

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Michelle Lee

Interviewers: Chaojia (Jessica) Ma

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Transcribed by: Chaojia (Jessica) Ma

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Audio Track Time: 1:24:41 (HOURS:MINUTES:SECONDS)

Background:

Michelle Lee was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 1958. She is the youngest of five children and has an elder brother and three older sisters. She attended the University of Taiwan and then worked for Cathay Pacific Airlines as an airlines stewardess for a few years before immigrating to the United States for graduate studies in 1981. She attended the University of Houston, working on a Masters of Educational Psychology, while staying with her brother, who was married but without children at the time. She met her husband, Jerry Lee, at the church she attended with her brother's family and married before her last semester at UH. Due to family reasons, they held their wedding in Taiwan and they moved to Taiwan for two years after her graduation. They returned to raise their children, Josh and Esther, in a better environment. She became a stay at home mom for five years before re-entering the work force through a part-time job, and eventually became a financial advisor for Chase banks in Chinatown. She currently works as a financial advisor for Morgan Stanley. At Morgan Stanley, she serves on the Diversity Council as well as the Women Advisory Council. She is also highly active within her church, Houston Chinese Church, volunteering with a community service organization called Light & Salt Association and serving as the Conference Chair for the Houston Chinese Christian Business Association.

Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of labor and capital to develop a working history around the context of childhood experiences, family life, and daily activities. The interview was conducted at Ms. Lee's home in Sugarland, TX.

Interview transcript:

ML	Michelle Lee
JL	Jerry Lee
JM	Jessica Ma
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

JM: Okay, so my name is Jessica Ma and I'm here with Ms. Michelle Lee. Um, so do you want to start off and tell me a little bit about your childhood, maybe where you were born and where you grew up?

ML: Okay, I was born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. It's nor—south part of Taiwan. We have—I was born in 1958 and my, you know, my parents and we have, my parents have five children. So I have four siblings and my, my brother is the oldest one and he is the only son in our family. So we'll, we'll have some, you know, talk about—about that culture later. And then, so four girls and one boy for my parents and we have, our family is, I have a very, very happy childhood. My parents they love each other and they set up a good example for us and uh my, my dad is—you know, that 1949, China and the Kuomintang, Communist and Kuomintang, they have a civil war. And then, president Chang Kai-shek moved to Taiwan, so my dad was in the Navy at the time, so moved to Taiwan in 1949. And uh, he was doing very good in the Navy; when he retired, he was an admiral in the Navy. So uh, and he's a—When you're talking about, you know, an admiral in the Navy, must be a, you know, very straight and serious person, but he's not. He's very yeah he's very ... trying to give us a good quality of life and very family oriented. So uh like at that time, during the weekend—'cause at that time 'cause like people working six, six days a week, and we only have Sundays—off so my dad would took us to the, there's a very famous park in south part of China called Chenqinghu and uh he often bring the whole family there we'll we just—he has his own jeep, so just put seven member in that jeep and then we, and he drove us to that uh that park, close to the lake, and we have picnic, yeah. Even, you know, at that time, like uh 4 you know 40... 500 years ago, it's very seldom to have a family who really wanted to spend time. So I have a very happy childhood.

Especially with five, you know, five children, and we're—I learned my social skill and personal interaction with, you know, in my, in my family so—and my dad also divided different family chores for us to do, like I still remember we have five items, because we are five children, so there are five things we rotate like every month, I still remember we have wash the dishes, and clean the floor—'cause at that time, we need to kind of mop the floor— and also we have a little cat and dog, so we need to clean their stuff (this is one of the things I hate the most), and then we have, since we have seven members in our family so we have a lot of shoes, so we, we just have to put it in order to, on the rack. And then another thing is we have a garden in our home, so we just have to water. So five things I still remember we rotate, yeah.

JM: Um can you tell me a little bit about your hometown, like what was it like? Was it like small town, rural, urban?

ML: Well, it's a, it's a big town. I would say it's the second biggest one in, in Taiwan. The biggest one is Taipei and then Kaohsiung is the second one. So uh... but at that time, it was like uh... because the transportation was not that—we took bus, my dad has that jeep and then he has his own—the Navy give him a car, and then he have chauffer to drive, to drive him to work. And uh, so we don't... I think we don't travel a lot. At that time, it's very kind of closed uh... environment. People don't travel a lot. So we just uh, we stay in small village that was, because at that time uh... the government moved to Taiwan so they're different because uh... because my dad served in the military, so there are people from different province, just like United States different states, so the government just put them into this village. So we have people from all over the country. So, like, North or South, you can see the dia—you can hear the dialect, you know, and so people can talk to each other but they don't understand and they have to figure out. So it's ver—quite interesting. That um, that little, uh, that little village is about, I would say about maybe... about not more than 100? Yeah uh household, yeah. So, and by the time goes by, we know each other, yeah.

(6:16)

JM: So it was a pretty close-knit community?

ML: Right, right.

JM: Um, I guess... you said in your questionnaire that you had worked a little bit in Hong Kong before you came?

ML: Yeah, at that time um, so the, the society at that time is very kind of...set. And people go uh, you know, as a children, you go to, you go to school and after you, you just go to elementary, you know, middle school, high school, college. It's uh, it's uh...the path is already set. You just, you just need to study. Okay? And, uh, after graduate from, uh, college and... at that time, we don't—people just don't travel a lot. So, the, for a college graduates, the only way, or several few way to go abroad, to see the world, it's a, you know, especially for girls, is to be a airline steward at the time. So it's very competitive, and I'll will just like uh, because I was studying in French first and then moved to educational psychology. So after I graduate, just try, you know, Cathay Pacific at that time, have a, they recruit the um...college graduate to join their company. So I just go with several friends, and I remember they just, they just... get three girls. So I was very proud at that time. Get to see the world and everything. So we go, uh, after that we went to training in Hong Kong for about three months or so. And then we start; they start putting us on our, to the... flight. After, I think I just work there for about a year or so, I think it's really not for me. I just feel like I cannot do this job for, for long time. So they are not very happy because they train me and then they want me to *at least* work there for 3-5 years. But I just don't see—it's not a good fit for me.

So then I decided to, well, see the world and then also make some money. At that time, it's high pay uh...for a college graduate. So I saved some money and then, since my brother, um, already finished his master degree in Kansas and he moved to Houston to find a job here. So at that time, it's like, at that time, no Internet no email, nothing. So I just feel like, 'Okay, I'm going to the United States and I'm going to stay with my brother. And then I just start a new life!' And uh... so I did not know what Houston look like. So by the time—this is my husband Jerry...

[Husband Jerry walks by to get to kitchen]

JL: Hi.

(9:42)

ML: So um, when I arrive in Los Angeles, when I got off the plane, I was like 'Oh my goodness, *this* is America!' So beautiful and especially the weather, 'cause Taiwan is kind of humid, even worse than Houston. So the summer was really, really bad—hot and humid. You walkin' on the, 'cause there's a lot of walking outside. Because the store just one next to each other, like, uh just like ... I don't know if you've been Hong Kong, it's just very crowded. People just have no—few people drive at that time, so just have to walk. And then every time we go shopping, and after we finish shopping, all wet. So I just wanted to get some place that dry weather is good. So when I get in Los Angeles: 'Oh, that's good. This is...I'm going to stay here, America.' And after four hours...uh flying to Houston, when I get off the plane, I was like 'Oh my goodness, this is just the feeling just like Taiwan.' [laughs] So I always joking and teasing my brother, 'Why you choose Houston?' Uh and at that time, I really don't know what Houston was like, and uh, but right now, I've been in Houston for... that was 1981, so it's almost 32 years. And I, well, I think right now I get used to Houston and I really like it. At least we have a lot of space, it's not like California, you know, you cannot afford to have a big house like that.

JM: Um, your questionnaire said you came for graduate school?

ML: Right.

JM: Was that, um, what you had planned while you were in Hong Kong? Did you plan to come here for graduate school or is that something that kind of developed after you came?

ML: I think I just have that mindset that eventually, I'm coming for more advanced education. That's the...that's the mindset for all the college student at that time. So it's just without second thought, everybody was like follow that path. And I was like that too. I just happen to have the opportunity to get interview and get into the airlines. I think that's, you know, I'm still thinking that I need to come back to the right track. That's the mentality of that

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time, so it was, uh, I have that mindset but it was not planned... uh 'cause I think I was planning to at least work for 2-3 years and get, save some money and then come to study. But after I find out it's not for me so, just you know, a little bit earlier. So that's why I was little bit different from the uh, I would say, regular graduate student coming from Taiwan. They all, you know, most of them hav— take the exam and pass everything and then come because the school give, issue them I-20s, to come over. Mine just a little bit different. I just come over here and then take the exam and then, you know, Houston with my brother, 'cause he, he married. At that time, he does, they don't have children, so I just kind of stay with them in their house. Very lucky, I don't have to go through those uh... regular path like uh the graduate student coming over here, and they have to find their own place, and financially it's very tight. I, I'm... very lucky.

JM: So when you first came, how did you financially support yourself? Did you work?

ML: Well, uh, my parents [laughs]. Yeah 'cause I don't have to—I don't have expenses for, for the housing and everything 'cause I stay with my, my brother. And they're very good Christian and my sister-in-law, they treat me very, very nice. So I just stay with them. Uh, well, my parents bought me car. So I—that's all I need, I have a transportation to go back and forth to, to school. So it's a, yeah, it's a blessing.

JM: Um, I guess, when you came, did you speak English at all? Or...

ML: Uh... okay, as I mentioned, I—in the high school, my dad sent us to—okay, there was, there was a new school. Or well, I would say it's a high, high school, it's a Catholic high, high school. Uh it was just built. And it was like a Chinese uh... palace kind of a building style. So my dad really liked it, and it's a really...next to the park that we used to go to picnic um and he just uh... he liked that very much and uh—once he learned that this is a girls' school only uh... and he liked Catholic, that the quality, so he wanted to send all the four girls, four daughters to the uh... to that school, so we are very... uh lucky to.

(15:08)

[ML's cell phone rings and she tries to turn it off] So three uh actually, three of, three of, three of four... sorry, so three of four of us uh... went to that... uh school. It's a—focus on language. So I, I learn...uh my major is French, was French, and then English is minor. So I do, I speak English, I would say, better than uh majority of the high school student in Taiwan. And...so I do, I do speak English when I get here but still, not that, as you can see, it's not that fluent or with a accent and some, sometimes a lot of grammar uh... need to work on. So I did experience a obstacle, when I—especially I studied in education psychology. It's—language is very, very important. So I can still remembered the first time, because when I received training in Hong Kong, it's in English too. It's like British English... uh and three, three girls from Taiwan: One was from uh... uh U.S., she studied in... I think she used to be in Seattle, and then she's fluent in English. And the other two girls was from, graduate from the University of Taiwan. So our language is really need to put a lot of effort, for that training, so I passed that training and then built up a little confidence. After we... after I moved to U.S. to study, it's a different thing. So a lot of reading; the first class, professor just throw us, 'Okay, this is the book list that you have to do' and I was like, 'Oh my goodness, how can I finish all those books?' And uh...I was very quiet in the class, 'cause I really do not, don't, did not know how to ask questions and also afraid to ask questions because of the language. But I think uh, but I am very um—I'm not very shy, so I would, after class, I will go to, went to the professor and tell them, you know, in Taiwan, we don't speak English and then I need to have more time or if you can—sometimes I videotape, uh not videotape, tape. At that time, I bring a tape recorder, so if you allow me tape that so I can go back home

to listen. So, and they're, they're pretty nice, so I've done that for the first year. And uh, after that I catching up.

JM: Would you say there was still like culture shock though, even though you kind of already knew English?

ML: Uh culture... shock... I don't see that. It's just... uh because uh I been in Hong Kong for a year, so it's a, before that I never step out of Taiwan. So uh Hong Kong for me is kind of culture shock. Because there, everything driving on the left hand side. So when you cross the street, uh or you, normally you would just go look at the right, right? And I would just look at the right and I start walking and then the cars coming from, from the left. So it's a, Hong Kong was very, very crowded and people were speaking Cantonese; I don't understand so Hong Kong, I would consider my first culture shock, even it's a Chinese society. But coming to U.S., I just feel like it's a, it's a very good environment, that I like, so uh, and I realize I just I have to, I think it's the uh, the language, I have to work on it. After you have that language skill, and then you will, you can learn and understand more things and build up relationships with, with different, different ethnic group of people. So for me, I think I just—it's like a eye-opening experience for me, I don't feel like... I feel very, very few negative things to me, but I just like, 'Oh, this is good environment and this is the language I need to learn and then those are people I'd like to, to know.' So uh, I don't know if this explains to you.

(20:26)

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um... after graduate school, how did you—what kind of job did you first get?

ML: Okay, actually... I think it was...I wrote it down. It's a reinsurance company; it's just my, my sister-in-law had a friend who know there's an opening, ask me if I wanted to go. I think it's during the summer time. I say, 'Yeah, yeah, I would, I would like to go.' So after I work there as a part-time. And they, they're a very good company and I don't think there is any reinsurance company exist anymore, because those start because insurance company, they wanted to... diverse their risk so they have a reinsurance company. I don't think after, after the economy, you know, with all the downturn and everything, I don't think there's any reinsurance company exist anymore. So it's in the Galleria area, it's a nice office building out there. And I worked there as just like a clerk...um I would say there's a different experience to me because af—my, my my life up to that time, I always encounter high educated people...uh and the environment is pretty, pretty good. But working at that company, there's some clerk, they're just maybe high school graduate. And uh...this is, I think that was the first time...uh I can see people can very naturally talking about their life...uh not hiding anything, like talking about their divorce and their boyfriend or several boyfriend and have kids with different... the kids have different fathers, and all those kind of things.

I was like, at that time, I was like very pure in my mind, 'cause I...the background that I grow up, people just... couple, they just don't divorce. And I think at that time, I was like, Okay, some people can see things, especially marriage, from that different angle. And then they're, they feel very natural to share, but inside the Chinese community, you don't...you know, you just don't share. And people would feel ashamed, divorce or anything like that. Of course, right now it's different but at that time, it's like... they don't talk about. So that environment and so I see, the people's not like... they're very different from the background that I grow up. So and they, they like me, so they invite me sometimes to their, you know, their, their social life. And I see those people, and especially um ...there...there's one black girl. That's really the first one I get to know...uh black people. And then she uh...uh invite me to, to one of the, the events. So I was not very comfortable being around with African-American at that time. But right now I'm very comfortable, but that was the first time, first time to really...not involve, but participate their event, yeah. And then uh...so it's quite uh, an experience to me. [coughs]

JM: And then from there, where did you go in terms of your work?

(24:47)

ML: Then I just uh...after that, I... I think it's just a summer, summer work, and then I went back to study, finish my Master degree. Uh, well, then I met my husband, at uh, at church, HCC [laughs]. And uh, we, at that time, his dad, the parents still in Taiwan, but my mother-in-law's kind of travel back and forth but my father-in-law never travel and then he got very sick. So uh, my, Jerry, at that time he's not my husband yet, so he has to uh... go back to

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Taiwan to um—at that time, he just finished one, he’s a computer major and he just finished one contract, and he was able to go back to, to Taiwan to take care of the dad. And he’s the only son in the family and he’s the youngest son and has three sister. And our family, I have my brother is the oldest one and then I’m the youngest one. So, so he went back to Taiwan and uh... uh so after I uh...graduate, I went back to Taiwan too for, for two... about two years, yeah. For um...’cause, and uh oh...I still have one semester before I graduate, so he went back to Taiwan and I, I just flew there to meet my...my mother-in-law. Just kind of—’cause they don’t—he wanted, actually, he propose, we engage before he left, so after um, after I finished that semester, I went back to Taiwan to uh, to meet his parents. But at that time, oh that’s very funny, that time his dad is very sick and then he just kind of uh... uh give my mother-in-law a hint, say he really wanted to see his son get married before he passed away.

So and my husband come back and say, Well, you are coming here—well actually we’re planning to really kind of engage, you know, in their family side—and then he said yeah, ‘If you don’t mind, we’re, can we just change the engagement to a wedding.’ And I said, ‘Oh... okay.’ And he tell me because the dad really wanted to see us; I say ‘Yeah, yeah, yes, we can do.’ So I just call my mom, my parents is in Houston too, and I just say, ‘Well we’re going to change the engagement to uh, to a wedding.’ And my mom say, ‘Oh okay, that’s fine but we cannot go—because it has to—it will happen in like a week or two—but okay, you have my blessing, our blessing and everything is okay.’ So we just uh, yeah we just uh... right after that, we just get married because his, my mother-in-law was a deacon in that, in that church for, for many years. So we’re... in Chinese cultural, when your dad is very sick, you don’t want to have a big wedding. People will...will kind of criticize you, so we don’t... actually I don’t have a wedding at church, we just have a very small, small gathering, a wedding where we invited a pastor to, to marry us, so after that the next day we went to the hospital to see his dad and his dad’s very, very happy to see we get married and the next day, he just, you know, become coma and I think two weeks after, he passed away. So that’s a, that’s an experience to us too.

(29:17)

And aft—so after that I went back to finish my study and then uh, get my degree and then I went back to Taiwan. Because I get my education degree, and I also have uh, a certificate for Mon—Montessori. I don’t know if you’ve heard about Montessori; it’s a, it’s a education approach and to use to teach children in early childhood. And there’s some Montessori school around United States. It’s a very, very good philosophy and approach and method as a foundation to develop uh... how to, how to educate the uh... the children. So since I have the degree and that certificate, and Taiwan, at that time, is booming. Finally open the door, and then it’s a lot of very international, a lot of different approach, a lot of new things coming. So they very welcome new approach or any, anything to Taiwan. So it’s a very good timing, so I went there, actually a Catholic uh... uh organization asked me to, to open a uh...a early childhood center, from pre-K to uh... well pre-K, pre-K to uh kindergarten. So I was the director, I opened that, and then we ordered all the material, ‘cause Montessori have their own very fine design material, so we ordered that from Italy. And everything, so... at that time, Taiwan econ-, economy-wise is very, very good, so parents, they can spend a lot of money for children’s education. So we’re doing very, very good to open that... nursery or kindergarten. And uh...after that I...I was pregnant with Josh and then we, we just consider maybe... we consider, compare the environment and still think U.S. is the better place to raise children, so we, we moved back to the U.S. Yeah, so I just have...we take, we took about two years in Taiwan.

JM: So did you close the nursery that you opened?

ML: I don't—because I was uh...they asked me to open that, so we do have some—I think right now they closed down. Last time when I visit Taiwan, it was not there anymore. So uh I just uh... I did not uh... I just quit that, the job. I helped them to establish but I'm not the owner uh for that school.

JM: So what was it like coming back?

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ML: Okay, and after I come back, because I'm an educator, I know how important for children's childhood, so I stay at home for 5 years, yeah for. And I have daughter Esther, they're just 15 months apart. So I know for uh... I, I truly know the important role for, for a mother to children, so I decided to stay at home, just taking care of them. At that time, we just got back to the U.S., and my husband trying to find a job. So it's a—we really need to have that faith, to uh, to have me stay at home. 'Cause I know I'm capable; if I wanted to find a job, I can find a good job but I just... uh 'cause we're Christian, and I know what is the most valuable things for me to do. So I choose to stay at home and my, my husband find a job when my first—Esther, that was 1990 when Esther was born, and uh...so we just live in a apartment, and uh... with uh very little income. But I feel like uh, you know, this is right thing to do.

After that I got an interview in a Montessori school, so I was able to bring my two children to school. I teach there and then they're around me. After that, and uh... I think when they, when Esther went to elementary school, and I think they don't need me in the house for that long time, so I find a part-time job in a, it's like uh doing assistant to a petrochemical company. It's a China and American joint venture company and I worked for part-time for several years. And then um... that business, I think it's... in '95 or '97, yeah, and then the uh there's the oil crisis happens so the company is downsizing and uh I was planning to become a full-time employee but that company's need to downsize; it's no way for me to get a full-time job. So uh because of that job, I have, I built up some relationship with bank so. And I learned that Chase bank at that time trying to build a new, stand-alone uh... bank in Chinatown, Bellaire Blvd—Bellaire and um Corporate Drive. At that time, there's not that crowded like right now. So that was like um Chase bought the land and then just build, build that bank up there.

(36:10)

So the—I know through a connection from the part-time job, and, the person who worked for Chase international department, he say, 'Oh there's a (?), they're building a bank over there; they need someone who can speak good

English and Chinese to help them.' So he kind of refer me to the branch manager out there, so I got a, I got a job working as a banker. And just about six months, I find out to be a banker out there, uh...especially in that community, that area, there's an investment opportunity out there. And investment as, as a financial advisor, you get to get your license and everything. It's a very, very uh difficult uh exam at that time for an immigrant, you know, manage to... Because it's a really hard uh... uh test, an English test. So, but I think uh that's a big demand for a investment area for bilingual...especially. So uh my branch manager at that time, uh he was, she was doing very well in each segment of the, the business, but only investment they could not find a bilingual person. So uh she asked me if I wanted to try, and I said, 'Okay, I would like to try.' I didn't even know what is a financial advisor and what kind of test I should take and everything. I said I'd give it a try. So she sent me to downtown to have interview with the investment um manager. Uh, so, after the interview, they like me and they say okay they would like to hire me but I have to take all those test. At that time, I was like you know for Chinese, taking test is not a big problem. After I received all those material: uh the next day they just ship all, two boxes. At that time, it's not even um... computer test so I have to study those. When I open those book, and I come back and tell my husband, No,

I'm not taking that test, too difficult. It's a—everything is finance and I'm an education major, psychology is totally different. I did not even know what is... Even reading that, I did not even know what it's talking about. But uh with Jerry's encouragement, saying if you want to move to the next level, get a better job, that will be a, a way that God put in your hand, you just go ahead and have faith to study. So he help me a lot, at that time, still, you know, two children's elementary school. So uh, everyday after work, I go straight to the library to study and then he will, you know, pick up the kids and uh... take care of them.

So I, I just study and I think there was like... three test has to go. Uh so I just one by one pass them and then uh within... I think 3...3, 3 months, I passed the first one and then the second one... Uh in order— have to pass three tests in order for me to get this uh position. So, very thankful that I passed those tests and uh so become financial advisor in 1997.

(39:58)

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So I work for Chase for 11 years and that's how, because uh I was the first financial advisor there, so I built my book, my customer, uh there, and I, I like my job very much. Especially financial advisor, it's really—you need to have your client to trust you because they have to disclose a lot of financial things. If you don't have that trust there, people will not give you those information. So I get to know my client well and then help them, not in a financially—financially of course, not only—but also, I can help them, they will tell me their, their, their problem, in their life, and family life, and even uh their—a lot of new immigrants come over here and they have a different, different uh path like I did. I'm very lucky I did not experience what they experience, so I'm try to help them and uh try to bring them to church. And so I build up very good relationship with my client and I think the trust is really out there, so uh well I would say as a Christian, I do help my client uh in their spiritual life too.

So uh, after 11 year work for Chase and uh, at that time, there (?), Bank One is buying Chase. Uh, but they carry Chase name but the CEO and everything is uh from Bank One. They have different culture and different uh philosophy, which I think is not I... I just don't feel, I, I feel, I, I don't fit that culture, you know, as I did before. So and then, uh Smith Barney is the investment uh investment sector in Citigroup, there's a manager who try to— 'cause once you become financial advisor, you will receive recruitment call like every month several. So I never—I'm not a person like, you know, if you can give me a better uh, you know, starting point or anything, I will move. I'm not. But at that time, I was kind of struggle with the, the new, new company culture, so I decided, well, I'll just take a look of the Smith Barney and I really like that, so I decided to uh move uh in year 2007... yeah, and to Smith Barney and the next year is year 2008, yeah. It's a big financial turmoil over there and experience a lot of difficult time. It's like nobody really know what to do, everything just change so fast. So I—and then there's merging going on between Smith Barney and Morgan Stanley. So as last year, we finally become Morgan Stanley so Smith Barney's name is gone. So right now I've been with Morgan Stanley... this is my fifth year, so yeah.

JM: Yeah, um I guess... How was, like like, the transition from like, like staying at home and then working part-time and then going into a completely different field from what you had studied before? Was that hard?

ML: Mmm... well, staying at home for five years... it was hard. Because uh... my personality is very outgoing, I I know I'm capable to do a lot of things, and I wanted to go there to accomplish something. But staying at home, especially at that time, we, we stay in an apartment, and children are 15 months apart, two of them, and my son is very energetic and then the girl's like driving me crazy, even I'm a education major. Okay, and then see my friends about my age, and they are, every day they are dress up and going to work in a nice and clean office. I was like Oh, look at myself, I'm just like [laughs]...Chinese say Huanglianpo, you know, without makeup, and then you're...look bad and everything so. You cannot dress up because your children will mess up everything. Uh it, it was uh uh ... It was hard. And uh...but I know, this is really something that I value and I need to hold down to it. And I think church really help me a lot. And at that time, we do have some mom, they decided to stay at home, so we form a small, a small support group. It's called MIT, uh Mother Infant, and Toddler, [laughs] MIT, and we have a pastor's wife meet with us like uh monthly. So we just kind of...of, you know, talk about whatever happened to, to our life and uh we just share that burden and then, uh so we have—we support each other.

(46:02)

Because uh...boy is very, very hard to raise compare with girls, you know, with the childhood. It's really—the boys will get sick more often and then every time when my son got runny nose, I know: this

is a sign to start two weeks, you know, you, you just have to, you... If I don't want to give him the medicine, just have to him to build up his immune system. So I try not to give him medicine, and then at least two weeks, I have to watch, watch him. So every time, he start having runny nose, I was like 'Oh my goodness, another two weeks...' And after these two week, my daughter will get it, so that's four weeks. After that month, and then probably he will get another one, so everyday was like that and I, I was just kind of frustrated and then I think I'm a bad mom, I don't know how to take care of children, they're always sick, and everything. So but with that group, and then when I call, my friend say, 'Oh, your son is runny nose? And my son did the same thing right now.' So oh, everybody [laughs] is experiencing

the same thing. That made me feel much better. So I uh...but I still uh went through that, I still will, at the church, will still uh helping the young couple, and I, I will, I will share my experience uh...I still thinking I, looking back, I still think I, I was doing good things to uh...to cook for my children. They're very healthy, especially, they have that security. Uh I think this is... you don't—it's invisible but uh you can see that when they grow up. So I think it's very, very good to help them to build that security and self-esteem at that time.

So uh, and then, going back to part-time: I think I'm very thankful it's not going jump into full—time. Uh going to part-time, it's a, it's a, a big adjustment...yeah and well I have to, uh...I'm very thankful my mother-in-law at that time was willing to help too. So, and then going to full-time: uh I think at that time we just kind of gradually adjust this kind of life, lifestyle. And my children are, you know, growing up, so they don't like maybe, like really need my attention all the time so uh it, it work out alright.

JM: Um, I guess is like the financial sector something that you, kind of were interested in before, did you kind of go into that sector for like financial reasons?

ML: Uh, for that sector, I think just that opportunity come. And I think when opportunity come it, you just have to be prepare and grab it. Otherwise, the op-, you know, it will just slip away. And I think uh for going to financial industry, it's really just the opportunity, for me. I have no clue about finance at all at that time, so it's just, just study those material for the test. It's very difficult because I trying to prepare for the test. The test is supposed you know all those things and then you study for the material and then you pass the test. So I'm just kind of trying to get all the information uh that I've never learned, and people might spend four years in a college to get those uh...those information foundation to, in order to pass the test. So that's uh for me, it's a difficult test. Uh...but since I passed, I just like uh, when I passed the test, and then I started to learn, from uh the, the work I—hands on, hands on experience. And I think Chase uh... is a very good financial institution and they always, non-stop give their employee training. So I just uh, once I even pass the test and become a financial advisor, I still have, you know, lack a lot of knowledge, so I still keep learning. I grab any opportunity to learn, 'cause in that group, we have a lot of experience financial advisor or some uh they're, they're being in industry for years. So when they talk about something, I'm just like Oh, I've never heard about it. But I'm not uh... I, I just have a passion to learn. So a lot of training or anything, uh they don't even, say 'Oh, this is nothing' They don't wanted to go, but I go. I just try to get on, get on the computer and see what kind of training classes the company offer. Every time if I find out anything, I just go. So uh... I, I think this is because I was not prepared to do that; I need to uh prepare after I got the job. So I, I just grab any opportunity to, to learn. And uh, yeah, I think uh ...after a few years, I have that confidence and then uh I, I really enjoy it. I think it's a really, uh, it's a good field for me and I think uh for my personality, I think it's a, it's a really good industry for me to get in.

(52:04)

JM: Um, I guess, working in the Chinatown area and having a female supervisor, did you still experience any sort of discrimination in the workplace?

ML: No, I, I don't. I, I really don't. Some people... uh I think the uh...America is really a society that hard to find in the world that can be so such a big tolerance, and then to accept very different, very diverse, to accept different people from different country or ethnic group so just... I just cannot imagine if we have a Mexican—or a African-American go to China or Taiwan to work... are they going to get the same opportunity as I do? So uh... I, I think some of the immigrants, they come over here, they will

complain about, you know, discrimination or anything, is (?) uh, because maybe they, they not communicate well or some misunderstanding. I think um... I would say yes, there is some, probably there, there is some discrimination there, but I don't want it to jumping into that conclusion that quick, before you kind of think it over, what cause that people give you that kind of attitude or anything. So you, you have to think it over and then make that conclusion uh. But majority of time, I really think it's the uh the

differences and the, the communication, understanding. If we have all the things, went through all the things, and then still feel that, then I would say this is discrimination.

Especially in the big company like Chase or, or uh...Morgan Stanley, they're very sensi—sensitive about that. I just uh, I think I put on the uh... the questionnaire. I was uh electe—invited by our complex manager to be a Diversity Council uh member. There are really, and last, last three year, I was a co-, com-, committee member for uh Women Advisory Committee. So I think the last—all a sudden, last, last three years, they kind of have their awareness that women is really uh play such an important role in the workforce so they just wanted to, to initiate and promote that. So we, we accomplish a lot of things. Every time we meet, all women financial advisor, we chat and everything. Uh sometimes they will, they will raise the issue, okay, uh this position opened and the, the woman didn't, you know, certain woman financial advisor didn't get that management job and those kind of things. Uh, they will make a comment about that, but I, I just like, I just shared with you, I think we need to go through uh... a lot of step and then see if this really true. But majority of the time, I would, I would say, because of the communication, or the quality uh, or the requirement they require is not there so a woman didn't get the job. It's not because you are woman you didn't get the job. And the same thing as uh, you know Asian—or African-American, we have to look at all the things. If it's everything, you know, all the requirement you meet and then you didn't get the job, then we have to, to look if that's discrimination issue or anything. But I think they're very sensitive to uh to discrimination so I didn't wanted to—I do see a lot of people, if they have something they did not achieve or they didn't get something what they want, and they are just very easily to conclude this is discrimination. I don't see that way. I think we just need to be fair.

(56:38)

JM: Um, I guess, thinking back to any major events in U.S. history or like Texas history, do you—can you think of any events that has really impacted your life?

ML: Like what kind of history event?

JM: Like um I guess um, I don't know if you were here or in Taiwan for like the oil prices—or like oil prices dropped and then—things like 1983, when Houston went into a huge recession, or just like anything... I mean, when you first came in 1981, I think Houston elected its first female mayor for like 10 years. Yeah, so like, were any of those things, kind of, impacting on your life? Or did you...

ML: Um, I think with uh...It's just like I mentioned, about three years ago I joined that Women Committee and I think if you say there's any impact in my life, I would say just uh women's uh...position, it's getting more...uh awareness and then women have more opportunity uh...in society Yeah, and I can see in our company, just uh...we have financial advisor, woman financial advisor, not more than 10%. So...that's why they established that Women Committee...want us to recruit more financial advisor. But uh...I think just, just looking at our office, we have about 17 financial advisor. And we have—our ratio is much better than overall. We have three female financial advisor and uh...majority white, male financial advisor out there. And their their, uh their business doing good, and uh they are the top producer out there, majority white male. But if you say is there any discrimination or unfairness involved... I think they're (?) just have more connections and they have more connection with more, you know, high-network client. And uh, but I think we're catching up there. Like immigrant, uh, we, I just have—'cause I'm a first generation immigrant, I build up connection by myself. But those financial—uh they're, you know, they have several generation here already. So I don't think it's a, it's a fair or fairness thing—issue, it's the connection and the history. They've been here for three generations; of course they have more connection. It's just like, I'm thinking about myself... if uh, if my children uh in the future,

they're—they want to be in this industry, I have my connection that I can help them. So this is not a, a fairness issue or not. It's just uh you have more connection and then you build up your—and I, I think they work very hard to build that uh that relationship. Because they have a good foundation, so we are building our foundation right now.

(1:00:21)

Of course, compare with them, we'll be less but since China right now, economy and everything is very wealthy uh society there. So there are a lot of—it's very, very different. The immigrants that you see today is very, very different from uh my time and what, you know, the like, George Gee's time. It's just very different, 'cause they like uh—I, I looked at George's history that you, you put it in. It's like, you know, people come over here, they have really nothing, okay. My generation, yes, I come over here to study because I have a good education so education is a good tool for you to, to uh to uh...to get uh better opportunity. But right now you look at 20, 21st century, those immigration that come over here: China, those uh young uh student come over here. They're not just like uh stay in a very uh less expensive apartment. They're here to, uh you know, when they settle, they stay in a very, very luxury apartment and they have a, a very expensive car, and then uh they go to the, the bank to open an account—it's a lot of money they putting in.

So it's very different now. Uh I, I think it's uh...the how long that you are in the society the (?) connection that you have and then also, uh for the, for the new immigrant, they have a lot of uh you know... they financially, they are very wealthy, so they might build up their foundation much faster than we do. And like my, my clientele right now, I have a lot of from Mainland China and you just cannot imagine how wealthy they are. Uh, it's very different right now, yeah.

JM: Um, I guess, about those relationships that you've built, what kind of like networks do you think that you've had in the U.S. has really helped you like build relations, make friends, and like help you make those connections?

ML: Okay. I think I start with the uh...the bank. Bank is a, it's a good environment to uh, to, to start with, if, if I first come up with—got my license and I work for Morgan Stanley, I, I don't think I can stay for even three months.

Because Morgan Stanley, you don't have those client base, you have to work on your own client. But working in a bank, you have all those bank, bank clients, so I work on, I build my book from the, the bank client. And then the banker has to refer their, you know, this is one of their scorecard, they have to refer their client to talk to me to open the account or business. And I—so from my, from my business, I build up a big connection and relationship out there. And then also, I involve volunteer, community services a lot, and that build up my, my relationship and connection. And then also, uh I go to Houston Chinese Church for—you know, since I arrive here, so 30, 31 years and uh...and one church, never moved to any other church. So uh...I build up a lot of relationship there. It's a different relationship; uh it's very solid and very um good relationship I really love. And I think right now, I'm in the second half of my life [laughs], so I will—uh I think my value and my um focus will be more shift a little bit to—more to church for the uh young couple, young immigrant, because China they have a very different, different value so I just try to uh help them. If they have some issue in their life, and then I would like to, uh I'm very glad to share my experiences with them. So I teach—my husband and I teach—Sunday school and then uh there's a very good class, developed by a uh... doctor from Northwestern University, working on uh family, and then uh husband-wife relationship, and also the parenting, so we're teaching that Sunday school for, for the Chinese group to help them out. And uh, I do volunteer in the Light & Salt Association for cancer, cancer patient and special need group.

(65:54)

Special need group is really kind of a uh...my heart for, for that. And it's just very—I think, I think I never under-, I never know anybody who has a special need child before, before I join them. I think it's

just through Sunday, uh through Sunday school teaching and there's a special needs parent in my class and when she shared uh her struggle, and then I, I'll just uh, and then I helped them to form a team that's uh...the special needs caring group. And I still helping them for, I think, this is the fifth years already. And I've learned a lot from them and I think it's really kind of open eyes, because my life, I would say, is very blessing and uh I don't, I don't see those people and family struggle, have this kind of struggle, so I just walk with them and then uh help them too. And so we meet like monthly and we have a different uh...program to, to help them out. This is a very uh, very close group that I, I really

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love to volunteer. And then also we go uh to China for short-term mission, and like we're planning to go this year in October uh to orphanage to help them through a Chinese Agape Foundation. And then I think through church uh, our church really help me grow a lot, to—if you're talking about the connection or anything, it's really develop from the church. Volunteer uh...work, and working with nonprofit organization that help me grow a lot.

JM: Um, I guess now that you've been in the U.S. for so many years, um like I guess, what do you identify as? Like if someone were to ask you, what were you, would you say like I'm Chinese American, or I'm Texan, or Asian American?

ML: International! [laughs] It's really, because I, I left Taiwan, you know, after I graduate, that was like 1981 right. So uh I, I consider Houston as my home, because I've been living here for more than 30 years and Taiwan is only like 20, 22, 23 years. Consider Houston as my home and uh American as my country, but when I go back to Taiwan and I still think I'm Chinese and I grow up there. And I still uh watching the, the news from uh Taiwan and I still pay a lot of attention uh to what's going on in Taiwan. And I have my friends there and also, I have two sister that still in Taiwan. So uh... I really, I think, I think it depends who ask me this question. [laughs] If uh, if like in the workplace, Yes, I'm a, I'm a U.S. citizen, so I'm American. But uh if back to church, that's Houston Chinese Church, so I speak Mandarin there and then uh I teach Sunday school in Mandarin so I consider myself a Chinese. And uh back in Taiwan, because of the political uh, you know, scenario, and uh I claim myself Taiwanese. So uh it's uh... international! [Laughs]

(70:08)

But I, I feel good about it. Some people's like, 'Oh we just lost our identity,' or they feel sad. I, I don't see that way. I think I'm real-, I'm very thankful; I thank God for giving me all this opportunity that I can, I can live here in the U.S., it's really the best, the best environment, and then uh I still have my uh my roots in Taiwan. And right now, because my parents they were from China, Mainland China, and right now so many immigrant, it would say: I think when—our time, when we in the college, in the, in the Chinese student um...organization, it's like 90% from Taiwan and then only 10% from, maybe less, from, from China, because at that time they're not allowed to come to, to study. And right now it's reversed. It's like 90% from Mainland China, less than 10% from Taiwan.

So and then our church... every time you have newcomer, and they're, they're from, from from China, and then I have—I help them and then I uh, I join their fellowship. So when they ask me, I will say—'cause Taiwan, in our, in our ID, before our old ID, will, will kind of put your—where you originally—your parents from. So my ID is not saying Taiwan, even I was born in Taiwan. But I still have what you originally, your parents, so still China. But they just—I think they just change that about a few years ago. If you were born here and then you are Taiwanese. So when, when I talk to the uh...the people from China, and I will identify yeah, my parents are from, from China so I'm, I'm Chinese! It's a... I think it's very interesting. And I feel it's a...it's a kind of a enrichment for, for me, to identify I'm U.S. citizen, and then I'm also, my parents originally from China, and I was born in Taiwan. So uh...I think it's really depends: so we can start conversation [laughs] with different people, yeah.

JM: Now that you've been here so many years, I guess, what kind of Chinese or Taiwanese traditions have you guys—um your family have taken care to like preserve...? Or what kind of American traditions...?

ML: Oh, a lot 'cause of... Well, first, big thing is my mother-in-law live with me and she has two room, her bedroom and her study room. So because my uh, my husband is the only sons in the family so uh... this is the very traditional Chinese culture: the son will take care the elder parents. And uh then...so this is—also because, because of my mother-in-law live with us, and she's like, you know, Chinese New Year or, or any festival, and we, we will, we will, we will celebrate. And so like Chinese uh—zong, zongzi jie, we'll have that, and yuanxiao...all those things. So my children, I educate my children, Oh today is like Duanjie or something. And they, they know that like especially like Chinese New Year where they will get red envelope with money, so they really appreciate that. And

uh, yeah, we, we do, we do reserve a lot of Chinese culture and try to uh... we...try to still speak Mandarin at home with two children. I think this is a good things to do, so they, they appreciate that. And they're kind of—right now, when you know—especially they graduate from college to work and they know, you know, if you know a different language, that will be a plus. So, like, my son will uh...intentionally say, 'Oh let's speak Chinese at home.' So we're, we're doing that, so every time—we speak Chinese more uh than when they were young. When they were young, they don't like to but right now they learn. And then push them to Chinese school and they don't like it, I think—I don't know if you have ever been... yeah, don't like to Chinese school. And right now they appreciate that, yeah. Uh so for lifestyle, I think uh we're like the uh, are (?), I prepare food majority is still Chinese uh Chinese food.

(75:23)

JM: Are there any, I guess, like more American traditions that you guys have taken up?

ML: Well... American tradition, yes, like rodeo. We'll go, we—you know, [laughs] and then our office will have Texan day, wear jeans and boots. I have one, one pair of boots that ev—I wear once a year. [laughs] And uh...I think a, I'm very comfortable with American culture and the Chinese culture. Uh they're not against each other and I think it's uh, you know, we embrace this two culture. Uh I, I'm very comfortable with that and I like, you know, American style. And then uh, in our office, every, after, after market close, we have a happy hour and we will go there and then our, our, our company have a lot of different events that I join and then I just uh, you know... I think Houston is very, the Hispanic population is over 50% already, so I, I sometimes go to celebrate Hispanic Mardi Gras or, their festival too. So I think it's a—Houston is very diverse and then I, I will come and then I enjoy different cultural things so uh...that's theirs, you know, they're all good.

JM: With raising your children, do you think having that educational degree from the U.S., has that kind of shifted what you thought you would, how you thought you would raise your child from like, from a more traditional Chinese kind of um discipline? Or did you kind of change that a bit?

ML: Uh, well, I think because, because I'm education major, so I, I don't, I don't use one culture or one uh...approach. It's kind of a...a different approach. So I have Montessori, and I have a, you know, like a traditional

American's education approach. So I'm not like the real Chinese parents, you know, have to study, like after school you still have your homework to do. We do have some, but there's, they're (?) very interesting. We—in our old neighborhood, I, I have a one neighbor's African American. And she also work in the different branch of the Chase at that time. So there, there was a very good, there was a very good conversation between us, uh... uh that was in the middle school. Uh...so we have this kind of conversation: she says, 'Oh, what, what your son do after,'—'cause they're in the same uh same uh grade, but different, different school though—what was your son do after, after school?' I say, 'Well, and then he practice piano, and then,' but uh my son play football uh since uh middle school, 'and then come back and he do his homework' ... She say, 'Okay...', so... Oh, at that time, I didn't mention football, I say, 'Play, play piano and then do homework, and then uh you know we have dinner, and then he will study.' And he will, and she will come out and say, 'Okay, you do all this... when do you son do sport?' And I say, 'Well I think it's uh during the weekend. They have some, you know, practice.' She said, 'No, this is not good. You need to do sport after school, and then you have your meal, and then if they have time, they do their homework!' [laughs]

So it's like, I say okay, for them, they're, they're focused on sport very, very much. For us, you know we, we, we do study. But compare with other uh Chinese parents and it was like whoa, your son come back to

uh... practice piano, and then do sport, and then do homework. And they're just saying 'why' they need to study, my son come back and then just have the meal and then study all this. And they go to different uh...you know, the uh—they do a lot of, you know, piano, violin, flute, and uh Kumon math, and all this. Like, you know, and then on Saturday, it's like from 8 to 6 pm, they all do different kind of, you know, things. So uh I'm, I'm—I think I'm kind of a in between. Not that

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extreme, you know, academic, and then it's not that—but I think for some, for some of my friends as I'm already, you know, let my son to play, to play football is really unbelievable. When they learn that, you know, 'Your son play football? Are you crazy? Do you know how dangerous that sport is?' I say, 'I know but, you know, this is something he really like to do.' And then I just pray every time when the practice season come up, just pray that—and then he uh, Josh was telling me, 'Every season, you know, if you don't get injured, and your coach think you're not playing football seriously, so you got to get some kind of injure'—so I just pray, 'Okay, small injure, not that bad, you know.' And he, he got, every season, you know, he got some injured. So a lot of my, my, my friends just cannot believe, you know, I let Josh to play football. But uh, but thankful—thank God, he did not have major injure uh and is still healthy and manage to graduate.

JM: Okay, um I guess then, just are there any other memories you want to share with us?

ML: Uh wha—what kind of...

JM: Just anything.

ML: [laughs] I think I share a lot already. [laughs] So I, I'm just very thankful, I think I'm very blessed. And my, my children always uh... when we talk, and they will always thankful that uh... they have good parents, we have a good relationship, and then our family's very open. And then also, we uh... they see an example that we're taking care of elder parents, so I think this will be a good tradition to pass to them. I don't really kind of lecture them, you know, this is, you need to, 'cause in, in Chinese, we emphasize xiaoshun (filial piety). There's no word that in, in English can describe that xiaoshun, that you're not only respect your parents but you really care about your parent and take care of them. So I think we don't lecture them but they can see how we treat our parents and I think this is uh, something that... and then also uh, I feel very blessed that uh my children, they, they are Christ-follower. So we pass our, our belief to, to them. So I think this is something that—the most valuable things that I can pass to my children. And they appreciate that, you know, it's a—normal family, because it's hard. Right now, this kind of family is kind of a minority now. So they really appreciate that. But when they were young, they don't see that such a precious things, but when they grow up, they see a lot of children; they, they grow up in a broken family. So they come back and they really show their appreciation with the, the environment that we provided them. I think this is something I really value and then very thankful.

JM: Well, thank you so much for talking with us.

ML: You're welcome.

(1:24:41)

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]

