

# PANDA BUFFET

If you've been following the travels of the Road Crew in recent months, you've probably noticed that most of our road trips chronicle the history of businesses that have been around for a long time. Our most recent trip, and the story that goes with it, is inspired by the privilege of U.S. Citizenship. We recently learned that on May 1, 2012, Yao Meng, better known as Brian, the charismatic front man of Panda Buffet, ended his five year process of gaining full rights as a citizen of the United States of America. A simple "congratulations" just didn't quite seem adequate.

If you've been to Panda Buffet, and hopefully you have, you already know that it features all the Chinese food you can eat, and then some. You may even know that Brian's family does everything, from cooking to cleaning. What you probably don't know, is that when additional help is needed in the restaurant, Brian calls on his network of friends within the Chinese community to work on a temporary basis.



Having eaten there on a number of occasions, we already knew about the restaurant. What we were eager to learn was how and why a family of Chinese citizens would leave their homeland, extended family, and friends, to start a new life among English speaking strangers in a foreign country. Did we mention that none of the family, including Brian, could speak any English when they arrived? Didn't think so.

In 2003, the entire family left Fujian Province in China and arrived in San Francisco. In case you were wondering, Fujian is an agricultural area in Southeastern China. After arriving in The United States, the family spent time in New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Muskogee, Norman,

Edmond and Woodward. At each of these stops, Brian's father, who had spent many years as a cook prior to immigrating to America, spent time in the kitchen of local restaurants perfecting the recipes that are now served at Panda Buffet.

With a background in the restaurant business, the decision to open The Panda Buffet was fairly easy. The former KFC building became available, and as they say, the rest is history.



Now that Brian had told us “how” they got to the U.S., we were still interested in “why”. He explained that in most countries of the world, hard work translates into nothing more than hard work. He continued by stating that in The United States, “The harder you work, the better the life you make for yourself.” He also stated that kids in the U.S. have the best childhood, and are appropriately the envy of the rest of the world. That’s worth repeating, so you might want to go back and read this paragraph twice. You might even want to share it with your kids.

Alright, but we still wanted to know why someone would subject themselves to five years of red tape, concluding with the surrender of loyalty to their native country and pledge their allegiance to another. We know that lots of immigrants live in the U.S. indefinitely and never acquire citizenship. Brian explained that he now considers America his home, and the six long days of hard work he puts in each week have enabled him to have the better life that his parents envisioned when they decided to move their family to America a decade ago. And not that he plans to do anything that would warrant deportation, but as a non-citizen, that concern has been ever present. Not anymore.

Since he’s now settled into his new career, in his new hometown, in his new country, with his new citizenship, we were interested to find out what Brian considered to be his best and worst surprises since arriving in Perry. Not surprisingly, he put the number of friendships at the top of the “best” list. And if you’ve ever spent any time talking to him, you already know how much

he enjoys fishing and hunting. Although he stopped short of giving us a “worst” list, he conceded that he wouldn’t mind having more time to spend in the outdoors.

Before we quit raving about our most recent road trip, we’d like to thank Brian and his family for not only spending time with us at Panda Buffet, but for opening our eyes, and hopefully all that read this article, to the privileges that we natural-born citizens all too often take for granted. Thanks, and lest we forget, congratulations.

If you’d like for the Road Crew to visit your business, contact Yvette Dow at 580-336-5562 or by email at [y.dow@bankfbt.com](mailto:y.dow@bankfbt.com).