



## Hsiang-te Kung (1946-Present)

Professor of Geography and Planning  
University of Memphis

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*"Be diligent and work hard and you can achieve your goal of making a better environment and more prosperous society." Hsiang-te Kung, 2006.*

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### Overview

Dr. Hsiang-te Kung is a professor of Geography and Planning, and Director of the Confucius Institute and Asian Studies and International Trade Program at the University of Memphis. His research focuses on the following: water resources and urban hydrology, urban physical environment land-surface system soil erosion, fluvial geomorphology landform and terrain analysis aerial photo interpretation, and Asia-China Geographic Information Systems. He teaches weather and climate, urbanization and environment, water resources, honor's global challenge, and thematic studies of China. He was the chair of the Department of Geography and Planning at the University from 1991 to 2001. He has also co-authored three books and published more than 94 refereed articles, and received more than 75 grants totaled over several million dollars. He was a recipient for Superior Performance of University Research Award (SPUR) twice, College of Arts and Sciences Eminent Faculty Award in 2005, and Excellent Teaching Award of University Honor's Program 2009-2009, the Alma Bucovaz Urban Service Award from the University College in 2009, and the PI-millionaire in 2014. Some his books include:

- Ying, Long-gen, Hsiang-te Kung, Wei-shen Gao, and Hsiu-bao Chang. Regional Development and Environmental Strategies. Beijing, China: Science and Technology Press, Hsin-Hwa Book Co., 1989. 202 pp. (ISBN 7-5023-0832-6)
- J. A.A. Jones, C.M. Liu, M.K. Woo, and H.T. Kung. Regional Hydrological Response to Climate Change and Global Warming. Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 1996. 440 pp. (ISBN 0-7923-4329-8)
- He, Daming, Guoyou Zhang, and Hsiang-te Kung. Towards Cooperative Utilization and Co-ordinated Management of International Rivers. Science Press and Science Press New York Ltd., The United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan. 2001. 307 pp. (ISBN 1-880132-73-7)
- Kung, Hsiang-te, Wen Sun, Zhao-guan Lin, Young-zi Hong, and Men-xia Guo, Chinese Listening and Speaking Workbook 1, Chinese Language Alliance Press, Beijing, China, 171 pp. 2008.

*This interview was conducted in 2015.*

## Early Life and Career

Hsiang-te Kung was born in mainland China, and raised in Taiwan. Although he has lived in the United States for over 30 years, Kung remains deeply connected to his Chinese heritage and values, and applies them scrupulously to his work. “Chinese tradition and heritage gives me pride,” he explains. “It gives me the esteem to work hard to be a good person and citizen, and to help improve society.” Perhaps not surprisingly for someone whose family traces their lineage back to Confucius, Kung enjoys being an academic who combines researching his own intellectual interests with educating others.

Kung has always been interested in geography, the discipline he now devotes as his career. “Geography is the study of human environments,” he explains, “and my major interest is the interactions of humans and their environments.” He is especially interested in how humans influence their environment through processes like urbanization, and how that environment in turn affects human actions. Kung began his academic career at the University of Chinese Culture in Taiwan, where he graduated first in his class with a bachelor’s degree in earth sciences. He then made the move to the United States for his graduate education, earning his master of science in geography and geology from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in 1972, and his doctorate in the same subject in 1980. While he worked on his doctorate, Kung also worked as an environmental planner in Knoxville, where he did environmental assessments and impact studies on development, studied water pollution sources related to land use planning, and developed a comprehensive energy plan to help the community choose suitable development sites and limit the impact of groundwater pollution. This work reflected what would become his research interests as a professor, especially work in urban water resources, the urban physical environment, and land-surface systems.

## Importance of Mentoring to Career

After seven years of working as a planner and earning his doctorate, one of Kung’s major mentors, the well-known geographer Dr. Edwin Hammond, encouraged him to apply for a faculty position at University of Memphis. Kung was hired as an assistant professor of geography in 1981, was granted tenure and promoted to associate professor in 1986, and became full professor and department chair in 1992. Kung continues to teach at the University of Memphis after the department changed to earth sciences in 2001. He has also taught and lectured extensively throughout China, and served as a professor in the Semester at Sea program through the University of Pittsburgh.

## Contributions

Kung says he has thoroughly enjoyed his career. Though he cites gaining tenure, becoming department chair, and increasing the number of geography majors as career highlights, the biggest highlight has been witnessing his students learn and succeed. “I enjoy what I’m doing now, being a good professor and mentor to the students,” Kung says. “I enjoy helping them get established and get work as scientists and teachers. Some of them have done better than me!” For Kung, maintaining a view of education as a lifelong endeavor is important, and he tries to impart that education is “like the Chinese proverb—‘you can grow a tree in ten years, but to educate someone takes a hundred years.’” Kung has served, as an advisor to a number of international graduate students, is a member of the university’s

Standing Committee on Human Relations, and an advisor to the International Study and Business Program. He is also the President of the Chinese Association of Memphis.

“I enjoy geography—I like to see what I can do to help the environment, and help people understand the environmental process,” Kung says of why he remains in the environmental field. For minorities thinking of careers in the field, he suggests that interest and passion for the subject are the keys to success: “You have to be interested in people and their surroundings. If you are interested, you can find a number different ways to do what you can, from teaching to working in Green Industry. Be diligent and work hard and you can achieve your goal of making a better environment and more prosperous society.”

### **For More Information**

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