

An impoverished, handicapped immigrant’s journey to becoming a prominent American millionaire



Mr. Wei: How did he become a millionaire in America?

When it comes to John Wei, everyone knows him in North Carolina’s Chinese circles. Mr. Wei stands out as a legend – starting from scratch to become a millionaire. His efforts towards success are definitely not less, if not more, than those of average people. However, with great modesty, he always says that he would prefer to be called “Lao Wei,” literally meaning “Old Wei.”



Lao Wei (left) and his wife (right) with a young President Xi Jinping (center) in 1985.

On account of his contributions to North Carolina's Chinese community, Chinese Ambassadors Li Daoyu, Li Zhaoxing, Zhao Xixin, Liu Yi, and Yang Jiechi will undoubtedly pay a visit to Lao Wei, with North Carolina's governor and congressmen accompanying him, whenever they visit the state. When President Jiang Zemin and Premier Wen Jiabao visited the United States, they would take group photos with the leaders of Chinese community, and you can always find Lao Wei in those pictures. In 1985, while current president Xi Jinping was the deputy mayor of Xiamen City and former Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman Jia Qinglin was deputy governor of Fujian Province, they all met him and took photos with Lao Wei. From these pictures we find a young Lao Wei, with his family, standing next to China's national leaders with modest clothing. In 2005, Liu Chuansheng, then Minister-Counselor for Education of the Chinese Embassy in the United States, visited North Carolina. It was Lao Wei who accompanied her to meet Elaine Marshall, Secretary of State of North Carolina. Afterward, Ms. Liu Chuansheng praised Mr. Wei as an eminent diplomat.



Lao Wei introducing senior level Chinese government officials to NC Secretary of State Elaine Marshall.



Lao Wei celebrating with NC Secretary of State Elaine Marshall at her birthday party.

Abandon everything, pursue the “American Dream”

Lao Wei’s father was born in Yanling, Hunan Province and moved to Taiwan with absolutely nothing. Consequently, Lao Wei lived in poverty since birth. In 1971, he graduated from mathematics department of National Taiwan Normal University. Before he came to the U.S., he worked as a teacher of mathematics for seven years and opened his own tutoring class, which brought him a relatively well-off life with houses, cars, and a beautiful wife., This is the first pot of gold in his life. However, only in his thirties, Lao Wei wanted to strive for more. He hoped to rise to prominence and become somebody. In 1978, he managed to get a full scholarship to the mathematics department of Pennsylvania State University, and half a year later, he helped his wife Gaoxiuqiong Wei successfully attain a scholarship to the university’s physics department. Subsequently, the couple sold all their possessions in Taiwan without any hesitation and flew to the United States.

Not everyone has as strong a resolve as Lao Wei and his wife. Every time someone mentions this experience, Lao Wei still sighs that he would never have gone abroad without the full scholarship and his wife’s encouragement. Life would have been quite different.

Flower blooming in exotic land

Carrying two suitcases in pursuit of the "American Dream," Lao Wei arrived in the United States. Without any relatives nearby, the biggest problem he encountered was the language barrier. Since the age of 20, a chemical explosion damaged his hearing, making it especially difficult to learn a totally new language like English. However, with his wife Mrs. Wei's encouragement and support, Lao Wei overcame the language barrier and achieved almost all A's in his academic work. He successfully earned a master's degree in mathematics and computer science.

Having struggled through a difficult school life, the life of Lao Wei launched like a butterfly breaking out from a cocoon. In the beginning of the 1980s, the American IT industry sprouted. After graduation in 1980, Lao Wei came to North Carolina, where he worked at Carolina Power & Light CP&L and then served as a senior software engineer at IBM. He worked in the IT industry for nearly 30 years, during which time he accumulated many personal connections as well as a financial fortune, laying a solid foundation for the pioneering work of the second phase of his life.

After his retirement from CP&L, Lao Wei became a senior software analyst in the Personnel Department of the North Carolina state government. He was full of passion for the career as an IT engineer, considering it as his old profession. He also said jokingly that he was going to expend the last part of his life in the IT field.

Surfing the business tide, composing a new chapter in life

For the past several decades, Lao Wei has always been a leader in business circles.

Lao Wei had a long-term and unique vision of the real estate market even when he was young. During the 1970s, he bought a house in Taiwan for NT\$240 thousand (New Taiwan Dollar). Now, the market value is more than NT\$8 million now - nearly 40 times the original value. In 1982, he passed the real estate exam and obtained the license of a real estate broker. In 1984, he joined in the China headquarters of IBM and served as the system engineer, earning his second pot of gold in his life. After returning from Beijing to the US in 1987, he founded the company R. D. Realty, which has become R. D. International, Inc. And the company has developed very steadily ever since it was founded. Under the management of Lao Wei, not only had it never suffered from the financial crisis, but it has created hundreds of millions of dollars in total housing sales during the past two decades. R. D. International has provided its customers with satisfactory residences and also making great contributions to the Chinese real estate business in the Triangle area.

This success could be attributed more to his unique business mind and fast, accurate and acute marketing senses, rather than simply luck.

R.D. International has employed a dozen experienced brokers with property licenses, and they have trained large quantities of the Triangle area's most elite real estate agents. Lao Wei always helped his employees with all his heart and taught them everything he knew. Some of his former employees have all done very good jobs on their own after they left the company. Seeing that, Lao Wei felt very gratified. His father once shared a sentence that left an impression on him for the rest of his life - "Bless all people with well-being." Due to this sentence, he made up his mind that he would help more people when he got rich.

From a very early time, Lao Wei had always been interested in stock market investment. Thus, he embarked on a journey to thrive in the stock market. Initially, he just knew the rudimentary rules like "buy low and sell high." With years of studying and practical experience, he has gradually formed his own style and created a new investment strategy named "Eight Steps by Mr. Wei." He always becomes excited at the mention of the secret tool and shared much information with other people. According to "survival of the fittest," by inputting a user name and password in Yahoo Finance, you would find the stocks working well by examining the gain and loss percentages under the "Notes" column and then investing in them based on the percentages. The higher the percentage, the better the stock will perform. You can also examine the change over various timeframes, such as the past five years, the current year, and the current day. After over 40 years of investing in stock market, he efficiently applied the eight steps and spotted the right stocks rapidly and never had a fail. During the outbreak of financial crisis in 2008, even the "Stock God" Warren Buffett lost almost one third of the value of his stocks, Lao Wei did not lose a penny. Instead, he even made a small fortune.

Lao Wei has served as the director of the Wake County Board for 22 years. He was also appointed as a member of the Board of Governors of the North Carolina Administration of Taxation for 12 years. After he retired, he and his wife received six different retirement pensions, which was his third bucket of gold. Together with the fortune saved up from his real estate business and stock investment, Lao Wei became a true millionaire before the age of 50.

Serving in various different business roles, he made remarkable achievements in all of them. However, he modestly believes that it all came from luck. "We met at a good time!" he always says.

Glory of the Chinese, renowned by everyone

Since the early 1980s, Lao Wei has been an activist in the local Chinese community. He was the vice president and president of the Triangle Area Chinese American Society (TACAS). In 1988, Lao Wei devoted himself to the establishment of the first local Chinese school called Raleigh

Chinese Language School (RCLS) and served successively as its principal and vice principal. During his tenure, he started a Taiwanese class and a Pinyin class. He also wrote the school anthem which is still sung by its current students. With Mr. Li Yanzhen and Dr. Yang Zhicheng, Lao Wei founded the Chinese Business Association of North Carolina in 1990. In that same year, he also successfully helped create the sister relationship between Taiwan and North Carolina.

When he was a committee member of the Sister Cities of Cary, he helped to establish the sister city relationship between Cary, North Carolina and Hsinchu City, Taiwan. Therefore, in 2005, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan awarded him the medal of “Diplomatic Friend,” while the Cary city government awarded him the “Foreign Citizenship Award” in 2009. In 2010, he negotiated with Zhenqiang Shi, who was deputy mayor of Xiangfan City, China, and performed the role of go-between to build the sister city relationship between Xiangfan City and Raleigh, which is the capital of North Carolina. In addition, he used to serve as the North Carolina representative of the United States Northeast Chinese Technology Institute for fifteen years. From Lao Wei’s point of view, “all roads lead to Rome” and socializing is not only work but also fun. So apart from stock and real estate investments, his biggest interest is making friends. “To be acquainted with the gifted of the world, it is a great pleasure.” This is Lao Wei’s philosophy for making friends. He never hesitated when his help was needed under the belief that the more you give, the more you get. Also, he never cares about how much he devoted. In the process of serving the community, Lao Wei has established many good relationships with many politicians of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, such as former Republican Senator Jesse Helms, who served as Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Erskine Bowles, White House chief of staff during the Clinton era; Congressman David Price, former Congressman Bob Etheridge, as well as many local governors, state legislators, mayors and city councilors.



Lao Wei with the late Senator Jesse Helms. Lao Wei with former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles.



Lao Wei with NC State Senator Harris Blake (left), Governor Pat McCrory (center-right), and Cathy Kimball (far right).

He always lends a warm hand to others who need help, no matter whether the person is a local Chinese or an American politician. Thus, Lao Wei was dubbed the “Chinese mayor” by the people of Cary, North Carolina. He always says that he has done what he could, and he has no regrets.

Enjoys retired life, reside work in life



Lao Wei with his grandchildren.

Lao Wei has a happy family. His wife is virtuous, and he has a daughter and a son. Now, three grandsons and a granddaughter have joined in the family. When mentioning family, Lao Wei will smile and say that there is an indissoluble bond between IBM and all his family members. His wife Gao Xiuqiong, who is diligent and intelligent, is a good and faithful helpmate of Lao Wei. She worked in IBM for 25 years and received an attractive pension. She has a wide range of hobbies, with Peking Opera and Mahjong being her favorite, and she chaired the Triangle Area Peking Opera Association in North Carolina. His daughter Shiny, who inherited her father's social talent, was a former president of the Asian Student Association at her college and now works as a Senior Manager at IBM. His son Addi loves Chinese culture and learned Chinese kungfu. He was a great helper to Lao Wei in his career. He worked as a marketing specialist at IBM after graduation and now works as a project manager at Siemens.

The ancients said: At thirty, I had my feet planted firmly upon the ground. At forty, I was no longer suffering from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with a docile ear. At seventy, I can follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired has materialized.

Currently Lao Wei is enjoying his 60s and approaching his 70s. Eleven years ago, he had three unfinished wishes. The first one was to build the Chinatown in North Carolina, the second was to build a bank for the local Chinese community, and the third one was to build a "Chinese Center." Up until now, his last wish has come true. The "Chinese Center" in North Carolina has been completed, which has greatly facilitated Sino-American economic, trade and cultural exchanges. Since Chinatown is currently under construction now, Lao Wei said he feels much pleasure about the project and expects to witness its completion.

Even in his later years, he still has great aspirations. Lao Wei said he has no intention of retiring and now he has three new wishes: he needs to (1) take good care of his health as he gets older, (2) continue developing his own career in real estate and stock market investment and let them prosper, and (3) sponsor more scholarships to the schools that he has attended, including Taiwan Normal University, Pennsylvania State University, and No.1 Middle School in his ancestral home of Yanling Town, Hunan Province, in the hopes of helping more ambitious students achieve their dreams.

On the track of life, Lao Wei never fails to charge forwards, never resting and rusting.

Renowned quotation: Today, we take pride in the United States of America;

Tomorrow, the USA will take pride in us.