

A: The following interview was conducted with Jan Yang for the Star Treasure AmeriCorps History Project. It took place on June 23, 2006 at F street Community Center. The interviewer is Haishu Zhu. Thank you for offering this opportunity for me to give you the interview. Would you please introduce yourself a little bit? What's your name?

B: My name is Zheyang Yang. Everybody calls me Jan.

A: How to spell your last name?

B: My last name is Y-a-n-g.

A: How about first name? First name Z-h-e-y-i-n-g.

B: This is the traditional Chinese name.

A: Thank you! Where did you grow up?

B: I grew up in the North-east of China. The City name is Shenyang.

A: How to spell it?

B: S-h-e-n-y-a-n-g.

A: Would you please tell us more about your family and tradition over there?

B: OK. I grew up in Shenyang. I was born in middle of 60s, 1964. I have a sister and a brother. I am oldest child in the family. My mother was a teacher, a high school teacher. She teaches chemistry and mathematics. And my father was an Engineer. I think I grew up in a very traditional Chinese family. They are very strict to us. I can't do anything such as after 7 o'clock, pm., I couldn't go outside to play.

A: Why?

B: Because in China they have something the girl should be quiet, be home to help Mom do something [housework] such as cleaning and to help little brother and sisters. But for sons they have different policies. They can go out anywhere. Something discrimination to women, to ladies, from the tradition[al] of China.

A: So did your sister do same thing like you?

B: Yes. My sister was much quiet than I am. And she always be home and my mom always said that your little sister was better than you, and she's so quiet. If my mom says something to her, she says, "OK, I stay." But I always very challenge. I like to take some risky.

A: What did you do?

A: Such as I wanted to play with boys. I wanted to go outside to do something challenge something like climbing up to the top of tree. That's very risky, especially for girl. So my mom doesn't like me. But it doesn't mean she doesn't love me. She wants me to a better girl.

A: How many years different between you and your brother? How many years he's younger than you?

B: My sister is 3 years younger than I am and my brother is 7 and half years than I am. In China if the family has no boys, it's not acceptable.

A: That's why you have a younger brother. Yes, after I was born 7 and half years later, my little brother was born.

A: Did you take care of him a lot?

B: Yes. I am the oldest one and so I took care of my brother and I carried him and anywhere I went. I took him during the daytime. Maybe I thought I was about 8 or 9 years at that time. I took care of a lot my litter brother. I was a baby sister.

B: Where is he right now?

A: Right Now? He is in China in American cooperation -XXX—very big cooperation. He makes lot of money. He was manager of north east of China derivation. He sells cell phones and gets very good paid. He earned American dollars not Chinese Yuan. He called me and asked me “how much money do you earn this month?” Because I am a part time worker, I do not earn too much right now. But he told me, “Oh, you, don’t stay there, come back. I earn American dollars at least 1500 a month. Right now I got promoted. I earn 2000 dollars a month. Do you think we have we have difference in different country?”

A: Do you think someday he will come over to work?

B: Yes, he said so once. He said someday, my company may send me to America to do some research, research markets, or learn something about new. I don’t know the schedule. But he will be here sometime.

A: What kinds of education he got in China?

B: He only got his bachelor degree in the college of Shenyang, Industry University of Shenyang. First he was ... Actually he graduated from computer science. At beginning, it was hard to find the job. He went to a small company, electronic company. He didn’t like the salary they paid him. Actually he was a very challenge and very small guy. So he quit the job and went to another company in Dalian, city of Dalian, still in Liaoning Province. He sells some alcohol, the company sell alcohols. He also got very high position. He told me that “I couldn’t sale alcohol anymore.” This is not my interests because I learn something different. I like computer science. I learn something high technology. So he again, after one and half year, he quit job and found another job, there were many and many competitors to challenge the job position, over 100, and only 3 candies got interviewed and he got the job. He was very proud and we were also proud of him in the family. Right now he moved to Beijing bought an apartment there and he has his own car and he has many-many job XXX.

A: Since he can buy a car, why he just buys the apartment? Why didn’t he bury a house, like people here?

B. Oh, no. that’s impossible. In China there is not too much space for too many people. Buy apartment, ok the top thing is buying an apartment. If you buy a house, I have a friend, my husband’ friend, but it’s outside Beijing, outside the city far away from the city because the city, there is no space for people. Beijing is Big enough if you buy house, you need to travel to drive the car more than one hour to work. So, that’s impossible.

A: You said that your father is an engineer, your mom taught chemistry, your brother is in computer science major, how about your major and your sister’s major? Are you all in science major, technology? Yes, my sister was graduated in computer science, too. She got computer science major after that she went to an import and export company of China. She works for more than 20 years there. But recently, the company was changed the name. Actually not changed the name, change from the company belong to the country somebody—individual--bought the company and named under his name.

A: So change the company name.

B: Yes.

A: Does your sister own the company right now? Not my sister, somebody else.

B: My sister is employee right now here. They still do the same thing. Only the company name changed and owner changed from country owned company to individual owned the company.

A: How about her income? Is her income changed or not?

B: Yes, it depends. They had the base pay. Pay is high enough and also have some rewards and bonus. She has some projects to do with, international projects. Sometimes do with America, sometimes Europe and if she got big project, she earned 10% as rewards. It's huge. It's large money. But if got small project, she earned less. So, it depends. But the base pay is already be there. You can get your base pay. If you do well, sale more products, or buy and earn more profits for the company. Every month, you earn more extra.

A: So do you think the change is doing good thing to the company or employee?

B: I think both. Because such as 30 years ago, everybody was paid the same money, you know, got same pay. They don't have motivation to work hard. Right now, if you work hard and get more money for company, then you get the more. That stimulates for people to give more efforts.

A: So do you think it's capitalism or still socialism?

B: .I think capitalism is better than socialism in this situation, because socialism think all people the same. Every individual is same. They have same needs, same lives, same thing. They treat people not just human, maybe something no emotional things. But people are different. We all people are different. People have different wants, needs, somebody wants to be more motivated. Some people want to be paid more. Some people want to have more vacations. So you should have rewards system different according individually not treat people all the same. That's ... socialism system.

A: How about yourself?

B: I, I was married in 1989...

A: After graduated.

B: Yes. I graduated in 1986. My major was in Electrical Engineer. I got job in Beijing and at that time, we got the same paid and at the beginning, after two years, things changed. Somebody doing well, he or she got a little bit more and got bonus. But the pay as very low at that time, about 300 Yuan to 500 Yuan. Ok , maybe, 80 dollar a month. 80 dollar to 200 dollars at most. After sever years I worked in my first job, my husband graduated from University he got his Ph. d degree over here. He was in metal physics major. He got his offer to Hongbo (German ) scholarship.

A: Which country sponsors it?

B: That's Germany, that's very famous scholarship for young scientist. Then, he went to Germany. After about half year, I went to Germany, too.

A: How old was he at that time?

B: He was 28 at first.

A: Do you have children at that time?

B: Yes, I have only one son at that time when I went to Germany he was about 4 years old. I went to Germany to join my family, meet my husband. Three people in the family at that time. I quit my job, just quit the job, I just left my job, left my country, left my parents, left everybody who loves me, I went to Germany to meet my husband. At first, I was sad because I didn't have anything, you know, for my self.

I didn't have job. I felt very, very imbalance at that time because I was independent woman fist I was sad. Later I went to the XXX institute to lean German. Everybody else in the class was very happy to be house wife. They were very proud of [to] be housewife. I am surprised that time. But after learn the culture, Germany culture and German, I

thought maybe being at home to be housewife is not bad thing. It's not the bad thing, I can spend more time with my family. I contribute my family, and just support them.

A: So you just stay at home to support your family that time?

B: Yes. I just learned German. I went to Institute ... University of Nation to learn German and other time, I stay at home to cook to help to my young son, help my husband.

A: When did you come back to school? When did you come to the United States?

B: After several years, I went to Germany for one and half year and then, we went to Japan two years and went to Norway for two years and finally we came here, United States.

A: May I ask that why you travel that much? Why did you go to Norway, Japan or...?

B: OK. That's because of my husband. My husband likes to learn something new. In his research area in that time, his research area in Japan, the technology is newest and he knew some other scientists in Japan. And they also need him to be there. They have research group researching metal physics. So I totally support him so he got offer. I said that "ok, I go with you." We went o Japan. But after two years, he went to conference, met professor in Norway. The professor, XXX (Norway name).

A: How to spell his name?

B: That's Norway name. He was interested in my husband's research. He told my husband, "I got funding. Do you want to work with me? If you like, send me an e-mail, or call me. After conference, my husband's project, profess (XXX) gave him was very good about aluminum. My husband was very interested about that.

A: What's that mean?

B: Aluminum, that's just metal. Because in Norway there are many nature supplies about aluminum. The Aluminum is soft and light can do many things in industry. Because in heavy industry, something was too heavy to move. If they use aluminum, maybe they save money save energy, something like that. I am not really knowing about that, anyway...

A: Why did he decide to come to the United States?

B: At first, after two years, we have chance to stay there to go to a company. They are very interested in my husband's research. They said, "If you come, we give you something, .something, some rewards, good paid, something like that..." But we think for the development of my husband' the future, he decided to go to America because he has many friends, many coworkers, not just coworker,

B: Colleagues?

A: Yeah, something likes that. If you be here, that time, they called my husband, if you be here, there is a big market, if you develop yours, yourself fully here. So, we think that 's good thing. Maybe we need to go to United States to see. Maybe have new future, better future for him. We came here in 1999. First my husband went to North-West University. He was a research scientist there. We were only be there 9 month, then we came here. In 2000, July we came here, Nebraska, Lincoln. Started a life here.

A: Why did you come to Nebraska, Lincoln here?

B: That's always because of my husband. My husband's work always need electronic telescope. Because here, there are two electronic telescopes, my husband came here to be a specialist to take care of electronic telescopes, routine jobs, also he needs to train staff

and students to learn how to use them. He also does some research work himself because his job always needs that.

A: So do you think you will move again and travel again?

B: Not known, but right now we are settled. We have family here, we have house we have cars. Everything satisfies me, but I don't know my husband. Maybe he...

A: He travels a lot. Everything is good for his academic, professional development. But during the traveling, how do you think your personal career, and development?

B: Yes, I think a lot. During the traveling from Germany to Japan to Norway to here. So during the time, every country we stayed on average two years. So that time, I was excited when I came to a new country, I study language and learn new things, to meet new people. Oh, it's so exciting. I traveled a lot. I was. But I came here, I thought, "Oh, my God, I lost myself. What I did for many years? I lost my career. I lost my, you know, I think I couldn't go back to my original job. So, I thought myself, maybe I need to go back to school again to learn something new, you know, to enrich myself. So, when I came here, I went back to school again, continue my study.

A: So, what kind of level is the school?

B: I went to graduate school.

A: For Master degree?

B: Yes.

A: Do you still remember what you learned in high school, or college? You have to pass GRE? You travel a lot, you stayed in Japan and Germany, do you still remember anything English?

B: Yeah. I couldn't pay attention to learn English at beginning. I just told me, just from the Zero. I try again, try to push myself hard. So at first, I was not that confident. But after a few month, I thought I remembered the thing I learned in high school, in university. I have experience, so, I passed GRE after two month studying. That's very quick. Somebody, my friend didn't understand, "Oh, two month. you finished GRE? You got your GRE score high enough? That's impossible.

A: What do you think the reason? Is that because you have good memory or because of you learned in your college or in your high school. Do you think you benefit from your previous learning in college or high school?

B: Yeah. I think so. In high school I learned a lot. I think high school education, I benefit a lot. The GRE, there are many questions, such as mathematics questions, just from my high studying. I remembered I don't need to review too much. Maybe I have good memory at that time. I don't think so. I think Chinese traditional education to make student to be a machine, they can copy everything. They can remember the book said.

A: Is that good or not?

B: They have their beneficial side, but also may destroy students, some student because the traditional Chinese education system believes that people, you should be best, you should be better. If you are not be the good one, you will be kicked out. You cannot go to university. You just do some low technology work. Everybody think you are loser. So that's unfair to somebody they are not good at study, they maybe good at something else. That's too single goal to everybody. Everybody goes to a single door. Everybody wants to go through the door. That's too hard for everybody.

A: So do you feel sorry for what you did? What you chose for your major or just feel it's all right?

B: Yeah, at beginning in China, I chose to be an electrical engineer, that's not my interest. Because in China, you can't choose your future, your goal. Teacher chooses that for you. Parent chooses that for you.

A: Why?

B: Because they think it's good for you.

A: How didn't make choices for you?

B: I cannot, I couldn't, at that time I couldn't. At that time, I very much wanted to be a doctor. But my Mom told me, "Don't be a doctor. Doctor, every day needs to contact with patients. There are many, many diseases you contact with them, your health will be bad. Not good for your health. So my Mom refused me to be a doctor. But I was very, very mad. I wanted to be a doctor that time because I thought being a doctor to save people to help people was good job. Human should love everybody and help everybody. But my parent didn't like me. They said that you were good at math, you were good at ...you know, chemistry, and physics, you should be an engineer or scientist. But I think I am still a girl, but I didn't pay attention, I have my goal, but if somebody told that's good for you. Maybe that's good for me.

A: So right now, you have the second chance to make a choice to choose you major your career? What did you choose?

B: Yes, that's why I think American education system is better. Everybody has their choices to choose their future. If you like something, you go for it.

A: What did you choose this time?

B: This time, I choose to be... actually, I choose the computer science major.

A: Just like your brother and your sisters' major?

B: Yes, this is just, I thought this time, I have my background in electrical engineer. I learned something some courses familiar to my computer major. Maybe that's the short-distance for me to catch up. So I chose the computer science.

A: How old were you when you were accepted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln here?

B: That was 2001. I was 37.

A: So that's when your son has already grows up and your husband works at university so have to pay for the tuition of graduate program?

B: Yes. I paid for tuition. That time I was in H-4 visa. I couldn't work, and then I went to school, I got state tuition rate. I got benefit.

A: Did you have chance to get assistantship from the department?

B: Oh, yeah. Second year, I was a TA. So, I got some money each month.

A: So what did the TA do?

B: I was the teaching assistant. I checked homework. Collect examination, I graded the homework and examines also sometimes, if professor was absent, I just replace his position to teach students.

A: Is it hard for you to teach student?

B: Yes. It's hard. I need to prepare very hard, very detail Because of my English. I am not an American. I need to prepare harder than another TA, Such as an American. So I.. But I was fun. I liked ...

A: How do you think your work as a TA?

B: I was a good TA. From the evaluation of students, and the professors, the feedback is very good. Highest score, such as 4.

A: Have you graduated from the program?

B: I graduated from 2003, August. After that I worked at the University for part time worker.

A: Why do you work as a part time worker?

B: Because at that time I still consider to have a new child. I think my son at that time already be 14 years old. My son always asked me “can I have another brother or sister as anybody else?”

A: Like his classmates?

B: Yes. I think he is right. We are new here in America. We have small family, only three people here. We have not too many friends here. Traditional American families, they have grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts... everybody around them feel loves. But we have too small family. I thought maybe that's good idea. If we have another child, we can have little bigger family.

A: If you were in China, do you think you would have the second child?

B: I cannot think about that because in China there is one child policy.

A: How do you see the China one-family, one-child policy? Is it acceptable for you?

B: It was acceptable in that time I was in China because everybody did that. You have no choice. If you want to have second child, you need to go to...if government found that ..you will be sent to hospital to make abortion. So that time I thought it's ok for everybody else, it's ok for me. But when I came here, I think it's against human nature. But when I consider the situation in China, there are so many people there, the one child policy is possible, it's not impossible. It should be to push this policy forward. It's for improving people living standard. If you have too many children, you don't have ...you cannot give them the better lives.

A: How old is your oldest son right now?

B: He is already 16.

A: Is he in high school?

B: Yes. He is in North Star High School. He is straight A student. He is very confident for himself.

A: Another high achievement student.

B: Yes.

A: What's your expectation for him?

B: Of course, like other traditional families, like their children to be scientists, to be doctors, to be ... you know, high achievement person. But when I sit down to talk about this with my son, he does not pay more attention to me, he told me that, “don't worry about me. That's my future, my life, don't worry, I can choose my future. Don't make future you like for me. That's what I think in my childhood. My parents didn't choose my career, maybe I could be a doctor right now. So just let my son to choose his future for himself.

A: As my known, in traditional Chinese family, son or daughter takes lots of responsibilities for the family, especially for the parents. What do you want your son to be after he grows up in here?

B: In China, they have different education system also the different traditional couture system. In china, family is important, the most important for everybody, such as in the 40 years ago, 50 years ago, there are many, many big families. Grand parents, parents,

everybody lives together. and when the grandparents are old, when parents are old, the children take care of them and give them ... Pay everything they need for their living. but right now, the family is much small, but the traditional culture is still there. In China, Chinese always tell their children too respect old persons, to respect grandparents. Sometimes, I told my son, when you were young, everybody around you, grandparents, parents, they want you to be good person, to be useful person, they give you loves, everything you need to make you to be good person, useful person for society. They want you to have good future, but they never want you to give them return, to give them payback. But you cannot think about they don't want me to payback, then I don't have payback. You should do something for them loving you. when they are old, you should love them, to give them something for living, for loving, everything, think about that.

A: Did you parents come to America to visit you?

B: Yes. My parent came one and half years ago, one year ago when I gave birth to my second son, Larry. They came here to take care of me and my son. But at first, when I call them, "Come to America to live with us...to take care of your future and your grandson or daughter. Oh, that's too long way. Second, we don't know English. Do you need to learn some English? Actually, my father knows some English. But my mother don't know any English. I said, "It's Ok. Just come and I will teach you some simple English. and then they came for loving, for me because I am their daughter for me they are grandsons,. But after they came here, they don't understand the TV, they don't know where to go. They have no things to do. Every day just stays at home. They feel bored and lonely.

A: Do you think your son has any interest in staying with grandparents? Did you see any difference between your son and other traditional Chinese children?

B: Oh, they are different. My son is not like other traditional Chinese children. They may say when you are old, I will take care of you and give you love and stay with you and live with you, do something like that. My son doesn't think about that. He told me that if my grandparents are old or sick, I send them to hospital and hire XXX to care them. I give them money. I have money. I pay them money and also, I can buy them a house. They... if they want a car, I will buy them a care.

A: Do you think this is against traditional Chinese culture?

B: Yes. That's different. My son is change after he came to America. But this is gradually, gradually change. I cannot do anything about that.

A: Thank you so much for giving me the chance to interview you. I do learn a lot about traditional Chinese culture and modern Chinese life. I do have two more questions to ask you before we complete this interview. First one, as you look back, what do you think about leaving the country you were born and come to the United States?

B: OK, That is... in my situation, I think it's just happened. I followed my husband's step. First, he went to Germany, then Japan, and then Norway, and here. It just happened. I just came here. We have no choice. But I think right now, we are living on the earth, they are not like 30 years ago, 40 years ago, we are separated technology and everything separated us. But right now, we are in a big family from different culture. There are many multi-culture international cooperation and many other kinds of societies, such as my brother, he is in China, he is working for America. He is working for America. He is working for XXX company. Last week, when I was online chatting with him, he told me, "Ok, I went to Germany to watch World Cup football. That supervised me. You see, the world is not

big. He flew to Germany only 8 to 10 hours. I think it's not too much different right now like 30 years ago, 40 years ago. We should have new perspective to look at the new world.

A: Thank you. And the last question is, "What do you want your children to learn and remember your traditional culture?"

B: Of course, I want them to learn Chinese at home or in the Chinese Sunday school. I want them to remember Chinese culture. But my son, my older son, right now he is 16 already, his Chinese level is maybe in elementary school level. He couldn't write letter if he left me to go to college. But I don't think he could write letter to me in Chinese. I push him first very hard. But he repeated to refuse. But right now, I don't push him too hard. Just like him to know, Chinese culture is very important to him. Maybe sometime, someday, he will know it's very important to him. Then he will learn by himself.

A: Thank you, I wish you and your family a good future. I wish that your husband has more success in his career and your son has good academic future in his personal life.

B: Thank you!