of China, where thousands of high-tech companies, research institutions, and dozens of China's top universities and technology colleges are located. In fact, my parents' residence is on the same block as the Thomson Reuters China's IP & Science Office in Beijing! I went to Beijing Film Academy for my undergraduate studies and received a Bachelor in Fine Arts degree in filmmaking. I then went to Peking University for graduate studies and received an M.A. in comparative literature and cultural studies. For nearly two years, between college and graduate school, I worked as an editor and correspondent for Science Times, a major Chinese newspaper. In 2000, I came to the United States and studied art history at the University of Illinois. After receiving my second master's degree in 2003, I came to the University of Minnesota Law School for my legal education. I received my juris doctor degree in 2006, passed the bar, and have worked for Thomson Reuters ever since. Thomson Reuters is the world's leading source of intelligent information for businesses and professionals. I lead special research projects and facilitate company joint initiatives with the academic and business communities. I also develop and manage Continuing Legal Education programs and diversity training programs and serve as a resident expert on legal, regulatory, language, and international project management for Thomson Reuters.

China Insight: You have published four books, and each one of them has a dedication. “The End of the Avant-Garde: Comparative Cultural Studies” was dedicated to your late grandfather Zhou

Bo. “Inside China's Legal System” was dedicated to your “teacher and mentor” Rick King. “Legal Research in American Law” was dedicated to the University of Minnesota and Thomson Reuters, where you “found and read the law,” and “New Tales of the Twin Cities: The History, Law, and Culture of Minnesota” was dedicated to “all the earlier settlers of the Land of 10,000 Lakes, and to all the strong, good-looking, and above-average Minnesotans who live there today.” Why did you dedicate the first book to your grandfather?

Chang Wang: My late grandpa Zhou Bo was a World War II veteran, war correspondent and senior reporter for a newspaper. He taught me integrity, humility, civility, determination, perseverance, tenacity, forgiveness and optimism. He played a very special and important role in my life.

Grandpa was born in 1923 in Shanxi Province, northwest China. He was a son of a moderate landlord and studied traditional Chinese literature and art in his hometown. However, his studies were interrupted by the anti-Japanese war. In early 1940s, he joined the Chinese Communist Party and the legendary 8th Route Army of The National Revolution Army. He led a team of soldiers fighting the Japanese army in northwest China and also was in charge of reporting from the frontline. During the wars, he seldom stayed in one village for more than a week. After the Civil War ended in 1949, grandpa was honorably discharged from the army. When peace finally came, he had a chance to pursue his real passions – literature, art and journalism. He worked for Henan Daily, the biggest newspaper in central China and was appointed senior reporter in the 1950s. He was a strong supporter of then President Liu Shaoqi's social democratic policy. President Liu, the nominal national leader who ranked No. 5 in the Chinese Communist Party, was murdered by Chairman Mao's Red Guards in Henan in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution. President Liu was labeled a “traitor” from his death until 1980. I remember later my grandfather showed me the pictures of him interviewing President Liu in the '60s and told me the heartbreaking story that President Liu desperately clung to a copy of the Constitution of China as he was beaten to death by the Red Guards. Grandpa served the country with dignity, honor, and a pure faith in social democratic equality. He despised corruption and party politics. In 1989, when the Tiananmen tragedy occurred, he was disgusted and disillusioned.

Over the years, I sent him all my publications. He enjoyed reading them even though he was not familiar with the topics of Separation of Powers or Freedom of Expression. He sent me his calligraphies and paintings. In his last years, he could hardly paint, draw, or even read anymore. After I had settled in Minnesota, every time I went back to China, I could only spend one or two days with him and grandma – mostly in the hospital. I never had a chance to tell



Rick King (left) and Chang Wang (right) at 2015 Asian Pacific Leadership Awards dinner

him what I do, what kind of life I have in Minnesota, and how much I love him. I missed the opportunity forever. But I know he is always here with me; I know he would have been pleased to know that I am writing a treatise on comparative constitutional law.

China Insight: You credited your “teacher and mentor” Rick King, Chief Operating Officer – Technology, Thomson Reuters, for all your career accomplishments. Is Rick the most important individual who changed and shaped your career?

Chang Wang: Yes. Without Rick's trust and mentoring, none of my career accomplishments would have been possible. I am most fortunate to work on Rick's team at Thomson Reuters. Under his leadership, Thomson Reuters has built strong partnerships with science and technology communities, universities, and government agencies; and we enjoy many benefits from these collaborative relationships. I am honored to participate in joint initiatives with the law school, business school, and the international offices at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota State government, the Supreme Court of Minnesota, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and Minnesota Public Radio.

Rick is a senior business executive with profound intelligence, superb management skills, and tremendous integrity. In short, he is a wise man with a big heart who teaches me modesty, honesty, empathy, compassion, confidence, patience, tolerance and professionalism.

In addition, I consider Rick a true example of “diversity in business.” Diversity does not only mean race or gender diversity, diversity is first and foremost an open-minded way of understanding, i.e., empathy.

Empathy is the capacity to understand what another person is experiencing from within the other person's frame of reference, the capacity to place oneself in another's shoes. Rick excels in positive psychology: his unique capacity of empathy is inspiring and motivating.

China Insight: What do you think the major difference in your life and career between east and west – China and the U.S.?

Chang Wang: I consider myself most fortunate to be able to appreciate the beauty and charm of Chinese arts and culture, while functioning freely in the American system of equal protection and fundamental fairness. In fact, there are only two things that can bring me close to tears: Chinese literature and American law. To illustrate the major difference between the two parallel universes, I would like to share with you a paragraph from the preface to “My Life in China and America,” the autobiography of Yung Wing, the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university. It said, “Would it not be strange, if an Occidental education, continually exemplified by an Occidental civilization, had not wrought upon an Oriental such a metamorphosis in his inward nature as to make him feel and act as though he were a being coming from a different world, when he confronted one so diametrically different? This was precisely my case, and yet neither patriotism nor the love of my fellow countrymen had been weakened. On the contrary, they had increased in strength from sympathy.”

Wang holds associate and adjunct professorships at seven top law schools in the U.S., China, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. He and his family reside in St. Paul and Beijing.