**Transcript of Interview with Jim Yong Kim**

Eun Yang: Hi everyone, and thanks again to James Yang for that wonderful animation – it as delightful to see and we can get some more thoughts from our other honorees today about that animation. We are honored here today to be joined by Dr. Jim Kim, President of the World Bank, who needs no introduction. We’re going to get a little bit of insight into his life and his career, especially how it relates to our community to how to address the challenge for future generations, which is part of the theme for today’s Korean American Day. So, Dr. Kim, it’s so nice to see you and I love the little chat we had beforehand…he’s a foodie!! He watches my foodie show! So, I’m so proud and excited. He watches the news too, obviously, because of his job. But I love that we share an affinity for food. That’s terrific. So let’s get right into it.

Number one, what inspired you to a career first in medicine and public health?

**Jim Kim:** I’ve always liked science, but we came to this country when I was five years old and I grew up in Iowa – and for the Koreans in the audience, Iowa is what you call *“Ahjusshi”* (Korean for: older man) world, right? It’s really isolated, but it’s a fantastic place to grow up, we loved growing up there. But it was very clear to us that we were minorities.

My father was a dentist, and dentists are one of the most practical people in the world, and my mother is a philosopher – maybe one of the least most practical people in the world. So, I had these two influences, and my mother, from a very young age, told us about Martin Luther King, and I remember watching Martin Luther King, and I remember the assassination.

She tried, in the middle of Iowa, to keep aware of some of the greatest social issues. So that was my concern, I wanted to be a social activist, I wanted to go into politics – those were the things that were the most exciting to me, and I remember – and I told this story before, so if people have heard it, I apologize. After my sophomore year, I came home and my father picked me up from the airport and we were driving home, and he said, “So what are you going to study?” And I said, “Well, I think I really want to study philosophy and political science.” So, my practical father dentist pulled the car over to the side of the road, he looked back at me, and he said the equivalent to me, at the time, *“Yah Iima*.” (Korean for: Hey, you punk.) And he said, “Hey look, buddy,” he quite literally said, “Once you finish your internship in business, you can do anything you want.”

So, what a great opportunity for me that I had this incredibly practical father and he didn’t say it this way, he said, “Look, you’re a minority. You look at yourself in the mirror. You are going to have to have a real skill, you’re not going to be able to get by in society by talking – you are a minority and you are going to need something practical.” And I will forever be grateful to him for doing that, because the work that I do now, you know you can study economic development – and I was really inspired by the piece by Eugene, you can read development theory, you can think about the importance of financial markets and all of that, but as a physician, going as I have, and working in Haiti and Peru, you actually see poverty and how it’s condensed into the bodies of people. The people who have turberculosis don’t have it because they happen to be uniquely susceptible, they have it because they are poor. In so many ways, HIV runs along the fault lines of society, meaning it was the most poor and the most volumized who were getting infected. So, as a physician, I had a skill, which was great, but also I got to sort of understand poverty and equality in quite literally a crippling way. When you see how inequality and poverty becomes embodied in people’s illnesses, it made me very happy to be a physician, but also gave me a deep sense that I had to do more than just treating people

Eun Yang: And then, that experience in public health was a natural progression into international development for you?

Jim Kim: Yes, for the past almost thirty years now I’ve been working on global development, and mostly on health, but also on education, social protection and developing programs that will support people. I’ve also being teaching and doing research. I’ve been doing all those different things and just completely out of the blue I just had an unbelievable opportunity to go to the World Bank.

Eun Yang: Can I just go back to something you had mentioned your father said to you and how it relates to this generation. You said your father said that as a minority you have to have a skill, in 2013, how does that relate to this generation that wants to make a difference? Does that still apply? And then how, to our young children, who feel very American, who understand they have Korean heritage, would you feel that this country is theirs as much as anyone else’s.

Jim Kim: I think it’s changed enormously. When our parents came here, it seemed so clear that you had to be an engineer, you had to get your Ph.D., you had to go to law school, you had to do something. My father said it exactly this way, you have to have something that no one can take away from you. But I think it’s different now, I see young people – Korean Americans, who are leading positions in investment banks, in private equity, doing foodie shows and being lead anchors. I think the world has changed a lot, and so my advice is really quite differnet from what my father gave me. What I tell people is that the most important thing is that you find something that you can be really passionate about, “Oh my gosh, I can’t believe I get to wake up every morning and do this.” Because that’s now how the world has changed and I think it’s fantastic that the world has changed in that way.

I have chosen to work in an area where the whole point is to try and give people more choices. This is the biggest thing that you see around poverty, that people that live in terrible situations of poverty really don’t have any choices. So, now that so many Korean Americans have choices, what I tell them is to make the most use of them. I still think it’s useful to get some kind of skill where you can actually contribute something, I think that’s useful. But it’s also important to be able to do something you like.

Eun Yang: And you’ve been able to offer some choices with your career path. You were the first Asian American president of an Ivy League University as the President of Dartmouth, and then you transitioned into this kind of job where you can literally change the world. What was that transition like: going from Dartmouth to the World Bank, and not necessarily to similar fields?

Jim Kim: It was hard, it was a tough decision. I still wear my Dartmouth tie. I love that institution and it was a job that I had to be in for a long time, university presidencies are not short term jobs. But I’ll tell you this story, at this point since he’s retiring I can tell you this story. Tim Geithner is a Dartmouth grad, as was Hank Lawson before him, so all the good and the bad in the American economy is being created by Dartmouth (?). But I have to tell you, they are two very different people, they are just extraordinary individuals.

I got a call from Tim, and it was the very week that they were going to make the announcement of the next person that was going to head the World Bank. And Tim, when he usually calls me it’s usually because he has a friend that he wants to put in a good world for to get into Dartmouth. But he said, “Would you be interested in being President of the World Bank?” And just about my jaw dropped, “You mean THE World Bank?” And he said, “Yeah.” And I saidm “Well, I don’t mean to suspend my life’s work, I have a great job, if this is a possibility I have to look at it.” So he said, “Can you come down and see the President?” And I said, “Sure, yeah, when?“ And he said, “How about tomorrow?”

So, it was a Monday, and I was actually nominated on that Friday. So, it happened very, very quickly. And if you think about it, it means I was pretty far down the list for choices. I’m being honest and humble about the reality of the situation. But my goodness, what an opportunity. And to tell you a little story: that morning, that Friday morning, we were sitting in the office looking out, about to walk out into the rose garden. It was President Obama, Secretary Clinton who had originally nominated me, Secretary Geithner, who was very supportive. And it was just incredible sitting in this room. And President Obama said to me, “So, how’s your family dealing with this?” So, I said, “Well, it’s very much of a surprise and the only person who’s having some real trouble with it is my eleven year old son, Thomas.” And so President Obama said, “Does he have a nickname?” I said, “Yeah, we call him TJ.” “Where can I reach him later today if I wanted to call him?” So I gave him my wife’s cellphone number and we went out and did the ceremony, and then I sent my wife a text saying ‘President Obama said that he might call to speak with TJ later today.’ She texted me back, ‘Yeah, right.’ So, about six o’clock that evening, my wife is driving down the road and the phone call came up, and it said ‘Unknown.’ So she just pushed it and handed it back to TJ. And President Obama’s secretary comes on and they said, “This is the President’s Office, can you take a call from President Obama?” And here’s my eleven year old kid saying, “Uh…uh, sure, yeah...” So he called and we were like, “Well, Thomas, come on, he’s the President of the United States, he doesn’t have to do this.” He was asking, “How’s school? What do you like in school?” and he has a daughter around the same age, so he talked about them a lot, and he said ,”Thomas, I know you feel bad about this, but your father’s going to do a lot of good things, so I guess I owe you one.” So my son spent the rest of the weekend thinking about what he could ask for. So, he came up with things like a ride in the armored car, but I think the best idea was that he was going to ask if he could have a birthday party on Air Force One. Ain’t happening.

And I had worked with President Clinton before met Secretary Clinton many times, and Geithner was a Dartmouth grad so I knew them really well. Just many unthinkable events coming together to lead to me having this responsibility.

But think about it, we have the most important development institution, we are about a fifty billion dollar a year institution, and we are working on the most fundamental issues for ending poverty, and what we call boosting shared prosperity. The thing that people want more than anything else is a good job, we know that the future of funding global health programs and the future of funding education programs is that economies grow and people have good jobs. We know that that’s the case and we work with so many countries throughout the world in tackling these fundamental issues. So, at the World Bank we tackle issues like health, and education, social protection programs, and climate change. Because if we don’t get on top of climate change, all the efforts we made for ending poverty would be for nothing.

So we get to work on all these things, and in addition we get to work with all these countries to create growth and dynamism in their private sector.

Jim Wolfenstein (SP?), who is a very good friend and the former President of the World Bank, when I as nominated I called him right away and he said, “You know Jim, Robert McNamara told me that the World Bank presidency is honestly the best job in the world and even if you had to pay to be in the job, you would have done it.” Well, McNamara, and Wolenstein, they have a lot more resources than I do, so I’m very happy to be paid to do this job. But Jim Wolfenstein said the same thing, he said, “It’s the best job on earth” and I have to say at this point, I completely agree.

Eun Yang: You mentioned some of the issues you were talking about, do you see those as the greatest global development challenges so far in your tenure there?

Jim Kim: Well, right now we’re still in the middle of a really difficult economic situation. Growth is not as quick as we’ve expected. One of the good things though is that the developing middle income countries have grown quite nicely. Latin America has been growing quite well and has been recovering quickly, and one of the great untold stories is that Africa is growing at about a five percent rate throughout this crisis, and so there are lots of bright spots.

I think that we are involved in this every day, we are watching what’s happening in Europe, what’s happening here. The stability of the global economy is a huge issue and it always will be for us because when the rich world sneezes, everyone in the whole world gets the flu. We are watching very carefully because the worse things get, the worse it will be, especially for the poor. So we do watch that.

I’m very concerned with climate change, I mean if you saw the New York Times article today that these extreme weather events continue. The evidence is overwhelming that climate change is real, that man-made climate change is real, and I don’t think that people understand what the implications are.

So the most important way for me to illustrate it that if we don’t meet our emissions targets, if we don’t get on top of the climate change issue, a two degree plus world could happen as soon as 2060. So in 2060 my three year old son will be my age, and he’ll be living in a world where the oceans have acidified, where the fisheries won’t be reliable, these extreme weather events will be happening all of the time, there will be enormous struggles over basic access for water and food – it will be a world that looks completely different from the world we live today. And the point is, many have said that we’re already past the threshold, it’s going to look like that, but what we believe that the World Bank, along with many partners, environmental organizations, the awareness of this issue is very high in Europe, it’s very high in China. I was just in China, and they have made a lot of carbon, but they are very focused on moving towards renewable energy. We can get on top of it, but the thing that I want to make clear to everybody is that if you have a three year old child, or you have a three year old grandchild, what you’ve got to understand is that if we don’t act aggressively on climate change, the world that they live in will be daily fights over access to water, daily fights over access to food, it will not look like the world that we live in today.

So, for us, when we talk about shared prosperity, what we know is that if you build societies with a lot of economic growth, but it doesn’t include young people for example, you get things like the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was fundamentally about inclusion, about participation. So there’s no simple answer. Just having a growing economy doesn’t assure you of a functioning successful society. You gotta include people, especially young people.

The other thing we know, is that if you don’t include women in economic development, you’re not going to have a stable path toward growth. The participation of women in economic development is critical.

But the biggest issue about shared prosperity is that we have to share our prosperity with future generations. So at the World Bank we talk about ending poverty and building shared prosperity. Those are the two things that we work on. And so, issues are interrelated, but the stability of the economic environment, climate change, and all of those implications have to get us thinking, not just about today, but what’s it going to take to build prosperity for the medium and the long term, and for our children and our grand children.

Eun Yang: I have a four year old, so to think about that is really chilling, for sure. You did tell us a little bit about your parents, were there any other critical moments or times in your life, or influences in your life, that shaped who you are, and your career path, that you could share with us? And that could also translate into advice for people who are trying to accomplish some of the goals that you’ve planned out here. It may be on the level that they are working, or for the future as well.

Jim Kim: There’s no simple answer, but let me try to just relate some of my experiences. I think that one of the things that I’ve done again and again in the different environments and different projects that I’ve taken on, is that I’ve tried to be really rigorous about asking, “Well, why can’t we do that?” It’s just a simple question, ‘Why can’t we do that?’ and in so many of the organizations I work in, I come in they say, “Well you can’t do that” and I say, “Why?” and they said, “Well, we’ve never done it that way.” And I keep asking questions. At Dartmouth I would ask, “Well is it against New Hampshire law to do it a different way?” and as long as it’s not… It’s the same question that I’m asking around the World Bank, and they say, “Well it takes too long,” “Well, why does it take too long?”

We’re trying to figure out exactly why we’re slow when we’re slow, because when we’re facing an emergency situation, like Haiti or Ache, we’ve gotten things done in a fraction of the time. Instead of eighteen months we’ve gotten everything done in weeks to months. So I think it’s really important to have extremely high aspirations in anything that you’re doing and it’s better, I have found, rather than focusing in on…for example a lot of energists come in and try to re-organize this organizational chart and single processes, but I think it’s really important to know why you’re doing what you’re doing and then take that and do that backwards. At the World Bank we ask, “Why do we do what do?” I’ve asked the walked around the entire institution in Washington and many country offices and I’ve asked the question, “Well, why are you here and what do you want to do?” And the World Bank is full of unbelievably qualified people but when you scratch a little bit they are there because they have a passion to fight poverty. And that passion to fight poverty may not have been something they were thinking every day as they’ve been there thirty years, but if you scratch a little bit, it’s there.

“So we have a passion to fight poverty, okay, what’s the vision?” “End poverty, build shared prosperity.” “How do we go about doing that?” “Well, one of the processes is that the processes are too cumbersome.” “Okay, we’re going to change that.” And we’re going to keep going at it until we change it because the goal has to be to actually end poverty.

And so this is the goal that I’ve set for the team, and it’s great, again, to see Eugene’s work. What I’ve told him is what would it take to end poverty, absolute poverty, in much less time than we’re thinking about? And I ask the question; “Well what do you think it’s going to take?” “Well, if we’re going the way we’re going right now it’s going to take 25 years.” So my question, again, is, “What would it take to end poverty in ten years? What would we have to do differently if we were to end poverty in ten years?”

So, once you have a really compelling goal, everything else falls into place. And the things that people thought they could never do, well they think, “If that’s the goal, then we never to figure out how to get there.” So, set really high aspirations and then figure out how to get there as you go along.

Eun Yang: Thank you Dr. Kim.