What is your role and area of focus at Johns Hopkins?
I am a pharmacology Ph.D. student in the SJ Yan and HJ Mao Laboratory of Chemical Biology and Drug Discovery headed by Jun O. Liu, where we study FDA-approved drugs, macrocycles and natural products for discovery of novel therapeutic and research use.

Who were your role models or key influences growing up?
My grandparents and mom were inspiring figures who set goals, worked hard and weathered the odds with grit and perseverance. They were ingenious and steadfast. In addition, my wife, Marjorie, as well as my mother and grandmother, have always pushed me to pursue what I love.

How did you decide to focus on health care?
After a family member (outside of the United States) with symptoms of breakbone fever left the hospital without any medication for dengue fever due to the absence of thrombocytopenia, I decided to dedicate my professional life to the cure of at least one disease and development of diagnostics. There is currently no specific medicine to treat dengue infection. Discussions with many experts in biomedical research about the difference between cure and therapy have convinced me to focus on therapeutics as well.

What does your identity as an Asian-American add to your work?
The Asia/Pacific region is an interface between Eastern and Western cultures due to the convergence of European and Asian/Pacific societies since the colonial era. This milieu gives me a global perspective, not to mention a facility for synthesizing concepts from different fields.

What advice can you give other Asian/Pacific-Americans pursuing health care?
The adage “it takes a village to raise a child” applies just as well to health care. Every idea and voice counts when pursuing monumental problems such as improving the world pharmacopeia. For instance, only 250 treatments are available for rare and neglected diseases, which account for at least 6,500 conditions! Asian/Pacific-Americans can help bridge this gap by choosing careers in biomarker and pre/clinical research, which help de-risk drug development, eventually making therapies available. Once in your niche, try to find a venue where you can contribute your ideas to the discussion. Being engaged in your community will build character and help the next generation of Asian/Pacific-Americans find more individuals to emulate. Also seek mentors who do not look or think like you—this unlocks your potential beyond the cultures and experiences you have been exposed to.