

# Long-distance call

A pioneer in cardiovascular health, US-based Kang Jingxuan spent his formative years in Guangdong. **Alicja Lam** reports.

Growing up on a farm in Guangdong, Kang Jingxuan, 46, never dreamed he would one day study nutrition at Harvard Medical School and become a pioneer in cardiovascular health and the use of omega-3 fatty acids.

Although his parents lacked a formal education, they often questioned him about his plans. At the time, leaving the mainland to study abroad was difficult. After completing his master's degree at Guangdong Medical College, in Zhanjiang, Kang received an offer to study at the University of Alberta, in Canada. Only a few scientists were permitted to leave the country to further their education but Kang was one of the lucky ones.

He left his homeland as a 25-year-old with only a few relevant English words, barely able to understand scientific papers written in the language, let alone communicate with the people around him.

"In Canada, when your language is a problem, it can be easy for people to look down on you,"

Kang says, remembering his early frustration. However, his research skills shone through his poor English and he earned the respect of colleagues, who helped him master the Test of English as a Foreign Language, which is required for non-native applicants at many English-speaking colleges and universities in North America.

"Those first two years were difficult but they were also an important transition time. I got a lot of help from people.

That is something I cannot forget."

Kang's life took another turn for the

better at an international conference, where he met a Harvard professor interested in the benefits of omega-3s. He became his mentor. "Nutrition is a new field, which is often overlooked," says Kang, who lives in Boston, in the US, with wife May Xie, who he met in Zhanjiang, a 17-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. "My interest in my field is in fat. We proved that some fats are good for the health, particularly cardiovascular health."

Not only have Kang and his team unearthed health benefits connected to omega-3s, they have also used biotechnology to create the fatty acids in animals normally unable to produce them. The technology is also able to convert the bad fat the animals consume into good fat; they have created transgenic mice capable of converting omega-6 fatty acids, which are excessive in western diets, to omega-3s. "It's like converting water into wine," says Kang.

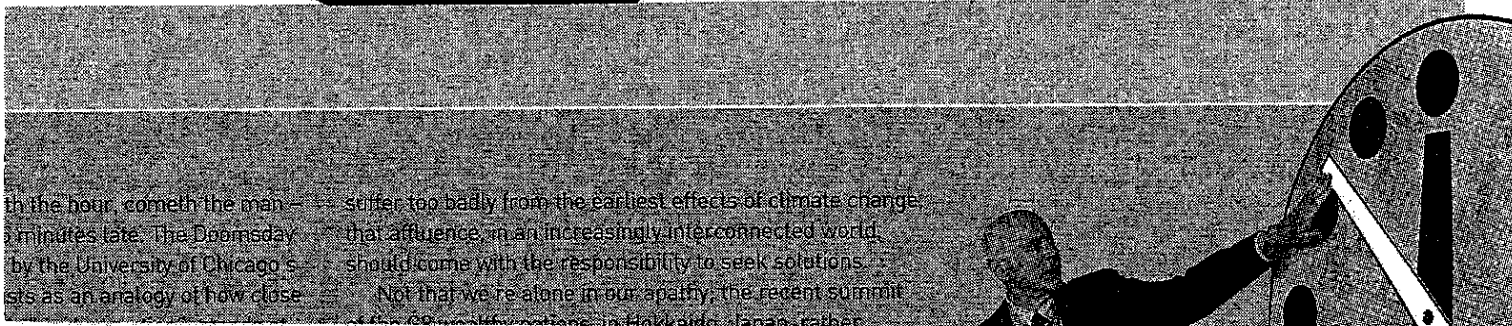
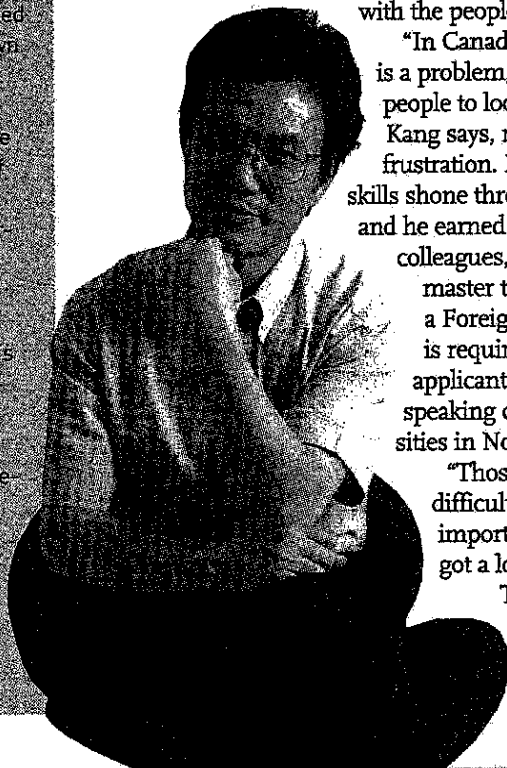
Most people do not include enough omega-3s in their diet but Kang plans to genetically alter food to be rich in the class of polyunsaturated fatty acids most beneficial to human health. "For scientists, salary is not the best reward. The important thing for me is to make impossible things possible and bring benefits to the public. I feel good about it."

Although life is much easier for Kang than when he first arrived in North America, he still does not feel completely assimilated. "As Chinese, we still have a lot of things we cannot change. Chinese culture and tradition are not easily replaced by western culture." But the opportunities in the US remain too promising for him to consider returning to Guangdong and his parents.

"Nutrition is not something you dream about when you're very young," he says. "If I had to choose again, maybe I'd do something different, but I think that what I'm doing is not bad. You just have to follow your path."



here are few pastry  
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in the hour, cometh the man  
minutes late. The Doomsday  
by the University of Chicago  
sts as an analogy of how close

suffer too badly from the earliest effects of climate change,  
that affluence, in an increasingly interconnected world,  
should come with the responsibility to seek solutions.

Not that we're alone in our apathy: the recent summit  
at the G8 in Italy, where in Italy, said, Japan's leader