

## Policy 360 – episode 132 - Dr. Jim Yong Kim transcript

Judith Kelley:

So my guest today has focused throughout his career on health, education and improving the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable. Dr. Jim Yong Kim is the former president of the World Bank and co-founder of the influential nonprofit, Partners in Health. He's received the MacArthur Genius Fellowship and was named one of Times magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. I'm Judith Kelley of the Sanford School of Public Policy. Welcome to Policy 360, Jim.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Thank you, Dean Kelly.

Judith Kelley:

And for our audience this might sound a little bit different today. We are sitting outside due to the pandemic, and it's a lovely day. We're going to talk global policy first. But before we do that, you told a really wonderful story at your TED talk about your father. He asked you about what your aspirations were. And aspirations was also a theme of your talk itself. So I wonder if you might recount that for our listeners. I think they would enjoy hearing that.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, my mother was a philosopher and she studied at Union Theological Seminary at a time when it was one of the most vibrant intellectual centers in the world. Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, some great Nordic thinkers of you which you probably know. And so she had always big ideas. She had us reading about Martin Luther King when we were in grade school. She wanted us to understand what the world looked like from a much bigger perspective. My father was a dentist, extremely practical. He was a refugee from North Korea, never saw his family after he left North Korea at the age of 19. So he was much more hard bitten in what he thought needed to happen. He was much more practical. So I had both the biggest ideas in the world the ideas of justice, ideas of eternity. Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr were two of the greatest thinkers at that time and she studied with him.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So when I first went to Brown I transferred to Brown you in my sophomore year, I came back from Brown and again, my head was just full of big ideas. That's what places like Duke and Brown do to you. It makes you think about, well, my gosh, the world is so big. And so he picked me up at the airport after my first semester and said, "Well, what do you think of doing?" I said, "Well, dad, I think I'm going to study politics and philosophy and become part of a political movement." And he literally pulled the car over to the side of the road. I mean, it was a highway, but it was a kind of Iowa rural highway so you could pull over the side of the road. And he looked back at me and said, "Look, when you finish your medical residency, you can study anything you want."

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And so he made it clear that, I mean, you can have all these big ideas, but be practical. And he used to say things to us like, "You're a Chinaman." And he used this kind of language [inaudible 00:02:57]. "You're a Chinaman. You think someone's going to pay you to listen to your ideas about philosophy and politics? Come on, you need a skill." So I'll always be very grateful to him. And I find myself saying similar things to students today. If you come to a problem with a set of skills that were hard won, that you really took the time to learn how to do things like treat illnesses or you're an engineer, or you have a

PhD in some important field, if you've done that work, then you have a very different conversation on the ground and also with the powers that be.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So I was very grateful Tim for doing that. But the idea of aspirations in general really struck me. Because in 1959, when I was born in Korea, Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. It was so poor that the World Bank refused to give loans to Korea because it just didn't think it could pay them back. And it had written about Korea that without a lot of aid over a long time, we didn't think there's hope for this country. And they really saw Korea as, quote, unquote, a basket case country. Now that I went from being born in one of the poorest countries in the world, the country that even the World Bank thought was a basket case country to being president of the World Bank I was especially alive to the aspirations of children and poor countries all over the world.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

In Africa during my time at the World Bank, everywhere I went, African leaders knew about the Korean development story. I remember Prime Minister Meles in Ethiopia was actually incredibly learned about the Korean development model and asking me about very specific Korean development programs and how he could create them in Ethiopia because they all knew the story, poorest country in the world after the war, became a global economic power. Without natural resources, without a natural industrial base. How did you do that? And so as I traveled the world, the thing that I saw so different from even 15 years before, or certainly 20 years before, is that the number of people who had access to a smartphone, not necessarily own a smartphone, but access to one, nearly everybody in the world.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Many, many more people had access to a smartphone that had access to clean water. And so everyone knew how everyone else lived. This was different, right? So no matter where you were, living in the poorest country, in the poorest village, if you had internet access, if you had broadband access, you could look on a phone and you could see how the wealthiest people in Denmark lived. And so what was happening, we were measuring it and seeing it at the World Bank, everyone's aspirations were going up. And so for me, as a person who went through that process, what could I do but celebrate that? And saying what a wonderful thing, everyone should be able to grow up and be the president of the World Bank. And I had a very specific incident. I went to Tanzania and as I often do, I went to a school. And this was 10 and 11 year olds, fifth or sixth graders.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And we talked and they were showing me what they were learning. And I asked a question, I said, "So what would you like to be when you grow up?" And three or four kids raised their hand. One of them, I said, I called on him and what would you like to be? President of the World Bank. And everybody laughed. And then a girl standing right goes me too. I want to be president of the World Bank. And all the teachers and my own staff laughed. And I stopped them. And I said, "Wait a minute. I said you laugh, but do you think if the president of the World Bank in 1962 came to my preschool in Korea trying to decide whether they should give Korea any loan at all because it was so backward, when he walked into my classroom, which he could have, do you think he would say my successor might be sitting in this very room? I don't think he would've. So please don't tell anybody in this room that they can't be president of the World Bank or secretary general of the United Nations."

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Our job is to make it possible so that everyone, if they work hard, if they take care of themselves, if they take care of the things that they need to take care of, everyone on this earth should have a chance to reach their aspirations. That's what we do at the World Bank Group. Now, of course, it's hard, right?

Judith Kelley:

It's hard. And you also, as you say, everybody can look at a phone and they can see how the rich people in Denmark are doing. And so one thing you've talked about too, and we know from happiness research too, is that our level of satisfaction is measured against those around us. And so this leads to frustrations potentially too, right?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Absolutely. And the World Bank has measured this, right? If the reference income, and usually people compare to their neighbors, right? But if your reference income goes up by 20%, your own income has to go up by a certain percent for you to remain happy. So we know that, and we know it can lead to problems, but this is why I think there is such intensity around building the kind of infrastructure that will allow countries to raise their people out of poverty. So we've learned a lot, Japan and Korea, China, Hong Kong and now Thailand, Vietnam. A lot of these countries are growing very rapidly.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And the pieces of it seem pretty clear. You need infrastructure, you need energy, you need transport, you need access to clean water. You need now digital infrastructure. We know that you need those things, but you also need investments in health and education. So the formula for lifting people out of poverty is not so mysterious anymore. If you look at China there's... Especially in this country, there's so many criticisms of China. But what I keep reminding people is China lifted 800 million people out of extreme poverty. In 1990, about 30 years ago, 70% of the population lived not in just poverty, in extreme poverty.

Judith Kelley:

I lived in China in the late '80s.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Did you really? Yes.

Judith Kelley:

I lived there. I remember staying in Tiananmen Square and not seeing a car. It's amazing.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So whatever else, the criticisms of China coming from a lot of different directions, you have to acknowledge that this was the most extraordinary accomplishment, I think, in human history. It's never happened in that shorter period of time. In 1990 to 2020, they went from 70% of people living in extreme poverty to almost nobody. And if you ask them, for them, the formula was pretty straightforward. Everyone has electricity, everyone has roads, everyone has access to education. Some form of healthcare, not the best at times. I worked very hard on trying to improve the healthcare system in China during my time at the World Bank Group. But those elements together, plus the opening up of

their economy. I mean, they had to embrace the global market capitalism in their own way, but they had to do that.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So now that what we've seen in China, it's not as necessarily replicable as we say in other places, but the pieces of what's required have become pretty clear with all these success stories around the world. And it's just absolutely natural that every country, every person wants that for their own countries. So it's what we spent all our time doing at the World Bank Group and now it's what I continue to do. I became convinced that there's just no way that aid dollars are going to build all the infrastructure that's needed in developing countries. We just have to have private sector investment. And it was so difficult to get private sector players to invest in infrastructure in the way that was needed that I left the bank and I'm doing that now in my day job, as it were.

Judith Kelley:

This is not in the script, but I feel like going off script a little bit, because when I lived in the China in the late '80s, I was there the year before and after the Tiananmen massacre. And I remember some very striking scenes of people protesting in the squares and everybody was riveted by the coming revolution. And then of course we had the crack down. And it was some months later I was able to get back in. And it struck me that now when I went to the market, it was... People were talking about the fact that they now had a refrigerator and it was in their living room.

Judith Kelley:

They would put the refrigerator in their living room because they were so proud of their refrigerator. And I really sense this, if we can't have democracy, give us capitalism. And now I'm wondering... Or at least give us riches, right? And now I'm wondering as we're seeing a fading or a retrenchment or a retreat of democracy that we've seen over the years, how do you think about the balancing between economic growth which at one point we thought would bring democracy, right? We thought that China would surely... The citizens would hunger for freedom and democracy once they were well enough equipped to of that information. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, I spent a lot of time in China, talked to in lots of people, including people in the government and people on the street, people in poor communities. It's hard to find, quote, unquote, poor communities now. I mean, they took me to some of the poorest provinces and still those poorest provinces had better airports than any in the United States, right? So the success in building, I think, very high quality infrastructure is really stunning. And I have to say, I didn't have the same feeling that a lot of people are caricaturing Chinese society to be. Oppressive, you can't say anything, you can't do any... That's not been my experience. And I think there have been a lot of growing pains in the process, but I don't think I fully understand just what happened. And let me put it this way.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So a great European leader who I won't name told us a story, a group of us, leaders of multi other institutions about conversations she had with President Xi. I already told you it a she, right? But there are many women leaders. And President Xi asked this leader, "How many people in your country?" And she gave them the number. And he said, "Very small province in China." And he said to her, "So tell me, how would you run a country of 1.4 billion people that 30 years ago had 70% living in extreme poverty,

that has a 2 million person army, that is constantly dealing with internal threats? How would you do it?" Right? And this great leader said to us quietly, it was a humbling moment. And I realized that the nature of his challenge is fundamentally different from any leader in Europe.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So I tend to look at China from an Asian perspective, right? As a Korean American growing up. Growing up in the '70s and '80s made in Japan was a joke. If you said made in Japan, everyone thought, that's why it broke, right? And young people today have no idea that made in Taiwan made in Korea, made in Japan, all were symbols of poor quality when we were growing up. And I grew up at a time when people used to say, "You better eat all your food, think of all the starving children in China," right? And so to go from then to where we are now is really quite stunning, right? And so I try not to sit back and be judgemental and say, "Well, what we really need is dumb democratic reforms."

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

I lived in a parliamentary democracy. I think it'd be very uncomfortable for me to live in any other kind of system. But what that leader told me about trying to understand the nature of the challenge that faces the Chinese president, I think it's important to keep that in mind. I mean, 1.4 billion people now, fastest growing economy in the world. China has literally been the source of anywhere from, I think, 30 to 60% of global growth. They're playing a hugely important role. With all the criticism, they're a very important role in Africa that is thought of very differently among African leaders than among China's critics, right? So it's just a reality that they're very soon going to be the largest economy in the world. And it's just a reality that they're now in a very strong leadership position. So I think the most important thing for Europe, for the United States for every other country is to figure out a way to have a useful, helpful, mutually beneficial relationship with China. I just don't think there's any way around it.

Judith Kelley:

Any alternative.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And I understand the critiques around democracy. Again, on a personal level, I would always insist on living in a parliamentary democracy. But when I went there, I was actually quite humbled to see what they had accomplished in such a short time. My mother went to China in 1982 and she came back and told the stories. You remember, right? Hard seat, hard bed, the way she traveled and the way that you were treated in stores, right? It was-

Judith Kelley:

Public toilets.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Public toilets.

Judith Kelley:

The only thing you could go to and it wasn't that private.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And when you went to a restaurant, all the chops were in a bowl in the middle. I mean, she told me all these stories. And then when I went there, I have to say it was emotional experience for me, right? Because you can say, yes, well, all these things have gotten better, but what about something else?

Judith Kelley:

Only heat on north of the Yangtze River in the wintertime's.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

That's right. That's right. And so going from there to where we are today, I try to remain very humble in the face of what is just an extraordinary accomplishment.

Judith Kelley:

Well, who can argue with humility? So you said that when you were finished in... Well, even before you were finished in college, you were swirling with many ideas in your head. And we face so many challenges now. So obviously you are in a position now where you are able to focus on many problems at one time. But how do young people decide where to focus their energies when there are so many challenges? How did you decide initially?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, Dean Kelly, I went to medical school and mostly because my father wanted me to. And I was accepted at several. The one that I really wanted to go to was the University of California at San Francisco. I was really interested in Asian American issues. And so San Francisco was the hotbed of sort of Asian American consciousness. And then when I got into Harvard, my father basically said, "Over my dead body will you go to University of California over Harvard." He was very traditional in that sense. And again, I'm just grateful to him for being so traditional. Because the opportunity I had at Harvard was to do my PhD in anthropology. And in many ways I have to say, I wasn't really very well qualified to get into that program, but it was the first year of the program and there weren't very many applicants.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So I got in and it was such a wonderful, wonderful experience. And that's really sort of looking around for and then grabbing opportunities that happen to fall in front of me. Saying yes to things that others might not say yes to because it seems like such a huge undertaking. I think that's sort of been my career. And the other part of it is that each time I changed my career or each time I did something new, I had to go back and go through the process of being an infant again. I mean, this is what anthropology is like really. It's the field where when you go into another culture, the process of learning the language and just beginning to understand why people are doing what they're doing and how they're thinking about what they're doing. I mean, you obviously had that experience in China as well, learning the language, et cetera. But that's been a good metaphor for my life. I've done that over and over and over again.

Judith Kelley:

You even talked earlier when you were together with us at lunchtime, about how that has informed your approach to investment now and how the company that you're working with now is approaching matters.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, I still don't know everything I should know about my new job. I'm still in the heavy learning phase. But for me, I think it's been very useful that I feel most alive when I'm tackling something completely new. I'm going back to being an infant in this particular realm and have to learn from the ground up. And it somehow now makes me feel like, I'm doing the right thing because I'm at a place where I feel over my head, I feel like I'm just barely surviving. The way that they describe it in medical training is they say, when you're... The clinical training starts in your third year and goes all the way through your fellowship, right? They say when you're a third year medical student, you feel like your nose is barely above water and you're just getting a breath every once in a while. And you fear you're going to drown.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

When you're a fourth year student, you feel like every once in a while, your eyes get above the water and you can see a little bit. When you're an intern, you feel like you can swim just a little. And then it goes on, the metaphor goes on. And so six different times in my life I've had that feeling where my nose just comes above water. Oh my God. How am I going to survive? And I can't say that I've mastered every one of those skills, but each thing that I took on so deeply informed how I look at everything, right? So my work in medicine, my work in anthropology, in Korea, in Asia, in Latin America, learning Spanish and working in Peru, doing academic leadership when I was president of Dartmouth.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And then the World Bank where I just had to learn about basically everything, infrastructure, education, arts. We were involved in everything. So I had to do deep dives in all these different areas. I think it's informed the way I look at things in a way that I'm just very grateful for. And I also think it's the reality that young people face. I mean, we call it the gig economy where young people don't feel uneasy about taking on a completely new job every three or four years. In the midst of all that, my strong advice to young people and it was great to talk to your students. It's just one of the most remarkable groups of students I've ever met. Just brilliant young people from Myanmar, from Vietnam, from Mongolia, from Korea, India, Afghanistan, and Columbia.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Those are the ones. I can I felt very lucky to be in that room with them. And to have them all around here and to be so wonderfully articulate about their concerns. What I told them too, was "Look, always try to pick up as many skills as you can." I told them, "Learn about economics and finance," right? Being a great macro economist who can do great modeling and utilize very sophisticated mathematical equations, not everyone's going to get there. But having a basic understanding of economics and finance, it is how the world works today. And even the leaders of the communist parties of China and Vietnam asked me constantly about how they could be more effective in competing in the global market capital system. It is the water we swim in, right? So learning something about that, I think is important. But if you can become an engineer, if you can become a medical doctor, a lawyer, if you can get a PhD in some field-

Judith Kelley:

Public policy.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Yeah. Public policy, build the skillset that you'd need so that when you come to a problem, you're bringing something, not just your interest, right? And then be prepared to take on new things. We don't

know what new things are going to come our way and you've got to be ready to learn from the ground up.

Judith Kelley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It sounds like there's a whole Dr. Kim philosophy of personal learning and growth here.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, I tend to be extremely optimistic about my ability to tackle these problems, which I'm usually far more optimistic than I am able and capable. But it's something that I've always said about optimism. People ask me all the time, you're sitting here facing global poverty, you're sitting here facing climate change, you're sitting here trying to think about what to do about some of the poorest communities in the world, how do you retain your optimism, right? And so what I always say is, look, when you're tackling something like poverty or healthcare in a really poor community, optimism is not the result of analysis, optimism is a moral choice. If you choose to be cynical, sarcastic, and pessimistic, you will probably achieve that outcome, right? So when you're going into a difficult situation, if you're not optimistic, if you're not constantly thinking there's got to be a way to have an impact here-

Judith Kelley:

It's the will to keep going.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

It's the will to keep going. Optimism is a moral choice. And I've seen so many people who get into these situations and just get overwhelmed by their own cynicism. There was a book written by the great Tracy Kidder, mostly about Paul Farmer, our beloved Paul, Duke alum, right? Duke class of 1982. And in that book, we worked with Tracy a lot. And then Tracy said something to me about optimism, right? He said, "When I see you and Paul and Ophelia and all the people who've Partners In Health grow, I just wonder, how do you guys remain so upbeat and optimistic when you're looking at such horrible things," right? He said, "I just have such a tendency to be cynical. But one thing I realized being around you guys is that cynicism is the last refuge of the coward."

Judith Kelley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Wow.

Judith Kelley:

Cynicism is the last refuge of the coward. I like that.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

If you're... Cynicism comes when you're afraid that you will not measure up and you will not be able to tackle the problems that you see in front of you.

Judith Kelley:

## Policy 360 – episode 132 - Dr. Jim Yong Kim transcript

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And by being cynical you Step away from the challenge.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

You excuse yourself, you excuse yourself.

Judith Kelley:

You step away from the challenge, right?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

You excuse yourself.

Judith Kelley:

And this speaks to something else, which... Because optimism is also about action. Because I don't know if you're familiar with Admiral Stockdale. And he has something called the Stockdale paradox. Admiral Stockdale was a war hero. He was in the Hanoi Hilton for seven years, tortured. And somebody asked him, "Well, who were the people that didn't get out?" Because he survived these seven years of torture and terrible time and was shut down and all those things. And he said, well, he said, "Well, that's easy. The optimist are the ones who didn't get out." But-

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Optimist were the ones who didn't get out.

Judith Kelley:

But he's just using a slightly different word for the same thing. So because the optimist were the ones who they just kept thinking that, by Easter, surely by Easter will be out. And then Easter would come and go and they were and get out. And they will say, well, surely by July 4th we'll get out. And then it would come and go and Halloween and on and on. And so they just kept sort of hoping and seeing dates pass. And finally they just died, he said, of a broken heart. And he said, for him, he doesn't use the word optimism for this, but the key was he said never to give up the firm belief that you would prevail in the end and to combine that with a realistic strategy for how to get there.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

That's so interesting.

Judith Kelley:

I think that's really interesting because... And I know that's what you mean when you say optimism, because we talked about that's the will to keep going, right? But it's also saying I am going to take steps that moves me towards somewhere.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, so there's a lot of different ideas that come to mind, right? So Carol Dweck, Carol Dweck is a great scholar of education at Stanford. And she came up with this idea of the fixed mindset versus the growth mindset. And she showed that in students that the students with a fixed mindset just collapsed every time they got a bad grade because they thought this is an indication Of how smart I am and obviously I'm not very smart. And the kids with a growth mindset said, "Well, I got a bad grade this time, but I can

do better on the next one," right? Now the most revolutionary thing she showed is that she could change students from having a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. And when she made that change, they did better. So that they weren't destroyed after every failure.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Which is I think what Admiral Stockdale was talking about, right? The people with a growth mindset that didn't get devastated after every failure were the ones who survived. Now, there's another... My mother gave me this book when I was in junior high and it was written by a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, a guy named Viktor Frankl. He was himself a psychologist. And the book was called Man's Search for Meaning. And he wrote in that book that the people who survived in the camps were the ones who had something to live for, right? Whether it was children, whether it was their own work and idea, and those who could continue to focus, not on the daily disappointments, but on the long term that when they got out there was something waiting, there was something meaningful.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

He turned that into a way of treating people. He called it logotherapy, meaning treatment basically, right? So I think they all come together, right? That finding meaning in life is extremely important. And there were a lot of young people who came and started working with us and just got burned out. It was just too hard for them, right?

Judith Kelley:

With us being, us being?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Partners in Health, Partners in Health. And the story of Paul Farmer, the way he was able to start this organization, treat these poor people, have just-

Judith Kelley:

Well, you started it together.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, but I mean, I was very different than Paul. I was not the person sitting in the clinic taking care of the sickest people. And that was how I survived and that was how I made my contribution. A few years in Paul said, "Jim, look, what you care more about is making change on a large scale. So go do that," right? And it was recognizing that we were different and that we had a different kind of psychological makeup. So that the things that excited us, the things that got us up in the morning and going were just different. Paul loved treating patients. And I was okay at treating patients, I wasn't as good as Paul. And I always had the overwhelming feeling that, oh God, there are other people who can do this better than me.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

But then I thought things like changing policy at WHO, managing the HIV unit at WHO, running large institutions, I thought those were the things that got me excited and going, right? So in other words, the key is that you've got to give yourself freedom to find meaning in your own way in whatever it is that you're taking on. So when I say optimism is a moral choice, I've always had optimism, but I've always

been lucky to not be in situations where every day I was doing something that was crushing my soul. And so a lot of young people think, I should do that. I should be like Paul. Well-

Judith Kelley:

The self sacrifice-

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Yes. I've only seen very few people who come anywhere close to having the kind of compassion and resilience and determination that Paul Farmer has. And we should all just be thankful for people like Paul Farmer, right? But if everyone tries to be like Paul Farmer, it could be the source of enormous misery, right? And so that's kind of been my role too. Said, "Look, don't think that because you can't do this or this or this, that you can't make a contribution. And therefore you can't go down the same path." There's so many ways to contribute. There are so many ways. Find the way that gives you the most meaning and optimism in your own life.

Judith Kelley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I want to ask you, so you've told us what gets you up in the morning, but what keeps you awake at night?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Our inability to really begin to face this issue of having to vaccinate everybody in the world, that keeps me up at night. But again, I'm optimistic. So-

Judith Kelley:

You think we can do it?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Well, I know we can do it. And the reason I know we can do it is that we did something very similar back in the early 2000s around treating people for HIV. So when we started treating people for HIV in Haiti, just about every single person in the global health community said impossible, not cost effective. I mean, some of my greatest heroes, some of the people who've made the biggest contributions financially and through their work to global health were saying it's impossible to treat HIV in Africa. And we thought, how can you say that? And I used to go giving talks saying if we let 25 million people in Africa die because we think it's too complicated, too expensive, too difficult, we will forever be remembered as the generation who stood by passively as essentially a genocide took place.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Just like the Germans who were alive during the pogroms. I mean, and they didn't live it down until the day they died. That they were there when that happened. I used to say that I used to say, this is what our generation will be remembered for. And we were going around yelling and screaming about this. But up until 2002, 2003, frankly, up until the moment that George W. Bush said, "We were going to treat people in Africa with HIV," 99.99999% percent of people said it's impossible, it's crazy, we can't treat HIV in Africa.

Judith Kelley:

So what do you think we need to do to vaccinate the world?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So once President Bush said that, then we had a license to try to figure out how to do it. There were so many obstacles, very similar to the obstacles we have today. So the drug companies were saying, "Well, we can't make these antiretroviral available in Africa. All these bad things will happen. You start getting generic versions, they're not going to be good quality." And so every time the pharmaceutical industry put up a barrier, I was at WHO we had to figure out a way to get past that barrier. So we said, "The WHO will take over the responsibility of doing quality assurance on drugs, made in India and China. And we will give messages to everybody about a specific companies and their drugs." We got the quality issue out of the way. Well, if you do it, then these generic drugs will leak back into the first world markets.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

They will ruin our markets. You won't have any more new drugs. And so we said, "We want you to know that that's almost never happened in history. We don't think it will happen this time, but we'll do everything we can monitor these drugs to make sure that that doesn't happen." Well... And they kept coming up with new excuses not to do it. But then when George Bush said, "No, we're going to do this and we're going to do this with generic drugs," that changed everything. So the system we set up at WHO to give information on the quality of these generic drugs, they set up system at the Food and Drug Administration, right? And they figured out a way to bring the costs down dramatically by using generic drugs. But there were other, but what about this and what about that? And what are the clinical protocols?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And just one after another We took them on and we figured it out. And now there are, I think, more than 25 million people on treatment for HIV in Africa. And I shudder to think what would've happened if we would've believed all the naysayers and let 25 million people die. I mean, I think those economies would've been in shambles. I think we would've been dealing with a much bigger problem. And now it's so different because treating people with HIV in Africa took an enormous act of compassion from George W. Bush who didn't have to do it. I mean, it didn't affect the US economy, but he did it. COVID affects the US economy, has affected it. And the only way to get on top of it is literally to vaccinate everybody with the strongest vaccines, the mRNA vaccines.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And that's how we get to what we call endemicity, where it's endemic and it's still around, but it just doesn't shut down economies, right? But we've got to get it for everybody. And it's totally doable. And we're facing the same arguments from the drug industry as we faced back then for HIV. And the message to them is we are so grateful that you made these vaccines and we want to protect every single one of your rich country markets. We guarantee you just like we did with HIV. Because there are still many new HIV drugs coming out. We will do everything we need to, to protect your first world markets. In fact, we will even make sure that for every vaccine that we make at lower cost and sent to developing countries, you'll get a chunk of that, right?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So you will make more money if you do this, right? And we'll figure out how to protect your intellectual property for the developed countries. And every new product you come out with and you have an

intellectual property for, we'll make sure that your ability to make money is protected, because we need you to continue to make new things, right? And so it's a bigger job than HIV because it's everybody on the planet, but I remain enormously optimistic that we can make it happen. Now, one of the things though that we've learned over the years is that there's only really one person and one office that can lead an effort like this. And it's the Office of The President of the United States. I mean we like to say, but Europe's important and Europe... It's true. It's all true.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

The European Union has become much more important. China has become much more important, but it still the case that without the leadership and direction from the Office of The President of the United States, it's really hard to do these things. And again, the blueprint is there. I mean, it's all right there waiting at a president's emergency plan for COVID. We could probably take PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and morph fit into something like that. President Biden and his top, top staff have to pay attention to it every day.

Judith Kelley:

And the cost benefit analysis is not even close.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

It's not even close. Even if we spent hundreds of billions of dollars a year on ensuring that everyone was vaccinated, Larry Summers, former secretary of the Treasury, former president of Harvard and David Cutler, brilliant health economist did a... They wrote a paper a year ago in November in the Journal of the American Medical Association saying the cost to the United States of COVID is going to be \$16 trillion.

Judith Kelley:

And that's just the United States.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

That's just the US, right? And that comes from the budget office on lost productivity. It starts with 7.6 trillion just of lost productivity because of COVID. And then it goes into things like the number of people who were suffering from anxiety and depression went from 11% on average in normal times to 40%. And I think it's even higher now, right? Things all have a cost. So spending hundreds of billions of dollars is nothing if we can prevent this from happening again. And again, if we build all those systems, whatever other microbial threat comes along the line, we'll have the systems in place to be able to respond to it. Now, it seems like a no-brainer to me and some of the same things are happening that than during COVID. We're seeing the former aids activists going out and doing actions again.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And we just need to get everyone's attention and just have to avoid going from what I... It's a term that I think I said for the first time when I was at the banks, with infectious diseases, we keep going from panic to neglect, panic to neglect, panic to neglect. And when we're panicked, we look around for short term solutions. And then when it seems like the pandemic is ebbing, we go back full blown neglect, right? And so, unfortunately even though there's still 90,000 cases, I forget how... Even though there's still literally tens of thousands of cases happening on a regular basis here in the United States for COVID, we are almost now going back into the neglect phase.

## Policy 360 – episode 132 - Dr. Jim Yong Kim transcript

Judith Kelley:

We need a-

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

We just can't do-

Judith Kelley:

Sustainable long term, intentional strategy.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And I think what we learn from HIV days is that doesn't happen just with polite conversation. I think it's going to require activists ensuring that people keep paying attention. And I actually think it could be a huge political victory for President Biden.

Judith Kelley:

Oh my goodness.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

He's the guy who can do it. I know having interacted-

Judith Kelley:

For the United States.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

He's an enormously compassionate guy. His top leaders are enormously compassionate people who've all done really wonderful things for poverty and social justice before. So it should be a no-brainer, but it's got to get to the top of their agenda.

Judith Kelley:

We'll get him on the phone in a second just after this call. So you talked a little bit about the United States leadership, but you also talked about Europe and Asia, and I'm wondering how you see the world economy shaping up over the next decade or so. We've seen supply chains coming up and things stuck at harbors. I know that I heard the Danish government just recently commenting on maybe we need to move more production closer to home and shorten the supply chains. And do you see a world where we move to a more tripolar state where we have a deep retail integration in China, in Europe and the United States, respectively?

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

I think it's... given all the dislocations that happen, right? So the company that I work for, we're in the shipping business. We own a large shipping company that's done extremely well, but we also own airports, which is not done very well at all. And so something has been reset fundamentally. So on perhaps on a more trivial level, we learned that there's a ton of business you can do over Zoom or over video conferencing. so-

Judith Kelley:

Well, I must say it is so much more lovely to have you here in person than on Zooms.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Very happy to be here. And it's much better of course. For me, it's still, I think very hard to predict where things will go, right? What I think will happen in Asia is that while there are constantly on the front page is of the newspapers tensions between China, Japan, and Korea, they have so much in common culturally in terms of the fundamental concepts all come from the original Chinese characters. Japan still uses the traditional Chinese characters as does Korea, Hong Kong. I mean, you know this better than I. You probably learned modified Chinese characters, right?

Judith Kelley:

Enough to argue in a railway station, but that's about it, or get a new light bulb.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So the while the simplified Chinese characters are different from the traditional concepts are just deeply embedded in those cultures. And I don't think there's any way that... Well, China could survive on its own, but Japan and Korea cannot survive without being intimately tied to the Chinese value chain. And I think that Southeast Asian nations as well. And, frankly, Europe as well. I mean, everybody, some stake in being connected to the Chinese value chain, having access to Chinese markets, Chinese consumers, having access to Chinese goods. So I don't think there's going to be that kind of polarization nearly as much as people think because it's already so integrated. American consumers will not enjoy shopping at Walmart nearly as much if this connection to China is broken somehow. It's already way too integrate it. So maybe I'm being too optimistic, but I think that over time there just has to be a way forward, some kind of rapprochement between the various powers. I can tell you, I haven't been to a G20 leaders meeting in three years, but-

Judith Kelley:

I haven't been for a while either.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

I think the most forward looking and thoughtful leaders in the G20 are just simply, what's the right word? Worried and anxious about all of the hard talk between the US and China and even the Europe and China. At the business level, the integration is so strong that we just have to figure out a political way forward. And again, just having... The Chinese leaders were very kind to me, and I think it was just... My mother was a scholar of Chinese Confucianism. She's studied Zhu Xi, the founder of what is often called Neo-Confucianism. It was a school of Confucian thought that combined Buddhist ideas. The Buddhist had the much bigger philosophical ideas, the existential ideas.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

They thought much bigger about existence and being and those kinds of issues, and Zhu Xi brought them together. And so Zhu Xi is one of the most revered scholars in the history of China. My mother did her PhD dissertation on Zhu Xi. And when I told the Chinese authorities about that, they just went crazy. They took me to every place that Zhu Xi had been, where he lived, where he studied, where he planted a

tree. And I think for them this institution which had represented, for so many years, the height of Western power to have someone like me running it-

Judith Kelley:

Who acknowledged and understood that you cultural...

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And I'm not Chinese. I don't speak the language. And of course I grew up in the west. There are of issues that we might have, but there was just something. They revealed a lot to me and asked for my advice and asked for my help in doing things like fixing the healthcare system. And so I think I came away from that not being naive about the issues that exist between US and China, but a sense that this is not a nameless, faceless group of autocrats, right? These are real human beings who lived through some difficult experiences. Li Keqiang, the premiere, Li Keqiang. I suggested to him that he should gather together all the heads of the financial institutions, just like Chancellor Merkel did and just have dinner with us.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

And so the very first time we did that, he brought all of us together. It was me, it was IMF WTO, OECD, International Labour Organization and we sat and had dinner. And he said, "This is a really great time of year because this was the one time of year where my belly was full." And I said, "I mean, the premiere of China." So except during the holiday seasons, we were hungry all the time, right? So the premiere, one of the most powerful people in the world personally remembered a time when his belly was full only once a year. We all kind of stepped back and said, "This is different. These guys remember what it was like being hungry." And certainly nobody else at that table could remember a time where we were actually hungry.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

So I tend to have a more hopeful view that we'll find a way forward. In fact, there are enough of us who are bilingual and bicultural, and we've got to figure out a way to move forward in a more productive manner. I mean, I think the criticisms that are brought from the West, I think they're valid. And the West should make the criticisms that they're going to make. But I also think that it's so important for the entire world that we figure this out somehow. For someone who's concerned about tackling poverty, if there were a rapprochement between China and Europe and the United States, and we figured out maybe on just this one area, how to tackle poverty in Africa, there was a kind of coming together around projects, or some kind of shared program, that would be so good.

Judith Kelley:

So maybe tripolar in the sense of economic powerhouses and some filters and deep regional integration, but not political alienation.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Not political... Find some way forward and find some way to begin the conversation maybe around specific projects. I think everybody would want that. But in the United States, politicians of every stripe, from every political party fear very much being called soft on China, right? So I think that's where we are.

## Policy 360 – episode 132 - Dr. Jim Yong Kim transcript

Judith Kelley:

Well, the thought of all of us being able to come together to solve big problems like climate change and such.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

It's not going to happen unless we do. China has made some of the largest commitments in terms of reducing its carbon footprint, but still needs to go further. And so how are you going to get there? There has to be some way of doing it along with Europe and the United States. And the sooner we find that path forward, the better.

Judith Kelley:

Well, Dr. Kim, thank you very much for joining me today. It's been such a pleasure to have this conversation.

Dr. Jim Yong Kim:

Thank you, Dean Kelly. It's been great to be here.

Judith Kelley:

Dr. Jim Yong Kim is on Duke's campus to give the Rubenstein Lecture, which is named for David and Rubenstein. This series brings thought leaders and policymakers to campus each year. And this is a very special year because we also happen to be celebrating 50 years of public policy at Duke University. I'll be back soon with another conversation. I'm Judith Kelly.