

# From Communist China to MCC president

## Opportunity knocked, Pan was able to answer

By Huan Vo

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Shouan Pan knows first-hand about what it means to live in a country where dreams of a better life are all but forbidden.

"In China, the condition's unlike the States, at least in those days, you are not as free to dream," said the Mesa Community College president, who never dreamed of making the journey that molded him into the head of the largest community college in the United States.

Pan was born into a fairly poor family in Anhui Province, China, in 1957. Nine years later, four Chinese Communist Party officials constituting the so-called Gang of Four assumed power and controlled the political organs of the Communist Party.

Because he had been educated by Chi-



Shouan Pan

nese Nationalists, Pan's father was labeled a threat to the Communist Party. He was fired from his job and exiled.

Under the Gang of Four, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination was made available exclusively to children from wealthy Communist families. That meant the door to higher education was closed to him, a child from a Nationalist family.

"I never had hope to go to college, never thought I could," Pan said. "Given my family situation, I would never have the chance."

As a result, he worked for two years on a farm after graduating from high school. Fortunately, the Gang of Four was denounced nationwide in 1976, and the entrance examination got reverted to what it used to be — open to the public.

"Because of that change, I was able to take the national entrance examination," Pan said. "I got decent grade and went to

college."

After graduating from Hefei Polytechnic University with a bachelor's degree in English, he was asked to teach at his college.

It was around the time that China became more open to international relations, and his school welcomed a visit from a representative from the University of Pittsburgh. After conveying his desire to further his education in the States to the representative, Pan got his wish: In 1985, he set foot in Pittsburgh for a yearlong exchange program.

As his program inched closer to its final day, Pan ran into a man who was recruiting undergraduate students for Colorado State University for a master's-level college student personnel administration program. Pan saved up money for the plane ticket and took the necessary tests. Not long after, his application was accepted.

"Sometimes opportunity knocks when you least expect it," Pan said. "We all in our lifetime run into various opportunities and different people. They can

create new paths, open new doors for you."

After graduating from Colorado State, Pan transferred to Iowa State University for his doctoral degree in higher education administration.

With a doctoral degree, Pan worked at a number of colleges and universities, including at Northern Arizona University and Community College of Philadelphia, and came to realize community college was his favorite setting.

So when the president's position at MCC became open in 2007, he gave it a shot.

"Part of me wanted to prove either to myself or Asians or Chinese, maybe we cannot only become good scientists, computer technicians, engineers, we can also run a college."

These days, Pan and the rest of his MCC team are trying to push the boundaries of what his students can accomplish and help them dream with as much freedom as they can.