INTERVIEW WITH MING GU

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KEK: Hi, this is Karen Kalnins and I’m a reference librarian at the Oklahoma City University Law Library and today is Thursday, April 2nd, 2009 and I am here at the Oklahoma City University Law Library with, today with Mr. Ming Gu. He is a professor here and also the Assistant Director of International Programs for the Oklahoma City University Law School. Ming, what is your exact title?

MG: Assistant Director of International Programs.

KEK: Okay, very good, so I got that correct. This interview is part of the broader oral history project that the Oklahoma City University Law Library is sponsoring. As a part of that project we are going throughout the state of Oklahoma and interviewing attorneys and judges about the Oklahoma courts and about their experiences. So, welcome Ming.

MG: Thank you.

KEK: Thank you so much, I was so pleased when you agreed to this interview.

MG: It’s an honor.

KEK: Great. Well, what drew you to the legal profession?

MG: Well, assuming though I’m also a graduate of OCU Meinders School of Business, on its Tianjian Campus, China, the Chinese campus. Since 1986 OCU School of Business has a very successful program in Tianjian, China. And so I attended that program from 1993 to ’95 and got my M.B.A. degree from that program. One of the courses in that program is legal environments. It’s a combination of various introductory subjects in law. And the professor at that time, I would say instructor at that time, Mr. Gary Michael Gray got me interested in law. Before that I did not have any decision made to pursue any legal degree, law degree.

KEK: Was anybody, is anybody in your family an attorney, back in China?

MG: Well, there is, there is one, it is my late uncle-in-law, my father’s elder brother and he used to be the Chief Justice in a district court in my home city. And he was one of the group of Chinese lawyers. I mean the first generation since the Communist Party of China took over in 1949. He encouraged me to study law. After I decided to do that, after 1995.

KEK: And what kind of steps did you take to prepare yourself to go to law school?

MG: Okay, I will tell you a little bit about my conversation with Gary Michael Gray, my instructor in the M.B.A. legal course. I was so fascinated by his lectures, even though it was only ten days long. However, I think I was the top, the number one student in that class. I do
have a solid business background since I had a business degree from the Chinese University. When he explained all the concepts of international business transactions like letters of credit, bills of lading, invoices, they were nothing new to me. However, I think his lectures and also the textbook that we studied, brought things together. So, at the end of his final lecture, I came to his desk and said, “Professor, I would like to study law in the United States.” As a lawyer himself he said, “I think it’s a correct decision.” I said, “How can I do that?” He said, “You have to take the LSAT.” I said, “What is an LSAT?” He said, “L-S-A-T.” I said, “I have never heard about that.” Then that’s the end of that conversation. Of course I talked with several Chinese law professors and they did not know in 1995 anything about the LSAT. There was no preparation course in China. But I told Professor Gray that there was no such thing class-wise or textbook, study guide wise for the LSAT in China. He sent me a Barron’s study guide, that was the only book I relied on for the LSAT. At that time, the LSAT, back in 1996, was only administered once a year in China, in Beijing. I checked the situation over there, it’s twice a year now, June and December. So, at that time, there was only the December test. So, I prepared for one month because I was working full-time as a government economist. It’s a very demanding job. And I took the LSAT. There were about 60 to 70 test takers at that time. And about ten of them, I could see, were foreigners. And the one who was sitting next to me was an American language teacher teaching in Beijing at that time. So, that was the LSAT part.

KEK: Wow, that just sounds incredible. How long did you, where were you living at the time and how long did you have to travel to get to Beijing for the test?

MG: At that time I was living in Tianjin, working for the Chinese government. And now we have a bullet train, only 30 minutes apart, at that time it was an hour and 40 minutes by train.

KEK: So, a pretty long trip. I mean, not days long but still, a pretty long trip to Beijing. Do you think that you had prepared enough with that one Barron’s book?

MG: At that time my daughter was two years old. So, I had to take leave from my busy work, stay in my room, and ask my wife to take my daughter to my grandmother’s house just for a few days so that I can study because I have to pace myself during our tests.

KEK: Exactly. What made you want to apply to and want to go to law school in the United States versus in China? Why go to law school here?

MG: As I mentioned, I have a business background and I taught business English. Correspondence, how to write a proper business letter, and business negotiations. All those courses I taught were in English. Of course I was an effective member of the staff training center of Tianjin Municipal Government Agency. They were business persons engaged in international trade. So, I was training them. So, I simply, after those courses with Professor Gary Gray, I believe I need something to enhance my understanding of the legal aspects of the business world. At that time, since I already obtained my M.B.A. degree from OCU, and worked for the Chinese government as an economist, I think it would be wonderful for me to have a law
degree, at least some training and combine the two so that I can be better positioned to do future business transactions. That was the starting point.

**KEK:** And do you, can you talk about the differences in legal education between China and the United States?

**MG:** At that time that was not an issue because I did not have any idea about what a Chinese legal education was. However, after working for OCU for some time in its international programs with Nankai University, one of the most prestigious law schools in China, I came to realize the difference. In China, it’s primarily lectures. It’s the professor who will speak all the time. There are some questions and answers between the students and the faculty members. However, not as much as we have in the states. And the Socratic method is not used in most of the Chinese schools if not at all. So, as a comparison between the two systems, the Chinese legal education system and the U.S. legal education system, very different.

**KEK:** Absolutely. Okay, so let’s go back to you, so you took the LSAT and what were your results?

**MG:** The results were not that impressive. And to answer your question more directly or one of your earlier questions, I don’t think I was fully prepared however, that was all the time I was given. So, I just took that because without that, nobody would consider my applications. I did apply to many law schools after that. Of course my professor, Gary Gray, wrote letters for me. I applied to Harvard, to Yale, all the big names because Professor Gray said, “As a foreigner, they may make exceptions,” so I just tried. And one of the other things is by applying to so many law schools, I don’t think the Chinese government at that time would subsidize my studies so I needed a scholarship definitely, I could not get a loan in China at that time. Nowadays I can, if I paid the loans later with some kind of work. But at that time, it was very restrictive so I must have scholarships to attend a U.S. law school. There were three law schools that accepted me at that time. OCU was one of them, another one was West Virginia, and another one was, I forget, it was somewhere in Texas. And West Virginia offered me a half scholarship, OCU gave me a full scholarship maybe because I was the first Chinese law student at OCU at that time and I scored very high in my M.B.A. program. So, I think that’s, not because of my score, even though it’s not that bad, it’s not one of the top ones I would say. So, OCU President at that time gave me the international student scholarship. So, of course with much pleasure, I accepted this scholarship. That is why I could afford to come to OCU Law School.

**KEK:** Well, wonderful, wonderful, and when, what year did you start law school here?

**MG:** I came here in August, 1998. I was one week late because my visa application was denied twice by the U.S. Counsel at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. So, it took me some time to get that straightened out. And there was quite a story with that and I think that I would like to share that with you.
KEK: Please do, I would be very interested in hearing that.

MG: Even with the scholarship from OCU, I got a full scholarship; I still had to put in money for my living expenses however, that was a very generous one at that time. I applied for a visa, a student visa with the U.S. embassy in Beijing and they denied me in the first try. I asked them the reason and they did not say. Now I know, they need to give a reason. So, I was just blank at that time when they said, “No, your application is denied.” So, I just returned home. Then I tried that the following day because I know I need to be at OCU ahead of time and I was late already. And the second time there was a lady at the counsel who said, “We cannot give you the visa.” But this time I talked with some friends, American friends, they told me, “Ask for her name and ask for her reason.” I did and she jotted down something like 214, something like that. Of course, I did not have any clue. She gave me that paper and said that was the reason. Okay, so common reason, “Immigration inclination.” That means once I come to the states, study, and get my degree, I will stay here forever to become a citizen or towards this direction. But with that sheet of information I went to my American friends who said it’s a crime against the United States government for you not to come to the states to study law because you do have ambition. And he pulled some strings by talking with one of the members of the Rockefeller family and also the U.S. Senator Dale Bumpers who was President Clinton’s counsel after the Clinton incident. And Senator Bumpers wrote a letter to the U.S. Counsel demanding an explanation. As a U.S. Senator, their inquiries must be replied to. So, he got an answer and the Senator, through my U.S. friend told me that all I can do…… And then Doctor Blue Clark who was then Executive Vice-President of OCU who met me at my graduation ceremony in China and also at Oklahoma City University; I did travel to come here to get the diplomas as a student representative from my whole class because of my academic performance. So, he talked with the Section Chief of the U.S. Embassy, visa section and they gave me a reply. They just called my home, at that time I did not have a cell phone. Cell phones were not popular at that time in China, very expensive. So, they called my home through the secretary they said, “Come to Beijing tomorrow morning at 9:00 o’clock, we cannot wait for you if you are late, even one minute and bring 3,000 U.S. dollars, cash.” I talked with my business friends and they said, “Ming, we cannot get 3,000 dollars U.S. cash.” I received a call in the late afternoon around 4:40, I still remember that. My father told me later on in that evening and then one of my friends, who was very helpful, decided to travel with me to Beijing to borrow money from his friend in Beijing or from his U.S. dollars account. So, we did that, we traveled to Beijing at 6 o’clock and the bank would not be open until 9 o’clock so we pulled strings to get the money anyway, that’s a long story. We jumped into our taxi and rushed to the U.S. Embassy. And I showed up at 9 o’clock sharp fortunately. And then, the Section Chief Dennis Helping, I still thank him for doing that. He opened a window, it was a small window, he showed up and said, “Are you Ming Gu?” I said, “Yes, Dr. Blue Clark asked me to show up at this date and I received a call from your secretary.” He said, “Yes, I know that.” I gave him my application and then that 3,000 U.S. dollars in the envelope he said, “What is that?” I said, “Well, that is the 3,000 U.S. dollars your secretary asked for.” And he said, “I don’t know about that.” I said,
“Okay.” Then he says, “Approved.” They gave me a green sheet, that means approved, come back tomorrow because it’s not same day service. I was so happy I turned to call my friend who was waiting beyond the line, and then when I turned to the Section Chief he disappeared. He just disappeared. I still had the money.

KEK: Right, you had the money and you had the green sheet.

MG: So, my application was approved. Then my friend treated me to Pizza Hut. At that time I thought, just looking back on that, that 3,000 dollars was just an excuse. Nobody wants the money at the embassy, it’s just an excuse that, “Oh, you’re short of money, we have to ask you to show your capabilities to pay for your living expenses.” So, they have to find a reason.

KEK: So, you think they asked for the 3,000 dollars just to see if you had the…..

MG: The money.

KEK: The money.

MG: The money to support myself even though 3,000 dollars, even nowadays, is nothing. They just want to find an excuse for that. Of course I don’t mind. Just looking back on that…… and then Dr. Blue Clark told me after I came back, after I was at OCU that the Section Chief left the post, left the position the following day. He was transferred to another foreign service position somewhere in the world. So, I was very fortunate and OCU helped me so much. Even though, it was Dr. Blue Clark who was personally involved in that. He wrote numerous letters to the U.S. embassy to try to get their attention and persuade them that this is a good student and he will return to China.

KEK: That is just amazing, what an amazing story. Is that pretty common, or was that pretty common back at this point, back in ’98?

MG: The visa application situation in China nowadays for Chinese students whether they’re law students or non-law students is much, much better. But, back in 1998, I think I was one of the most fortunate ones because denials of your applications for U.S. visas were so common at that time, you expected that. You had to try at least one more time to get it even though you have a full scholarship.

KEK: And that just wasn’t enough for the United States, enough of a guarantee, even if you had a position, like you had here at OCU and you had a full scholarship, that was not a guarantee for them?

MG: That’s true, even for PhD candidates. Of course at that time there were very, very few Chinese students who apply for U.S. law schools. I think it is still true nowadays because it is prohibitively high in cost and also the LSAT is one of the biggest hurdles.
KEK: Right, right. Well, tell me about your experience at OCU once you got here. What did you think of the school and what were your experiences like?

MG: As I mentioned, I was late for one week. And I showed up at one class, just knocked on the door and would like to get in because I got a wrong time, my watch was still on China time. So, I was messing up this however, I managed to get into the afternoon class. At that time my English was more British accent because when I was a language major, English language major in a Chinese university most of my professors were not Americans. Even the Chinese professors, they were trained in the British English. So, I had some difficulties in understanding our professors’ lectures just because of the choice of words and also the accents, the American accents. I still remember one instance Professor Barry Johnson, at that time he was Associate Professor, he taught us torts. One word repeated itself so many times during one lecture. It’s inquiry, inquiry. I did not know what it was and finally I got the courage, it took me quite a while to gather my courage to talk with an American law professor. And I said, “Professor, what do you mean by inquiry?” He said, “Well, this is this.” He spelled it out and I said, “Oh, inquiry.” He said, “Yes.” And I said, “Okay, now I know.” It’s just one of those instances. However, since I was an English major before and I had an M.B.A. degree from OCU by attending the Tianjin campus program for 18 months, a little bit longer if you add up the administrative time and the preparation course. So, English was not an issue after a while. Just the accents, the choice of words, and still I think, I could not get enough sleep. Of course at the same time I was missing my two-year old daughter, my wife, my family. So, the first semester was very tough for me. Of course, it is tough for everybody.

KEK: Yeah, but I think it sounds like you had an especially difficult time because you’re coming from a different country. So, you have the whole issue of culture shock and the language and you’re away from your family. How did you deal with some of those challenges?

MG: Well, I was told by being the first law student from China we have a few others ahead of me, a few years ahead of me, from Taiwan so I think, “I must survive, I must survive.” Just think of my applications for the LSAT, for the law school, it took me more than two years. So, I think, “I must survive by adhering to patience and perseverance.” I think those two elements got me so far and I must study hard just for my family and for the scholarship so that it can be renewed the following year.

KEK: Right, right. Now did OCU help you out with any kind of tutoring, did you have help in that sense? Or, were you able to meet one on one with professors?

MG: Yes, OCU gave me a lot of support as a foreign student. My professor who was in charge of, I was in Section I, was Professor Hatamyer. She was teaching us civil procedure 1 and 2 and she noticed that I had difficulties understanding some of the idiosyncrasies so she asked me all the time, “Ming, could you understand this? Could you understand that?” If I did not quite understand a few points, she was very patient and she sat down with me in her office and
explained those things to me. Of course several of the LRW professors did the same thing and that helped me greatly. At least they showed I was not alone in fighting this uphill battle.

**KEK:** That’s right, that’s right. And how about making connections to the community, and finding friends here, what was that like for you?

**MG:** At that time I was the only mainland Chinese student here and also we had one student, female, from Taiwan. But she was in Section II so there was not so much communication, interaction between us. We had different professors most of the time. As far as the OCU community is concerned, of course I was car-less, I didn’t have a car at that time. So, I was not so mobile. I stayed near campus, lived in an apartment. There are more Chinese students in the School of Business, computer science, but I did not interact with them that much simply because I did not have time.

**KEK:** Now, during your three years at OCU going to law school, was your family ever able to visit you here or were you able to go back to China to see them?

**MG:** We were given, well, any foreign students were given, especially Chinese students, were given a two entry visa. However, the visa was only valid for three months, it expired. So, in order to get back to China first I had to consider the tickets and then the visa, whether I could come back or not. There was always the risk they would deny you again on various grounds. So, I did not venture out. Also, I could not afford to come there. So, I encouraged my wife and….

**KEK:** I think we’ll go ahead and take a break now Ming, and then we’ll continue on then.

**KEK:** Hi, this is Karen Kalnins again, I’m a reference librarian at the Oklahoma City University Law Library and this will be the second half of the interview with Mr. Ming Gu. He is the Assistant Director of International Programs here at the Oklahoma City University Law School. And, in the first half of the interview, Ming talked about how he became to become interested in the law and how he came to OCU. And I guess Ming now I wanted to ask you, we sort of broke off while you were talking about your family. Did they have a chance to visit you while you were here going to law school?

**MG:** They did not because my wife was working full-time as an engineer in an Australian company in Tianjin, my home city. And my daughter at that time was attending our daycare center, and I was busy studying here so there was no travel at all.

**KEK:** Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that. Now, when did you graduate from law school?

**MG:** I have to add something to your question. My wife and daughter did come a year later to join me.

**KEK:** Wonderful.
MG: So, I was here alone for one year, two semesters. And they joined me in June 1999.

KEK: And, did they join you to stay or did they join you for a visit?

MG: They stayed with me. My wife quit that job because I like Chinese food so my wife was preparing Chinese food for me. Of course my daughter was able to go to our daycare center here; of course my wife could not work so she just stayed at home taking care of us.

KEK: Wonderful. What was that like to have your wife back after being apart for a year?

MG: Of course I was very happy that our family was reunited and that makes my cooking part less burdensome. And at first I think I should do everything but eating less, eating not Chinese food actually later on they found out that American diet was very fattening for some of them so I got a little bit bigger by not exercising regularly and by sitting there studying all the time, by not eating Chinese food, I believe too that’s part of the reason. And it was quite a happy time.

KEK: It sounds like it. Did she have any kind of problems getting a visa to come here to the United States? Did she face any of the challenges that you did?

MG: Another interesting story because I prepared all the documents for them and I sent the originals back home so that they could come because in the U.S. immigration law there was a, I believe it’s still there, a provision that family members to join you so that’s one of the best ways to get a U.S. visa, a family reunion. So, my daughter got a visa without any problem, it’s F-2, dependent, but my wife got, for some reason, a B-1 which is a short-term stay even though she applied for F-2, dependent. After she came back to her office, the American manager said, “Well, that was not F-2, dependent, that was a B-1.” B-1 can only allow you to stay in the States for less than 30 days, 60 days at most. My wife was surprised so they called the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. Embassy said, “Yes, we made a mistake, you did apply for an F-2, a dependent visa, please come back tomorrow.” So, my wife did. Took that day off and came to the U.S. Embassy and got her visa in the right form. However, she was never compensated for her time and also for her travel expenses. But still she was happy that she got the visa, she could stay longer. I still cannot figure out why the U.S. Embassy did that.

KEK: I don’t know, it’s hard to say with the U.S. Embassy and with the bureaucracy I think it’s, you just never know. So, what year did you graduate from OCU Law School?


KEK: And what was that feeling like for you, that graduation?

MG: I took that very calmly because as my wife reminded me now, right after the graduation when I returned the robe to the cashier because it was on loan to us, I found myself back at the law library, studying for the bar examination or just wanting to be a student again; that kind of feeling because I was so used to that. Of course I got an award from the student body at the law
school. That certificate says, “The only person that you can find after 11 o’clock in the law library.” And I was that person. Of course it should be before 11 o’clock. I studied hard, tried to survive, and tried to be on the same footing with native speakers so to speak since I’m not a native speaker.

**KEK:** What would you say to someone who was not a native speaker of English; coming from wherever in the world, what kind of advice would you give them if they wanted to come to law school?

**MG:** To be a U.S. law student or to survive in your first semester, you have to have very satisfactory proficiency in the English language and that’s a must. Of course I had that qualification or competency when I came here and if you don’t have that ability or competency; it’s very hard for you to catch up with all the lectures even if your understanding is perfect. However, it takes time to build up your language skills so I would advise future law students from overseas just be very good with your English first.

**KEK:** Good advice, good advice Ming. What were your plans after law school? You said after you turned in your robe, you came back here to the library because you had to study for the bar exam. So, first obviously you were taking the bar exam. And did you know what you wanted to do after that?

**MG:** My original plan to come to the States to study law with the scholarship was I would return right after my graduation. At that time I did not know I had to take any bar examination to become a U.S. lawyer. I’m not interested in becoming a lawyer at that time because what I would like to do is just the training so that I can be a better business instructor, business person back in China. However, after some thought in my first semester I thought it would be in my best interest to take the bar exam even though that was a bigger hurdle than law school to me, as I later found out. But still, I would like to return to China because I would like the U.S. Counsel even though I don’t know their names, I forgot their names, to prove myself that what I told them in the interviews for the U.S. visas was true and it’s unchanged. I would like to return to China.

**KEK:** So, you wanted to return just to prove yourself that you were not going to stay here.

**MG:** Yes. However, I tested the job market for a while, just out of curiosity. And I was accepted by two companies, Kerr-McGee and also at that time, Phillips Petroleum because I became interested in the energy sector. One of the reasons is Tianjin is a city with a lot of offshore drilling and Oklahoma City of course is one of the energy centers in the United States at least. So, I think that’s a good combination. That’s why I interviewed with those two companies. And the other reason may be more important, is those two energy companies, at that time, had China offices. Both of them were in Beijing and they were training offshore, near Tianjin because as I mentioned, I always want to come back and that’s a perfect match. And I got interviews from their counsel in Beijing through telephone. However, the reason I declined the offers is Kerr-McGee would like me to relocate to Houston but my prime focus was the
Beijing office. Kerr-McGee, they said, “You have to be trained in Houston for a while.” I don’t think that’s a good choice for me and also Conoco Phillips would like me to report to duty at the end of the year. And of course my son was on the way. So, we thought that we had better stay here. But anyway, I took the bar examination in the following February 2002 and I passed that so I became a lawyer I believe on April 19, 2002. Of course at that time I was working part-time for my previous employer, The Beard Company. It used to be called the Beard Allyer (?) because they do have a China office. It took me quite some time to find that job.

KEK: And what kinds of things did you do for the Beard Company?

MG: On a part-time basis, before I took the bar examination, translation, consulting work on their China business development because I used to work for the Chinese government as an economist. My major responsibilities for the Chinese job were to help overseas companies locate lucrative business opportunities, investment opportunities in my home city. So, consulting was not new to me even though it was for the government, I got paid by the Chinese government. So, I was able to do that for the Beard Company providing our consulting work to them. So, translations, interpretations, and also consulting on their business plans on a part-time basis, I was taking care of my wife and also preparing for the bar. Of course I joined the Beard Company officially on a full-time basis in March, before the bar results were out.

KEK: Wonderful. And did you stay with them after you got your bar results?

MG: Yes, I stayed with them. As the corporate counsel I was the only lawyer with that company.

KEK: So, what kinds of things did you get to do once you passed the bar exam, once you became an actual attorney?

MG: We are a public company. And so I was busy with some initial securities law issues. However, we have our outside counsel taking care of that because the Beard Company has been there since 1921 so it’s quite an established company. But my main focus was to help its China business so I studied lots of Chinese laws and regulations because it changed while I was at OCU Law School pursuing my J.D. degree. However, it was not that difficult for me to pick it up and I maintain contacts with my business friends in Tianjin so that I can keep myself up to date with what is really happening in China at that time.

KEK: What kinds of changes did you notice in the laws and the regulations in China while you were over here in the states? What did you notice, what kinds of differences?

MG: As far as laws, I focus on FDI, Foreign Direct Investment Law, it is more open. It is still changing, but it is changing for the better, more open, more transparent, more favorable to our overseas investors and business persons. Of course nowadays China is a full member in the …… (?) organizations like national treatment. There’s a lot of favorable elements in that. So, I
would say our laws are changing for the better, more favorable to the outside, foreign business persons doing business in China.

KEK: What do you say to those people that might criticize China for allowing, let’s say for being against the environment or against workers’ rights, those kinds of things? I realize that you’re not working in China now but you’re an expert on those laws so what would you have to say?

MG: I’m on daily communication with my Chinese contacts, business persons either for OCU or for other clients. So, I know pretty precisely what is really going on there. Before I answer your question I would like to share with you one story. As a first year law student I did not have a car. So, my Chinese friend drove me to a downtown shop, and we were just window shopping at that time. And we ended up in a very upscale clothing store and so we just looked at the fabrics. A lady, an American lady came to us and asked, “How can I help you?” I said, “Nothing, we’re just looking and walking around.” She asked, “Where are you from?” We told her we were from China. And she said, “Oh China, oh, you have a lot of human rights issues, this….” At that time she did not mention the environmental issues just the whole human rights issues. And this or that, she started going down a laundry list of so-called issues. I was not happy with that. I was not on the defensive however I was not happy because I did not know her, and so I told her, “Well, ma’am nobody’s perfect, and no country is perfect.” So, back to your question, I would like to say the same thing, nobody or no person is perfect. And I do realize there are issues with the Chinese policies, environmental protection issues, however I think the current administration in China is moving in the right direction.

KEK: It certainly seems to be and just the Beijing Olympics that we had last summer were amazing, so….So, how long were you with the Beard Company?

MG: I was with the Beard Company from October 2001 to, I left the Beard Company last June and officially joined the OCU Law School in June, 2008. So, almost six years.

KEK: What made you make the switch from working for a private company to coming back here to OCU to an academic setting?

MG: Okay, I thought that I would like to be a teacher but not on a full-time basis. I don’t think I’m ready for a professor’s position. However, as a teacher for ten years myself back in China, I thought that I was familiar with this academic environment. Of course, my father was a retired professor in Chinese history and Chinese languages. So, in my family, in my wife’s family we’re not short of teachers and professors. And, before I joined OCU officially, I helped the law school open doors in China for the past three years, since 2005. So, the programs are like my own babies. So, I was very pleased that it was growing. So, by the time I joined OCU we had three study abroad programs in Tianjin’s Nankai University already, and very successful. So, I see much more hope to create change at that time.
KEK: It definitely sounds like it. How were you able to open doors for OCU in China?

MG: Okay, I was born, grew up, and educated primarily in Tianjin, it is my hometown. And by being a previous teacher, the higher learning institutions were nothing new to me. So, I had a lot of contacts back in Tianjin. Even during my law school studies, I maintained very close communication channels, if I can say that, with all my business contacts. Family members of course in Tianjin and elsewhere in China. So, when Dean Hellman would like to do a program in China, I was able to help using my contacts and also what is more important is over the years by working for the Beard Company and also for other clients, I was able to keep abreast with what is really going on in China. So, you really need that understanding in addition to your contacts to get things done in a foreign country. By foreign country I mean China, just in comparison with the United States. And people may say, “Ming, you have been here for so many years, almost a decade, eleven years this August and you must be forgetting something or what is going on in China.” However, that was not true because I have traveled to China so often.

KEK: How often now do you go back and forth between Oklahoma City and China?

MG: I would say two or three times a year. Sometimes for OCU, sometimes for my own clients. Of course there are some personal reasons to go too because my parents and my wife’s family is still there.

KEK: How important do you think that networking and those contacts are in China to do anything, either to do business, to set up any kind of international exchange program like OCU has done? How important is it to have somebody there like you, such as yourself, who understands all that?

MG: I think the cultures in a business environment and interpersonal relationships are quite different. Of course they are different elsewhere too but when you compare the United States version and the Chinese version, they are, as the Chinese say, heaven and land, that’s a bigger difference. I’m saying that not in a derogatory meaning. I will say that things in China are good or practices in the United States are bad, no, I’m not saying that. But, if you really want to do things in a foreign country, in a certain region, you have to understand thoroughly its cultures, its business background, most importantly, how people get to know each other. Here in the states, my feelings are that it is quite easy to get acquainted with each other. However, you may forget one another pretty quickly too. But in China it takes lots of time to build that kind of acquaintance. You just cannot say, “Oh, I met you today so we are friends.” No, you cannot say that. You may say that but nobody will believe you. It takes a long, long, time to build up to the relationship but it’s mutual trust. If you are comfortable with them, and they are comfortable with you, so that’s quite different from the United States. And people do things indirectly in China like elsewhere in the world but here people are more direct. I’m just amazed by the plastic glasses or Styrofoam glasses you get from 7-11, I never shop over there. It’s huge, it says,
“Gulp,” or something like that. But in China it’s a smaller one so I made this comparison because here it seems to me, I’m generalizing of course, people would like to get satisfied immediately. But in China, step-by-step, you have to do things step-by-step. You can drink that much however, you may be choking, you may be feeling uncomfortable. So, I think that might be a good comparison, very step-by-step, very slow but steady. You will get there. So that’s why I come back to my two elements for future law students. Patience and perseverance will get you anywhere.

KEK: Absolutely, absolutely. Well, good advice. Do you think that most Americans who are working in China or trying to start businesses in China, do you think that they understand that?

MG: I will give you an example without naming one of my closest friends. He is an American, he is from Rhode Island, he has been working in the greater China region-Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong, Beijing, mainland China since 1988. He can speak very good Chinese. At one time I was his personal tutor because we are good friends. And he was a general manager for a very famous, multi-national company in Tianjin, also in Beijing. It’s a foodstuff, food processing company. And, many people believe and I believe that too, he is a China hand (?). He knows China so well, speaks the language, has been immersed in Chinese society for so long. However, when he was dealing with one issue he was not quite understanding the Chinese government. He found a Chinese law firm, of course he needs to pay them to sue the Chinese government and I asked him, “Why did you do that?” He said, “That’s the American way.” Well, you are in China. He said, “I just cannot bear that anymore.” I said, “Well, you just have to, patience and perseverance, you come a long way.” Of course he was asked to leave that post by his home office because he offended many people by suing the Chinese government. If I were him, I would tell him, “Okay, you can talk with people and just be patient, if you cannot do that, you can ask somebody else to do that.” That’s not a bigger issue, it’s misunderstanding. However, if you sue somebody in China that’s…… In China we say it’s quite another issue that’s a very polite way to say thanks in China and that means you got into big trouble.

KEK: How important are the courts in China, I mean in terms of civil litigation? Everybody says oh here in the United States, we’re all sue crazy; we’re suing everybody all the time. Is the same type of thing happening in China or not so much?

MG: We are getting there I believe. Because nowadays if you have a dispute, even a smaller one over a trifle, you may hear the other party say, “Talk with my lawyer.” And that never happened in China twenty years ago but it’s happening nowadays and people are suing people. However, that’s not the mainstream. We still would like to talk one out of trouble instead of force one to accept a judgement, verdict. That’s still not the mainstream because we, the Chinese people, many people in the southeast Asian region, are heavily influenced by Confucianism, Confucian ideas so we don’t like litigation because personally I think litigation is not the only means to solve problems because unlike in the States if you sue somebody and you “get things done,” if I can use that term, you can still talk with each other. And people may say,
“Oh, it’s commonplace, that’s the business environment here.” However, if you sue somebody in China, you burn the bridge. You burn the bridge definitely; it’s very hard to keep the business relationship. However, if you use mediation or even arbitration, keep it as less disruptive as possible, so far as your business relations are concerned, it’s much preferred and I would like to do things like that. Peacefully.

**KEK:** Yeah, it sounds like that might be more effective.

**MG:** Yes, it is, I think so.

**KEK:** Well, tell me about your job responsibilities here as the Assistant Director of International Programs, what kinds of things do you get to do?

**MG:** Even though I office at the Law School, I have responsibilities on a university-wide basis because in addition to my law school responsibilities that include keeping and promoting international programs particularly the Tianjin, Nankai University program, and also our Tianjin Bar Association program. This year we will add one more university, Tianjin University of Finance and Economics and that’s my law school job. In addition to that, I help the School of Business and also the School of Music with their China efforts. So, as I mentioned, I office here but my responsibilities are more broadly based.

**KEK:** So, you have a pretty full plate of responsibilities it sounds like.

**MG:** I think so, and the things on the plate are getting bigger. I’m pleased with that because that’s good for the university, for the individual school, and also for the two countries as well as for the peoples in those two countries.

**KEK:** How do you think that international programs like the ones here at OCU at the law school and the ones you’re trying to develop with the business school and the music school, how do you think those kinds of programs help the relationships between countries? Say between the U.S. and China, do you think that they have any sort of effects at all?

**MG:** Well, first I think positive things are happening if students from one country travel to another and stay there for some time. I am a living example of this exchange because before I came to the States, I heard a lot of things about the United States. Oh, what you have to do in the States, the United States, first, according to the stories, the roads are paved, at least in New York City, are paved with gold nuggets. What you have to do is to bend down and pick them up. Of course that’s not true. However, there are lots of things floating around somewhere if you’re not there. Like the students from, since I was Assistant Director for our law school’s programming in Tianjin, I would like to give you an example. One of the American students who studied in our first year program went to the farmer’s market and bought something. And when he paid that, he said “Ming, did they offer me a lower price because I was American?” I said, “On the contrary, you were overcharged, you should talk with me first.” He said, “Why?” I said, “You
come from afar, you don’t know the landscape, usually it happens anywhere. It’s hotel prices, or this price, or street price.” He said, “Even for that Ming, I think I underpaid him.” I said, “Why?” He said, “It’s unbelievably low.” I said, “Do you think the price is low?” He said, “Unbelievably low.” I said, “Why do you think that?” He said, “Oh, it’s in the U.S. news, anti-dumping, China was dumping its goods in the United States.” Hearing that, he said, “Well, I think you believe that but after I came here I saw in the first place, with my own eyes, things were much, much less expensive than I thought. So, that’s why I was asking you, even though you told me I was overcharged because I’m a foreigner.” I said, “That’s the case.” By and by they came to realize, “Okay, at least for those prices it’s not bogus, it’s real.” It’s real. So, that’s a small lesson for a big subject. And I think they came to love the country. Of course, whether they love it or hate it, it’s their personal choice. However, my responsibilities were to show them around and let them interact with the real people and touch the real things and look at China with their own eyes and see if it’s true or not. I think they came to understand, “Okay, those two countries need to work together.” And they do see people’s optimism in China and they think the country is moving in the right direction and of course that is also my belief. I just want to show them this is the case and they sensed that themselves. So, back to your question, I think it’s helpful for students from different countries to visit each other. And if possible, stay there for a while and understand the local culture, business background, and more importantly, what do the locals think about their countries? And their friends’ countries? And I think there are still lots of misunderstandings, miscommunications between the Chinese people and the people in the United States. Only because they have never been there before. What they were told was A, B, C, but actually it’s E, F, G.

**KEK:** That’s right, that’s right. So, why would you recommend to somebody, either a Chinese student to come to the United States for a while or why would you recommend that an American student go to some sort of program in China? Why do you think that that is such a good thing?

**MG:** Of course I’m biased since I am from China and I’ve been to the Chinese programs for, this will be my fourth year this summer so I’m pretty confident that there will be another good group and there will be good results. However, in addition to China I would encourage our students just to go overseas to see what is really happening over there, especially what people there are thinking about, how the world is going. It’s important for me, if I was not given the opportunity to come to the States, I may be better off, I may be worse off, I don’t know. However, by being here and seeing the true nature of a country and listen to and watch what the local people have to say; even though I may not like what they told me but that’s fine, I want to hear that in the first place. I think true and genuine communication, interaction, is critical to our people, especially between our two countries because the United States is the number one superpower. China is a country on the rise, at least economically. So, there is no reason that our two peoples in our two countries cannot get along with each other. And to share with you another story, the U.S. friend who helped me to come here at least partially. Of course Dr. Blue Clark of OCU helped me greatly. He said, “Ming, once you are in the States,” of course at that
time we were in China, in Tianjin talking about my forthcoming trip to the States back in 1998; he said, “Once you are in the States you will know that we are human beings too.” Even though our skin color might be different, however, actually what we think to make our life easier, to make our life better, so that our children and our grandchildren can enjoy the world in a better way so I think you will be amazed that this is universally true.” I did not understand that, I said, “Well, they are different, just look at their visual features, they’re different, so they must be thinking differently.” However, after a few years at law school and working in a company, I have to agree with that friend. We are human beings, we think alike, even though we may look differently. So, human nature.

**KEK:** Absolutely, absolutely. What kinds of things do you think you’ve learned by coming here to the United States?

**MG:** Of course the overwhelming reason for me to come here is for that law training. And then subsequently the law degree and I enjoyed that very much. It helped me so much, it’s like learning a foreign language. For me, it is a foreign language but it’s foreign, foreign, language. I liked that experience and I think without being here, it should be a regret, even though my destination is still China. Don’t get me wrong, I will prove again to the U.S. Counsel that they are wrong, they are wrong. I’m still a Chinese citizen by the way; I’m just staying here on a professional arrangement. My experience here, work-wise, education-wise, helped me understand this country better and that’s because I always want to be a bridge between those two countries, if I can say that, and also, those two peoples. Without understanding the host country thoroughly, I cannot achieve my goal by being a good ambassador, bridge. So, I’m eternally grateful to OCU, to all the people who have helped me to become a good law student, to become a lawyer, and in general, a better person. So, I think it’s very helpful. That’s why I encourage other Chinese students whenever possible to consider studying law and try to go overseas especially to the United States. To answer your question more directly I think I’m better trained in business or in business law than I was ten years ago.

**KEK:** Well Ming, is there something that you want to talk about that I have not asked you? Or is there something that you want to say that I have not asked you about?

**MG:** I think your inquiries are very complete. I have nothing to add, thank you.

**KEK:** Well, very good, thank you. I know that we’re over our hour here so thank you so much for being so gracious with your time. I really, I’ve learned a great deal from this interview so thank you. So, thanks again.

**MG:** Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

**KEK:** Great, thanks.