

David Ho: AIDS Researcher

Dr. David Ho is a world-renowned physician, researcher, and virologist, and an immigrant. He originally moved from Taiwan to the United States in the sixth grade, reuniting with his father. His father, too, was an academic, having moved from the mainland to Taiwan as a teacher even before the communist upheaval of China. His mother, on the other hand, was born in a Taiwanese village, Tazhong. Dr. Ho was born in that very village, a small town in Central Taiwan. Today, Tazhong is the third largest city in Taiwan. In Taiwan, he remembers the education system to be very competitive, distilling in him a sense of academic curiosity and drive even from a young age (Moyers).

Dr. Ho describes his father as a role model, an immigrant who left for the United States to pursue academia and who eventually became an engineer. An uncle on his mother's side also followed the same path, reinforcing within him the value of schooling and a rigorous education. Then in 1957, two Chinese scientists won the Nobel Prize, a major achievement that inspired Dr. Ho, still a child at the time, to follow in their footsteps.

After being separated from his father for almost eight years, Dr. Ho, his mother, and his younger brother finally joined him in California in 1965, where he had to assimilate not only to a foreign country and a foreign language but also a foreign culture. They entered America at a period of increasing social change- the Vietnam War, Civil Rights movements, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The dynamic was one filled with joy and hope of liberation and the radical rethinking of social structures. An undercurrent of anti-Asian sentiments, however, spoiled the scene.

In the 1850s, many Chinese workers came to the United States in pursuit of opportunities awarded by the California Gold rush. They left China in hopes of a better future, escaping the

economic turmoil of the Taiping Rebellion. After the Gold Rush ended, many Chinese immigrants remained, opening up restaurants, laundry shops, and grocery stores in pockets around California. In the 1860s, Chinese laborers were one of the largest groups responsible for the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. However, White Americans grew wary of this immigrant population. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first anti-immigration law in the United States, banned Chinese laborers from entering the United States. This legislation was motivated by the scapegoating of Chinese workers for declining wages, job losses, and economic troubles. Despite only composing 0.002% of the American population at the time, Chinese workers were shunned, mocked, and verbally and physically attacked as a result. The law was originally set to only repeal Chinese immigration for ten years; however, in 1892, California congressman Thomas J. Geary signed into law the Geary Act, which reinforced and extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for another ten years. It also required current Chinese citizens to carry certificates of residence with them wherever they went. If found without this documentation, Chinese-Americans were subject to intense labor and deportation and were only allowed bail if spoken for by a “credible white witness.” Even the U.S. Supreme Court upheld these movements: the 1854 *People v. Hall* case maintained that the Chinese, along with African Americans and Native Americans, were not allowed to testify in court. Moreover, the *Fong Yue Ting v. United States* case of 1893 upheld the Geary Act, limiting Chinese immigration (Gray and Supreme Court of the United States). In 1902, Chinese immigration was permanently banned by congress. The Chinese Exclusion Act was not repealed until 1943, when Congress decided to instead establish an immigrant quota of 105 visas awarded to Chinese individuals each year (Field and Supreme Court of the United States). In 1965, the year that Dr. Ho and his family

reunited in the United States, a new law repealed the original quotas for non-European immigrants.

To come to the United States, Dr. Ho and his family had to deal with these discriminatory policies placed upon Chinese-Americans during this period, as well as the resulting xenophobia that followed. Not only that, learning a new language and having to assimilate to an entirely new culture was also difficult: “in Taiwan one does not learn English until you get to middle school,” Ho says. “we had absolutely no exposure to the language. We did not know the alphabet. So we started from step one” (Moyers). Because of his language difficulties, Ho was known as the “dummy of the class,” and was teased by his classmates. He was viewed as an outsider, even later in his adult life. Ho describes the feeling as “a certain attitude that I think is somewhat pervasive that an Asian face is automatically non-American” (Moyers).

Despite the challenges of familial separation, language and cultural assimilation, and bullying, Dr. Ho managed to find his own place to thrive in America. After completing a bachelor’s degree at Caltech and a MD program at the Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology, Dr. Ho began working as a resident at the Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles, California, where he first discovered evidence of what was later identified as the AIDS virus. Later, during the 1990s, Dr. Ho and his team conducted a series of human studies to determine HIV replication patterns in-vivo (Ho). His research helped provide a basis for an HIV treatment, combination antiretroviral therapy. This therapy, which he led the efforts towards, controls HIV replication in patients. Furthermore, Dr. Ho has led the development of preventative methods against the transmission of HIV, including several non-vaccine methods. For his work, Dr. Ho was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Bill Clinton in 2001. He was also named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year in 1996 (Time). Most importantly, Dr. Ho’s efforts

towards HIV/AIDS research and treatment have saved millions of lives, with the potential of aiding even more.

Both Dr. David Ho and Minori Yasui faced social discrimination and legal residency challenges in the United States. Despite these difficulties, they overcame the hardships and created legacies of their own. Their self-determination is inspiring and paves the way for even greater future change. In the spirit of Yasui's life and work, I hope to also advocate for social justice and the self-determination of immigrants and refugees. As the child of immigrants myself, I bear witness to the struggles of acceptance and acknowledging one's cultural heritage while living in a different country. To fight for Yasui's values and legacy of justice, liberation, and acceptance, I strive to work towards cultural preservation. To do this, I will work with peers in high school with the Oregon Chinese Coalition, an organization I am a part of, to continue outreach on sharing Asian cultures through performances and social media messaging. This would further Yasui's mentality of building bridges between individuals and communities by connecting individuals from all cultural groups to celebrate and share each other's culture. Additionally, having a place of community celebration would help newcomers to America feel safer and more integrated within the community. Furthermore, I would like to create a resources guide to share on various social media platforms to educate individuals about famous immigrants and refugees through history. This builds a bridge between historical stories and present. Hopefully, this project would inspire individuals to view immigration from a more positive lens while also encouraging people to fight for justice in their communities. It also encourages a culture of acceptance and welcoming towards immigrants and refugees, reducing the hostility that some individuals feel. Finally, another action I strive to uphold is to advocate for multilingual signs, messaging, and captions. This would reduce the stress of newcomers to

America by providing resources and information in an accessible way. One major challenge of moving to a new country is an inability to communicate, and I hope that having accessible signs will help assuage the pressure and danger this causes. In the spirit of Yasui's legacy, I also hope that this project will encourage all participants to consider issues from more diverse perspectives instead of a singular stance.

Both Dr. Ho and Minori Yasui embody the perseverance, will, and passionate spirit that characterizes many immigrant and refugee experiences. Their work inspires me to put forth these values as well and to characterize them in my daily life.

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