

Interview with Dr. Steven Shu - By Timothy Pan



Youth Columnist Interview

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Why did you decide to pursue medicine?
I asked,

Dr. Shu's father, a fisherman, was involved in a terrible accident while fishing and had to have his leg amputated below the right knee. This was a 'very traumatizing experience' for the young Dr. Shu, but it planted 'seeds in his heart' that maybe someday, he could help people like his dad.

'Whatever happens in China...' his father said: 'someone will always be sick. Any path, any destiny, people will always be sick and need help.'

'Culturally, China and America are very different. Western culture is based on Christianity; people help each other, emphasizing serving the collective regardless of background. Chinese culture is family-oriented, and there is a lot less care for people they don't know.'

When Dr. Shu first came to the US, he spent 15 years supporting the local Chinese community- he established four nonprofits, published newspapers, and even started a free weekend clinic for newly immigrated Chinese without insurance.

But it's the second half of his work in the United States that he wanted to emphasize instead: His work abroad on medical missions to the poorest places in the world.



On his first trip to Haiti ten years ago, he performed vasectomies with an American physician team. During his work, he saw that due to poor living conditions, many men had horribly large hydroceles- 'buckets and buckets, 3000cc, 5000cc...'

'I felt painful when I saw this. I almost cried, and I prayed: Lord, if I can go back to the US, if I can organize a mission organization, bring physicians to help them, this would be wonderful.'

Since 2017, he has visited Haiti 15 times and performed over 500 surgeries.

He claims that he is an 'Ordinary surgeon'. Google says that he is a 'Miracle worker.' Who is Dr. Steven Shu?
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What surprised me the most about my interview with Dr. Shu was not just his humbleness, but the profound message that he had to share with me and the rest of the world.

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'This kind of joy is deep in your heart, because you see each surgery totally change this patient's life. By contributing your time, effort, money- yes, it is a lot of contributions, but it is not only joy that you feel, but you are helping yourself at the same time. Ralph Emerson said: 'No man can sincerely help another without helping himself.'

He continued on: community service work is also helping the Chinese community as a whole.

I agree with him that there is a very real and negative stereotype about Chinese people: Work hard, buy a big house and an expensive car, and send the kids to Ivy League schools... **'That's all that they say Chinese people can do!'** Dr. Shu said. **'But no! Chinese people can have loving hearts and help each other, the community, and the poor people in the world.'**

'You can still have a good life!' Dr. Shu added. **'You need to use your talents-** God uses people. He uses me for my surgical skill, and I do not deny that because I can use it to help more people more efficiently and effectively.'

'It is good to get ahead in life, but it isn't the meaning of life. The meaning of life is broader than that.'

When I asked Dr. Shu about a failure or regret in his life,

I was expecting to hear about a project that failed, or even a story about the pain and hardship of his patients, but his reply was completely unexpected. but was one of the most moving things I have ever heard:

'It has been 20 years since I started in 2003,' he began, 'one thing that really bothers me- makes me guilty, is my family and kids. I've spent so much time and energy on work and on my missions, **I feel that I didn't spend enough time with my wife and especially my three kids.** I always feel bad, in some ways I feel like I failed. I try to make up for my absence, but it is always a challenge balancing career, service, and family.'

'If I could start again, I hope that I could have balanced a little bit better.'

As I prepare to leave for college, I look back on my relationship with my own family and can draw similar conclusions.

This seems to be a problem that a lot of Chinese families have: the relationship between the parents and the children is based on respect and progress, not love and understanding.



Dr. Shu is correct that balancing work in arguably the most demanding career in the world and raising children is a tremendous challenge, and nobody can possibly be perfect. But as a youth myself I can say that even a small genuine attempt at connection at a younger age, building friendship instead of only respect, will make bonds that last a lifetime.



In terms of future plans, Dr Shu revealed that he has one particular goal he would like to achieve. 'I want to visit all 63 of the national parks, I have 20 to go,' he said excitedly. As an avid photographer and backpacker, he likes exploring the outdoors and especially intense hiking and camping for several days. He also wants to visit as many countries as he can, expanding his mission programs and hoping to connect with the greater Chinese community around the world.

'You will see lots of different people all around the world,' he described, 'Your view is opened when you experience new things. If you stay in one place, your view is very narrow.'

I asked Dr. Shu for

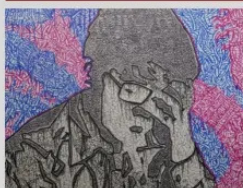
any advice he would give young people like me:

Dr. Shu has high hopes for the second generation of Chinese Americans. We don't have the culture and language barrier that our parents had to overcome, and our opportunities are more varied and our trajectories more promising. He is not worried about how much we study; his advice is not to study harder or more. **His advice is to be curious and not be afraid of new things.**

'Aim your target a bit higher. If God touches your heart, listen.'

He added a crucial piece of advice from earlier:

'All your material accomplishments are tools. They are not the meaning of life. They make things more convenient and easier, but they are only tools, not the final goal.'



Timothy Pan (17) insta: timithtablesalt Senior - Hanford High School

I agree with Dr. Shu that you should try as many things as possible! My hobbies range from sewing and fine arts to Boy Scouting and competitive robotics.