

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

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Interviewee: Jihuang Ji

Interviewers: Kristian Edosomwan (Senior); Meredith George (Junior)

Date/ Time of Interview: March 29, 2014, at 4:30PM

Transcribed by: Kristian Edosomwan and Meredith George

Edited by: Chris Johnson, Sara Davis, and Patricia Wong (6/20/16)

Audio Track Time: 1:33:46

Background:

Jihuang Ji was born in China's Jiangsu province. During the Cultural Revolution, her schooling was disrupted and she was sent to the countryside. However, when Deng Xiaoping regained power, Ji was able to obtain a recommendation, pass the college entrance examination, and enroll in Huanzhong University, where she studied mechanical engineering and became a professor of computer science. She was sent to the University of Maryland as a visiting scholar by the Chinese government and moved to Austin to work with Dr. Raymond Ye in computer science research. Then, she moved to Houston to obtain a PhD in computer science and eventually became a professor at Sam Houston State University.

Setting:

The interview focuses on Dr. Ji's experiences growing up and getting an education in China during the Cultural Revolution. It also details her experience as a computer science PhD student at the University of Houston in the early 1980s and the difficulties she faced.

The interview was conducted in a private study room in Fondren Library at Rice University. The interview lasted about an hour and half, with a few minutes at the end devoted to taking pictures with each other and with the items that she brought to the interview. Dr. Ji brought two books that she had written: one that she co-authored about computer science and one that she wrote by herself about her experiences in Houston.

Interviewers:

Kristian Edosomwan is a senior majoring in sociology and Asian studies from Beaumont, TX.

Meredith George is a junior at Rice from Houston, Texas majoring in sociology and policy studies and minoring in business.

Interview Transcript:

**Key:**

<b>JJ</b>	Jihuang Ji
<b>KE</b>	Kristian Edosomwan
<b>MG</b>	Meredith George
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause

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<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]	Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

**JJ:** So my friends want—want me to let them know what kind of question you will ask us.  
[brings out personal voice recorder]

**KE and MG:** Oh!

**JJ:** [laughs] So they will be able to [laughs] .... So I ...

**KE:** Yeah, so this interview is mostly just about your history and your life experiences, so you can talk about anything that you want to talk about. We're just interested in hearing what your experiences as an Asian American [MG laughs] in Houston.

**JJ:** Okay.

[indistinguishable overlapping speech]

**MG:** So just start from, I guess, yeah, if you want to start from your childhood and like what influenced you and what made you decide to come here or just start wherever you feel comfortable.

**JJ:** [overlapping] Come to the United States you mean?

**MG:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**JJ:** Uh, okay. Let me start with [MG laughs] probably, uh, the year I was in middle school, high school. Okay. Let me see. I graduated in 1965 in middle school and then get into high school. Okay. But, uh, before I finished the first year in the high school, and, uh, uh, Chinese—says—has a Cultural Revolution. I don't know if you have any idea about that. Okay. So they started the, you know, Cultural Revolution and then the school all, you know, uh, stopped. Uh, no class in the school. And then we stayed in the school for about—let's see that's 1968—we stayed in school for about less than .... Oh, 1966 yeah, the Cultural Revolution started, so we stayed there for about two and half years.

Then—then we get into the—about end of 1968. And the—then Chairman, um—Chairman Mao started to say, [laughs] “Okay, those young kids who are in middle school, high school, uh, go to countryside to learn from peasants.” Okay, so actually at that time we were kind of like whichever Chairman Mao said, we would just go. [laughs] We go for it. We didn't know, you know, much about those things, so I went to countryside. I went to countryside with, uh, some of my classmates. You know, three—uh, two classmates and a couple of other, you know, uh, students. And at that time I was the first year high school student. Okay. And, uh, I stayed in countryside for about—actually altogether about five years.

Okay, and the, hmm—the first two and a half years were just, uh, you know, I did the labor work with the peasants together because, you know, in China at that time, uh, the land—the land in, uh, countryside was, you know, assigned to group of people not individual people. So

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then, you know, I was with a, you know, work (?) group. We called a bridge. We call it bridge. And then we have about, uh, like, uh, probably about 100 people, you know, in that village. And, uh—

**MG:** [overlapping] Wh—

**JJ:** I did the labor work for two and a half years.

**MG:** What was the village called where you did the labor work?

**JJ:** Oh the—okay, the village.

**MG:** Mm-hmm.

**JJ:** Um, this is called Yang Village.

**MG:** Okay.

**JJ:** Yeah, actually I had one—I, you know—I wrote one article, uh, which said that the first day, uh, of my countryside life in Yang Village.

**KE:** Oh!

**JJ:** Yeah.

**KE:** Cool

**JJ:** Yeah. I had one article for that. So I went there and then we did the labor work. And at first, you know, we just, uh, feel, “Okay, we need to learn from peasants” or something like that. But, uh, you know, several years after we started to kind of have a kind of feeling: it seems like there is no hope for us to get back to our city, uh, with our parents and get back to university to study anymore. And, uh, I was a good student when I was in high school, middle school. So then I really loved study. And, uh, we lost that opportunity. I thought I—we lost that opportunity forever. Okay? So I started to, uh, learn something by myself. Since you know when I was in elementary school, and I went—I was in a vanguard school, elementary school, so I learned some English there and—on the fifth grade, sixth grade. But when I get into middle school, I was assigned to a class, you know, uh, to learn, uh, Russian.

**MG:** Oh, wow! [All laugh]

**JJ:** You know, we have—actually we have four classes altogether in my, uh, grade and then two, you know, uh—two classes learned Russian and another two class learn English. So I was assigned to learn Russian. So I learned Russian for three years in middle school and then another year in high school. For four years.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** But now I almost have forgot everything. [All laugh]

[0:05:19]

Okay. So, then—so I started to learn something by myself, you know. And, uh—and then after that—and, uh—we have actually, that village, uh, has—not that village. We—we call the, uh—there is a larger unit which consists of about 20, you know, villages. Okay. There is a elementary school there. Okay? And uh, uh, so the children, uh, there, they go to that—they went to that elementary school. And at that time, you know, Chinese government all—also, you know, they like, uh, those, uh, kids to be able to get, uh, uh, not only elementary school education, but also middle school education. So then, you know, we do not have much facility. So that school, they started to add two more grades, so grade seven, grade eight. Like this, so in the same school, okay, they just teach the middle school stuff, you know, based on those, you know, textbooks.

So then, um—and then I was, uh, you know—I was assigned to go there to, uh, teach. And, uh—but I would not get salary, uh, as the other teachers. So the other teachers, they were, uh, kind of like belonged to the government education system. They—they have salary, but I didn't have salary. And, uh, I have a kind of like a—they just count those points, you know, to try to, uh, get my food, or other things I get from, you know—from village, you know, instead.

So I was a teacher there for another, about two years, two and a half year. Okay. And they have—it's very interesting that that village, uh, that school, uh, didn't have anyone who can teach English. But they said, well, middle school students needs to learn a foreign language, one foreign language. And then I told them I learned a little bit [JJ and MG laugh] English while I was in elementary school. [All laugh] So I started to, you know, teach English, and I teach math—I taught mathematics. I taught English. You know, I also taught kindergarten. So that school is like, uh, starting from kindergarten and then first grade, second grade, and then seventh grade, eighth grade altogether, you know? Yeah. And, uh, uh, that facility, you know, they—they do not have enough teachers. They didn't have enough students either actually. So like, uh, I teach a class which is the—the combination of second and fourth grade. So, you know, two grades get together into one class. And then every one hour, uh, I teach the—you know, one part of the students like for, uh, a half hour and then let them do exercise and then teach another—another half like his one.

So I stay there for altogether five years. Okay. So then on, uh—actually on the fourth year, I got a opportunity to get into a kind of community college and, uh, I was recommended by them, by them. And they said, “Okay, you—it seems you love study. And then we will send—we would like to recommend you to go to that community college.” And, uh, so I was so happy. And, uh, my mom even, you know, uh, tried—paid money to ask a for—fortuneteller person to try [JJ starts to laugh; MG laughs] to see whether I would be able to, you know, leave—

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh!

**JJ:** —countryside or not. And then they said yes. But, unfortunately, I wanted—or, I was still there. And, uh, well, at that time, uh, I thought I would stay in—in the countryside for my whole life. And my mom even said, you know, “If you—you—you have to stay in countryside, you know, and, uh—I would—I will, you know, stay with you after my retirement.” Something like that.

Okay. But things changed the second year and, uh, that's 1973. Deng Xiaoping got on the stage—got *back* on the stage. Let me say this way because Deng Xiaoping was criticized by Chairman Mao, you know, during Cultural Revolution. And as he, you know, he got back to stage, he said, “We need to, you know, not only consider about politics things, but also we need to have our economics be strong.” And, uh, so he started to try to, you know, do a lot of things to try to, uh, you know, bring up the economic, you know, part. But then he was, you know, step down—stage up, step down, stage up, [laughing] or something like that.

**[0:10:30]**

And, in 1973, he was stage up. And then he said, “Whoever wants to go to university, need to, uh—recommendation is important. However, they need to take examination.” So—so then that—that is a kind of, you know, favor to me. And, uh, so—so then I was recommended. So our, uh, whole, uh, community, we have 20 big bridges, about 20. And then they said, uh, um . . . . We have—I—I don’t—I don’t know how many, probably 800, you know, young kids like me who were sent to that, you know, uh—the—the—that area. And then they said, uh, uh, there were four people who can go to university. So we have several hundred, 600, 800 something like that. So then, they recommended 12, you know—12 students. So I was one of them.

**KE:** Wow.

**JJ:** So then they said, “Well we recommended you and after that, it all depends on you. If you are able to get a high score and then you will be accepted.” Okay. So then I went there. I took the examination, and fortunately, you know, I didn’t give up during the time I stayed in countryside. But, uh, I did feel very sorry for some of those kids who are really very nice, you know, uh, kids and then they—they were very good student when they were in school, but after they get into countryside, you didn’t—they didn’t touch book. They didn’t touch textbook. So then I took examination and then I was accepted. Okay?

I accepted and, uh—actually at the time when I, you know, applied for the admission we need to fill form, right? Say what is your, um—so which university you’d like to go. I dare not to fill any good university. [laughs] Instead I just, you know, filled university which is called Yangzhou Normal University, which is local university. And, uh—and then because I was afraid, you know, they just do not let me leave, and so if I went to a local normal school and then after that I would still be a teacher and I can, you know, come back to teach in that elementary school and middle school, you know, like this.

So—so then I did that way. But, uh—but it is, you know it just happened at that time and the university, they don’t care which university you applied for. And it happened the university I went, you know, they need to—they need to, uh, have a special class—no, no, you know—special class which they need 100 person to—training that 100 people to become university professors. So then, you know, I—I believe I got a pretty high score [MG laughs] and then I just was just admitted into that university—so into that university to study mechanical engineering which was not my—not—not—actually, I don’t really—I do not have any knowledge about mechanical engineering. [All laugh] I—I like mathematics very much. I like, you know—I—I didn’t have any knowledge about that. I just feel I was not good at that. I was not talented on that. And—but I went there.

**MG:** So did you get—sorry.

**JJ:** [overlapping] Yeah. Go ahead

**MG:** [overlapping] Um, did you get placed in the mechanical engineering because of your test scores or ...?

**JJ:** It's just because they want to have 100. You know, they want to training—you, know, to try to train 100 university to—the—they want to have higher score. Yeah.

**MG:** Okay.

**JJ:** Yeah. Students—so they picked me. [All laugh] They picked me.

**KE:** So is that, um, Huazhong University 'cause I noticed your—

**JJ:** [overlapping] Huazhong University! Yes!

**KE:** [overlapping] I looked it up! And I was interested.

**JJ:** [overlapping] You—you know that. Yeah, that's Huazhong University of Science and Technology. Actually now it—it—it turned out to be a pretty famous university in China.

**[0:15:02]**

**KE:** Wow. I was actually trying to figure out how you got from Jiangsu to Hebei for university and I was going to ask you about that.

**JJ:** [overlapping] Oh yeah? Oh, uh-huh, uh-huh, that's the reason. You know, uh, originally I only applied for local university in Jiangsu—yeah, in Jiangsu but I was accepted there, so then I went there. I went there and I studied, you know, majored in mechanical engineering for three years and I graduated in 1976. And, uh—and then after that, uh, I was remained, you know, to—I was, say, immediately hired by the same university. So become a teacher. [laughs]

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** So actually, in China in the universities, they would like to keep their own, you know, good students after their graduation to be a good teacher. They like to do this. It's not like in United States, probably you'd like to get other blood. Okay. So then, uh, I became a teacher there. And, uh, then, uh, probably one year or two year after and then the university—the university started to form a new department, computer science department. And then they need more—they need to have some teacher there, and, uh, then I was picked there. [laugh]

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** So I didn't have any computer science background [MG laughs] and become a computer science department teacher. [laugh] And actually many of other teachers, you know, in the department was from mathematics. That's in the early years. They always do this way. They think their mathematic, you know, the ... Uh, so—so my colleagues, many of them are mathematic, you know, teachers. Yeah, so—so I was there and then worked with them, and then we start to learn some program languages and those things anyway, at that way.

And then in, uh, 19—in 1977, so, uh—in 1977, yeah—actually after I got into university in 1973, in, uh—just one year after, Deng Xiaoping stepped down again. [All laugh] He stepped down again, and because he stepped down again, and then, no entry examinations any more. So then, uh, they continued to just use recommendation. So, you know, if you are recommended, then you would be able to get into university. So therefore the quality of the students dropped down definitely—

**KE:** Oh.

**JJ:** —because, you know learning—they do not need to take entry examination. So as long as you were very good, you know, doing labor work in countryside probably you would be recommended. Okay?

**MG:** So who wrote those recommendations? Um ...

**JJ:** Okay, usually like in my village, we have a bridge, bridge has about 20 villages, okay? And above a bridge there is—we call a commune, okay? There is another layer, okay, recommended by that layer. Okay? But they're probably also—sometimes they get opinion from the, you know—from the bridge head.

**MG:** Okay.

**JJ:** Okay, something like that. But because, you know, that's big, big difference, you know, uh, comparing with working in countryside. So, uh—so things happen. For example, you know, some people probably have a good—a relative that know head or something and then they get opportunity to get to university.

**KE:** Oh.

**JJ:** So that's what people say, backdoor. So they went to university, you know, through backdoor instead of like a—a fair competition.

**KE:** Oh.

**JJ:** Something like that, yeah.

**KE:** Okay.

**JJ:** But then, you know, that lasted for another couple of years until 1977. Deng Xiaoping got back up again. [All laugh] He got back to stage again. 1977, at that time Chairman Mao has

already died, pass away. Chairman Mao pass away and Deng Xiao—you know people, you now, started to feel it's very important to develop the economic, you know—economics, so then they got Deng Xiaoping back. And then at about, I think about the end of 1977, and, um—end of 1977, yes—Deng Xiaoping, you, know announced, uh—I'll say Central China, okay—the Committee, they announced say well, “Deng Xiaoping said whoever wants to go to university, okay, has to take entry examination.” Okay.

[0:19:57]

And, uh, uh, there is no one who, uh, can, you know, fight against the people who are in your part—unit—work in your unit, to take entry examination. So that's really big, big mandatory, you know—uh, favor to us. Those young kids who were in—either in countryside or have already, you know, get back in the city to do some other things. You know, like my husband actually—you know, my husband stayed in countryside for about two and a half year, and, uh—and then he got opportunity to, uh, get into our, uh, you know, county troupe, uh, because he play, um, uh, flute. He play flute, and then, you know he gets into, uh, there. So he does not need to—he did not need to go to any, uh, labor work anymore. You know, he left. And then in 1977 because Deng Xiaoping said this. So all those people who originally were in middle school, high school, even elementary school, as long as you *think* you are able, you want to go to university, you can—can take entry examination.

So that's 1977. That's a big, big year. So if now, you talk with people, talk about, uh, did you—you get into university in 1977? And if they say yes, they would feel very proud of themselves because at that time—I don't know the whole country how many young kids there think this way. So only a small, uh, percentage of the people who were able to pass entry examinations. The competition is very, very high. Yeah. And my—my husband—actually, my husband—when Cultural Revolution started, my husband has already get into his twelfth grade. He almost finished all those, you know, high school, you know, study. But he lost opportunity to get into university in the regular—you know, uh, you know, because of Cultural Revolution, so then he took entry examination in 1977. Okay. Before that, he thought he would never have the opportunity to get into university. Okay. And my brother was in fourth grade, in elementary school when Cultural Revolution started, and he took entry examination in 1977, and then he was admitted also. My husband was admitted. He was admitted. My nephew, uh—I have another—I have another nephew, he was also admitted. So, they were all very good students while they were in school, but lost opportunity for that many years.

So in 1977, they all, you know, got admitted. But actually, the Jiangsu province, you know I was born in Jiangsu Province. The Jiangsu Province, the whole province because there were too many candidates who applied, you know, registered to take the examination, and the—the—the Jiangsu education system, you know, they believe there were too many. And because the whole country then will have the, you know, examination, they said—they just think that's too many people. They said, “Well let's make the first exam to, you know, just try to drop, you know, the big percentage and let those winners to take the second examination.” So then, you know—so my husband, my—my brother, and my nephew, so, they all took first examination and then after the first drop—and then they took the second examination. Even the second examination, that is 29 to 1. So that means, you know, uh, 29, you know, candidates there is only 1 who was accepted. So after the first big drop.



So, and that is about, uh, 1977. 2007, 30 years after that, and a lot of articles, they're starting to celebrate—to try to celebrate 30 years, you know, anniversary of those 1977 [MG laughs] students. And then they started to announce all these numbers and then I—I—I found—I say—yeah, I knew it was very, very difficult and then I didn't recognize that it's so difficult, [laughs] you know? So they get into university. You know, my husband just applied for the same university.

[0:25:00]

So then we—you know, we really .... [laugh] Say this way, at that time I was a teacher; he was a student. [All laugh] So his classmates and, uh, you know, my colleagues, we all joke at him. [All laugh] Say, "Your wife is teacher. You are a student," something like that, yeah. And then, you know, though I was a student—you know, I was a teacher, but, uh, I still feel kind of like a—you know I—I feel kinda—especially after my husband get into university, get into school, and those students like me, you know, who were hired immediately after our graduation, we feel kind of we need to learn more. You know? We need to learn more because, you know, 1977, 1978 those students took so hard, you know, examination, and after their graduation, definitely they get the regular, you know, education and then their quality will be higher than us. Very much likely. So though I—I believe that, you know, our group, my group they all love, you know, to learn. Okay? They all love to learn because we lost that five years opportunity. We just feel kind of, um—I want to catch up. Something like that.

Okay. So then in 1978—yeah, one year or so after this 1977—in 1978, and the university started to say, "We want to also develop the, uh, graduate program." So they started to, you know, recruit graduate students. Before that, there was no graduate students. Okay. So they stopped, you know, during Cultural Revolution. So they said, "We want to have graduate student." And then I planned to take entry examination to get into graduate school.

Again, it was very, very hard because I think about—during Cultural Revolution, those students who were in university already, okay, and then they graduated, uh, they were, you know, sent to, you know, different department. "You need to work there." But many of them were assigned a job because at that time after you graduate from university, you are—you belong to the government workers, okay? So then government assigned you a job—assigned you a job.

Like one of my brother, uh, older brother, you know, he graduated from Nanjing University, another pretty famous university in Jiangsu, uh, top university in Jiangsu. And he graduated in Nanjing University, and—but during Cultural Revolution he was in his I think third year in university. And then Cultural Revolution started, so—which means he didn't finish another two years before his graduation. And then they were all assigned a job. So he was—he was assigned a job to teach in middle school, which he really feel kind of very sorry because he didn't know how to control those kids. [laughs] He feel, you know, he—he—he—he couldn't—you, know, he feel—he liked to do research. He—he liked to do—to be a university professor, you know, and then he so ....

And, uh, so then—so in 1978, you know, they started to have graduate program. And I was going to take entry examination, but, uh, I gave up because at that time I've already had my kid—my—my child—my child, and then I feel kind of very, very tired to take care of my child and also to be a teacher, uh, teaching 1977 students. [All laugh] And, uh, also, uh, you know, our university's pretty good. They also, you know, uh, uh, have a kind of a training program to let us, you know, who has already been, you know, hired by the university to get, you know, more

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knowledge, okay? So—so they—they arranged a professor to teach us young teachers. So therefore, you know, I was very busy at that time and, uh, sometime not very healthy even at that time. Hurt a lot, hurt my body a lot. And, uh—but I want to study, but I gave up for the 1978, and then 1979, I took entry examination, get into graduate school ... program. So then I—because at that time, I was a computer science teacher already, right? So then, uh, I applied for, uh, computer science, you know. I was, uh, accepted, uh, you know, into the computer science program.

[0:30:06]

So I wrote those computer science theories [laughing] and other things there, yeah. And, uh, after my graduation—so I was—I—I still stayed in the same university, you know, as a teacher there, and, uh, until 1984. 1984, the World Bank—the World Bank tried to help China to develop, you know, uh, our, you know, uh—to help China. So then they, uh, I think they, uh—we had a loan—loan from them. So Chinese government had loan from, uh, World Bank, uh, got, uh, you know, some money. And then they selected people to go abroad. So I was selected. So I was sponsored by, uh, Chinese government, actually with, uh, World Bank money.

So I came here first as a visiting scholar and, uh, worked at the University of Maryland at computer science department with uh, uh, uh, department chair, uh, Dr. Raymond Ye doing research in there. And then, you know, he actually—he was the department chair. He also owns his own company, so we have a group of visiting scholars who are doing research in his company, including me, okay? But later on, he dropped, uh, uh, uh—I think, you know, he quit the job and run a company, uh, run his company in Austin—in Austin. And then we have several visiting scholars, you know, working with him in Maryland, in University of Maryland, and then, uh, when he moved to Austin, he brought some of us, including me.

So I came south, okay—came south. And then, uh, I told him—and I said, “Well, I want to go to university to study for my PhD.” Uh, so then I came to Houston. I studied at University of Houston for my PhD. So I came to this library a lot while I—I was a student. [All laugh]

**KE and MG:** [overlapping] Oh! Wow!

**JJ:** So when you—you—you say Fondren Library, I didn’t know the name of this library. I thought Rice, they have several libraries. Fondren Library. You know, uh, we came here a lot to—to try to find some materials. [laughs] Yeah. My son also graduated here.

**KE and MG:** Oh! [overlapping] Cool.

**JJ:** Yeah, yeah, he graduated here, yeah. So then, I—you know, I—I studied for my PhD, and then I got a PhD from University of Houston and then got a job at Sam Houston State University.

**MG:** Okay.

**JJ:** Yeah.

**MG:** Wow.

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**KE:** And so how were you reunited with your family after you—did you go back to China afterwards or did you just stay here?

**JJ:** Oh, actually, I studied here by myself, uh, from 1984 to 1986. Okay, about two and a half year. At about end of 1986—the end of 1986 and Chinese government started to . . . hmm, uh, the policy became more open. So more openness. Said, “Well, uh, if you—if you’d like to invite your spouse to come to United States, you can do so.” But before that, uh, you know, they just did not want to do that way because they were afraid you would not go back, right?

**MG:** Right.

**JJ:** They spent money on us and if we just stay in United States, uh, that’s not good to the Chinese government. So then, uh—but in 19—hmm, 1986, at the end of 1986, uh, at that time I studied in University of Houston for one year already. So I started in January and then my husband and my son came in November. In November, yeah. And then Chinese government, uh, you know, begin to be more open. And they believed that, uh, they just say, “Well you’re welcome, definitely, you know, we would be very happy if you can come back and serve for the country.” And, uh, uh—and they believed that even though some of us do not, you know go back and it definitely will still be helpful, and, uh so, for the like exchange program and those things. Yeah I think Chinese government did the right thing. And, uh, I feel actually that is a fact, and, uh, though many people stayed here in United States, and it really also helped the China, you know, the exchange, you know, uh, uh, helped a lot—help a lot.

**[0:35:13]**

We have, actually—we have—uh, like our university in—in China and the president and the deans and other people, they come to, you know, visit in United States. We all host them, right? And when we go back to China, and then we’ll visit our, you know, university and then can give some seminars to them, so.

**MG:** Okay. So those first years, when you—when you first moved to Maryland and it was a totally new environment, what was that cultural adaptation process like? I mean how was that?

**JJ:** [overlapping] That is true. Yeah, that is true. And, uh, actually, you know, first several months was okay with me because, uh, we have so big a group of visiting scholars together.

**MG:** Oh, okay. [laughs]

**JJ:** And then we—every day we took the university bus together. We took bus together. We go shopping together. [MG laughs] We even *lived* together because, um, our boss say [laughs], uh—our boss, he has, uh, you know, some houses, you know. He has some houses; he just let us stay there.

And we were sponsored by Chinese government, so therefore we actually do not need him to pay us. Yeah, that’s kind of free research [MG laughs] for him, you know? [laughs] And, uh, but we also learned, you know? We learned. Like, you know, at that time he was very famous in software engineering. So at that time, he asked us to, you know—to develop system

for the program generator. But the program generator at that time was really, really new. And I didn't know what—what that mean. And we just tried forms, you know, buttons, those things and, uh, I—you know, I didn't know anything about that. We just tried to write a program to draw those forms, draw those buttons, and then try to make it work in some way like what we guess. [All laugh]

Until 198 ... 6 I think, beginning of 19—1986, 1985? And, uh, when I was moved to Austin, and then I found, uh, Macintosh has those graphic interface. So you see? And then in 1986, I found, uh, Microsoft Windows started to have graphics user interface. But, actually, my boss really he was very famous in software engineering. Yeah. He—he has already predicted that [scraping sound] and just ask us to do something. We just, uh, you know, unfortunately [laughs] we didn't know much about that. But then I found, you know, what he actually ask us to do is very much like a visualizing, but that's about 10, 15 years after Visual Basic was—get on market. Let's see, yeah.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** A lot of difficulties after I get into University of Houston, actually.

**MG:** Oh.

**JJ:** You know, at that time, you know, uh, I was—you know, I drove here by myself. And, uh—well, I hate to say drove here by myself. Uh, you know, I bought a car in Austin in order for me to come to University of Houston. I bought a car, a used car with like 750 dollars. Okay? A very old Chevrolet. You know, but, uh, before I—I came here, I never drove on highway.

**MG:** Oh. [laughs]

**JJ:** So everyday, I just drive from where I live to the company, to my boss company about two miles, local. You know, two miles of local. And, um, you know, when I took the, uh, road examination in Austin, and then the—the—the policemen, uh, said, “Okay, drive. Go ahead.” I drive. And then—but—I—I—I need to try to remember, if you met red light, stop. [MG and KE laugh] If green, do something. I try to remember what I learn from the book, you know?

**KE:** Yeah.

**JJ:** And then, there is a green light here, and he said, “Turn right.” I start to think, do I need to stop before I turn right? Or I should go ahead turn right. And there I—I told myself to be safe, stop first. So I stopped at a green light, and there is just, [laughs] you know, the—the—the—the police, he said, “Go, go, go!” And then, I said—“Oh, go! Go! Turn right!” And then I failed. [All laughing] Kept failing the first. And then, he has a comment there stays, “Stop at the—at the green light almost cause accident.” [All laugh] So and—and then, you know, I practice again, uh, you know, one more week. I need to get driver license in order for me to drive to Houston. [All laugh] So—so I went there [indistinguishable] you know, actually—and after that, I tried to go through that test area, you know tried to make me familiar with that area. So my American friends helped me, you know—helped me, you know, he sit behind—you know, besides me. And then I tried driving a lot, so I passed the second test.

And, uh, you now, when I drove *here* and then I have a friend, uh, another Chinese friend, a visiting scholar. He said, “Okay, Ji, I will go with you and, uh, I will help you.” So he—he sit, you know, on the—the vice (?) driver, associate driver’s position, uh—position. And then he said, “You just drive. I will tell you stop and turn.” [laughs] And so then, you know, he just tell me. So I drove the highway, and, uh, after that [laugh] did the same thing—it’s fine after I drove that highway. [laughd] And—and—and, uh, you know, that—that is, you know—actually, you know, before I—I—before left, you know, I told you that we have several people who live together in that, uh, houses—those houses. And they all say—they all came to me to see off. [laughs]

**MG:** Aww.

**JJ:** And, uh, I spotted 2 [laugh]. I—and I start to be nervous, and then I don’t know. I couldn’t stop. You know, you know, the [indistinguishable 1 word] here. And—and then I told myself, I need to go. I need to go. And then, I just go. [All laugh] All right, this way.

Anyway, and actually, first semester study here, uh—actually, let me say it this way. I don’t know whether I should say I was lucky or I was not lucky. Okay? The first day I went to orientation. So for international student, the international students office, they have orientation for us. I went to the first station, and the—and the advisor, the international advisor, you know, a lady who was Debbie. You know, she was so nice. And then she said, “Oh, you’re a PhD student?” I said, “Yes.” And, um—and then she said, “Oh! Our office, we bought several computers here. We asked your department chair to, uh, assign an RA for us. He just didn’t do that. Can you be an RA? [MG laughs] Can be an RA?” And uh, I said, “Well, I don’t know. What do you need me to do?” And then he started to, you know, he gave me those materials and all those manuals, and the, you know, uh, CDs, those things. And then I said, “Let me go home and read that and then let you know whether I should do that or not.”

Actually, what I—I really meant is: I need to call my friend. [laughs] Had in Austin another American friend. You know, he is very good. He is very smart. And then I ask him. I said, “Well, I was offered an RA. Do you think should take that? I never did this before. Uh, I just programing. You know? I—I’m very good at programming, but, uh, I never did administrative work before. And, uh—and he said, “Go ahead! Take the job.” [All laugh] So I took the job, and then he said, “Just read the manual.” [laugh] You know? [indistinguishable 1 word] the manual. So then I read the manual, follow the manual, and eventually—you know, finally it turned out to be good actually. I met a lot of friends there because I worked in United—in, uh, international studies, office, you know, not only their staff, but also a lot of other international students there. And I also got the opportunity to go Colorado, ski because of that international program.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Oh, yeah, yeah. And, uh—so then I was hired there and started to work there 20 hours per week. And—but then, you know, I registered for three classes, and, uh—and, uh, originally, you know, I register for like 60-something, you know, graduate course—in a low level, first level graduate course like, uh, program language, Pascal, like data structure, those which I think I need. You know that I didn’t have much background, undergraduate background in—I do not have any. So then, you know, I just feel maybe it’s, you know—just start from first graduate

course. But then, one Chinese student came to me, said, “Oh you are new?” Said, “New big sister!” Because you know they are very—much younger than me. There are about 22, 23, just graduated from university, was sent by Chinese government also as, uh—you know, um, uh, uh as a, you know—a student, you know, foreign student here, uh, sponsored by Chinese government. So, they call me big sister. I was— let’s see that’s 1986—so I was almost 35—after 35—30—almost 36 years old, but they are much younger. Okay? They call me big sister.

**MG:** Oh.

**JJ:** So then we were together, three young kids plus me, so four Chinese, uh, students studying for PhD. And, um—and then he said, “What—what are you going to register?” I said, “I’m going to register these three classes.” “No, no, no! These classes will not be counted as graduate credit. So these are for those people who needs to, you know, make up their backgrounds, you know? And, uh, so those are not counted! So how many years are you going to stay here? And are you going to graduate as early as possible?” I said, “Sure. [laughs] I want to.” So he said, “You know, just write a report. Just request waive.” You know, he told me, you know, so I wrote. I said, “Well, I do not need to, uh, learn Pascal because I’ve already learned C. Like I do need to take this because I have this background blah-blah-blah anyway.” So I wrote these and then all the four, you know 6-0 levels were waived, waived! And then I directly get into the, uh, you know, uh, credits hours, so I registered three classes, which is database, uh, theory of computation, and, uh, theory of program languages like compiler. So those are three classes. So I took those three classes.

**[0:47:09]**

Then—oh, that's a big shock. When I was in China and then, teacher gives homework, and I almost can finish that in one night. So they give homework. I finish. I forget it. And—but here, those homework. When you got the homework, you don't know what to do! [All laugh] Say, what happened this homework? So, and like 7 questions, and, uh, I do not know answer for *any* of these 7 questions! [laughs] So, oh goodness! I would, you know—I would turn in a blank sheet [all laugh]—answer sheet! And, uh, you know, I just—oh, you know, I started to ask other classmates. Say, "How do you feel? How do you feel?" And, uh—and the teacher give a homework assignment, a—the—a programming assignment. The teacher, first—first class, the teacher give the, uh—the language teacher, uh, said—you know theory of computation gives seven questions. Okay, uh, the language teacher gives the first homework, do a big program for LLR, uh, LR(1) or LR(2) compiler, okay, which should be at least 3,000 lines of code. And then he said, "I give you 2 weeks!" And also 5 theoretic questions, okay? "I give 2 weeks." And then, database teacher said, “Well, I don't know your background. And then let's have our test in 2 weeks!" So therefore, you know, you started to be busy now. [laughs] You started to be busy!

And I just feel, you know, I never want to, you know, study overnight before I came to United States because I always kind of like, uh, you know, try to be efficient. So whenever I—whenever—you know, for example, I—I get to the library, I always have my watch. Take watch off and put here. So, first 20 minutes, do this. Next 20 minutes, do what. So then, every, like—so my progress will be counted in 20—20 minutes, something like this way. So, very efficient, I feel. I feel that way. So, I slept a lot. I do not like to sleep late.

So, usually, and—even now, I—I go to bed at 10 o'clock. But when I was a student in— in China, I would like to go to bed at 8 o'clock, even! [MG laughs] And, uh—but, the university enforce us to take the evening, you know, uh, evening study, you know, in our—uh, so in our bedroom, you—we—we have—the university share all the—all those rooms, you know, and, until 9 o'clock. So, after 8 o'clock, I—I started to feel sleepy, and then I wait—wait until, you know, I get 9 o'clock. I immediately [laughs] hurried! When I get in to sleep, and then, my—you know, my roommates, they're still working and then chatting, and then, even though the light was off. When the light was off, they started to wash. [laughs] You know, you know, and they take baths or something like that. But I was always the first one, you know.

[0:50:31]

But after I came here, I—I just feel I couldn't finish. I said, "What happened?" And, uh, so that big compiler program. And, uh, I—two weeks passed. I finished all the the—theoretical 5 questions, and, uh, I couldn't finish the—the, uh—I couldn't finish the program because I didn't know Pascal. So the teacher said, "Use Pascal to, you know, do this." I asked the teacher, I said, "Well, uh, can—can I use C?" He said, "No! Pascal only!" You know, I feel strange. So now I'm teaching software engineering. When students ask me, "Which program language should we use?" I say, "Whichever language you like to use." My class does not teach you program language. Instead, you know, you just need to implement a system, like this. Or—or if algorithm or intake, you just need to write program to implement that algorithm. I don't care which language. But this teacher, Pascal. So I got within that two weeks, I need to learn Pascal, you know? And first, learn Pascal grammar, and make sure you know the difference between Pascal and C, and then start to write program to test my, you know, understanding of that. And then—and, uh, anyway—but finally, I still couldn't finish. Almost did, but I couldn't finish.

So then, I submitted my, uh—my program. And, uh—and then—because then, I found database will have a test soon. Oh database has a test—had a—a database test. The teacher give like a book. [gestures to thickness of book] So this thick, big amount of questions! So then I—actually, database, I thought, you know, I was good at that. I thought I was good at that because, uh, you know, even after I graduated from university in China, already guided students to do database management system. So I thought I was good. So I start to answer question, you know, one after another. I didn't stop. I didn't stop. I just keep answering question! But, that's the one I would pass. But that's 50 minutes class. And then, when class was over, teacher said stop, and then I only finished about like 50%. [frustrated groan] So, I was so frustrated! So, you see, that program didn't finish and turn in [all laugh] and then the test, I only finish 50%!

And—and then, the teacher, second—second class, the—the database teacher said, "Did I ask too many questions?" Something like that. And we all say, "Yes, you did!" I was so happy. Oh everyone said yes. [KE laughs] And then, you know, the teacher started to say, "Well, the highest grade is a 64." I was so, you know, frustrated. I said highest grade, definitely not me. [all laugh] I didn't finish. I only finish 50%, so I couldn't get the 64, definitely. And highest grade is 64. The lowest one is a 26. The average is a 47. Okay, and, uh, I just feel so angry. I feel so sad. I finish less than 50%, okay? And then, I got the sheet back, and then, I got a 38! [MG and JJ laugh, groans]

And, uh I just feel kind of—when I was in China, and it seems, you know, among the students, I always top 1, top 2 student! And then now I become like, lost confidence, you know? I don't know which way to go! I don't know how—why they could do so good! You know, and I

just feel, you know, I really, you know, studied like this. So then, my friend, another Chinese, the—the young kid, you know, he studied too. He said, "Big sister!" You know, just we two, you know, are in database class. "Big sister!" I said, "Yes?" And then, "How much did you get?" I said, "Well, I didn't get a good grade." [MG laughs] And, uh, "You definitely were better than me. You definitely!" I said, "How could? I got a 38." And he said, "I was the lowest one, 26." He was a PhD student. I was a PhD student.

[0:55:02]

I said, "How could you get a 26? I told you to study for database! You want to work on, uh, compiler program." And, you know, he finished compiler program, so he didn't have the time to study for, you know—for—for database. So he got the lowest one. And then, uh—and—and then, uh—and then he started to say, uh .... I said, "How could? How could?" I thought I, you know, I—I—I—I thought usually when I was in China I compared with other classmates. You know, I can answer questions very fast, you know, comparing with others' speed. And then he said, "Well, those classmates, they have old questions, old tests!" I said, "What does that mean?" They have the .... So they said .... They collected. So this teacher, usually like to has—had a test bank! Okay, he picks some questions, and then let you answer. And then next time, he get on the bank again. So then, you know, other classmates they know this teacher. They know this teacher. They started to collect all those old tests. And then try to answer those, you know, questions. So then, you know, when they read the questions, uh, you know—they read the questions, they do not need to read all of them. They already know what kind of question the teacher ask. They started to answer! But for us, you know, for me, I got to read everything, and then make sure I understand what the teacher asked, and then answer question. You know, you know then he said, "Well, starting from now on, I will try to collect old—old tests—old tests." So we all started to collect. [laughs]

Anyway, we tried to ask other classmates, you know, to try to get ... A—a—a—a—and then that teacher, you know—the second examination that the teacher give, and I—I actually, I really prepared a lot, practiced a lot! And then I can do that very fast, very fast! And then that teacher came for the second examination. And he ask a question. I found [rattling] only 5 page, and every page a small question, and the difficulty is in the same level. You know, I just finish answering all the question. Then check, check, check, I only spend 20 minutes.

**MG:** Whoa!

**JJ:** And, uh I—I was so frustrated. I feel so sad. I just feel everyone get a 100, and then definitely I would fail this class. So then I left after 20 minutes. I just, you know, left. And then my friend left in 25 minutes, and I waited for him. And then he said—I said, "What happened? This teacher was crazy." And then everyone get 100. I said, "Why are those other classmates they're still hurry (?). They're in classroom. They do not want to turn in? They should have finish already!" You know, based on the previous, you know, experience, they should have finished already. And, uh, you know, then usually after that class, I need to go back to international studies office to work. And every time, you know, I—I need to be hurried to go to work. But this is only time—this is only time I do not need to hurry because I have—still have 40 minutes to go.



You know, I was so—you know, actually, I feel so sad. And, uh, at that time, I already dropped the compiler class because I believe—you know, compiler, I just feel—I didn't finish. And, uh, database, I—I believe myself. I think I can, you know—I can get better and better. And then I dropped compiler. I only have 2 classes left. You know, I said—I—I—I'm not supposed to drop, actually. I didn't know, so I dropped. As an international student, I was not supposed. I should take 3 classes, at that time. Now, I think policy changed, so you can take 2 classes, but not at that time. I didn't know.

And then, they started to .... So then the teacher—I just, you know, feel so sad. I said, "What happened?" I said, "The whole semester you have three classes, are all mess." That 7 questions from theory of computation, uh, I couldn't finish all of them, and then I finished part of them, and then several days after, I finished some more. You know, uh, I talked with other classmates, they said, "I've already finished 4." At that time I finished just 3. "I've already finished 5." I finished 4. For exam like this one, I always get behind, something like that. So I—I talked.

But then, that class, fortunately—that class, finally I found out the way. Okay. So finally, found a way. On the very last minute, I solved the last question, so I got first place on that one. Yeah because no one solved the last question except me [laughs] and that question, a theoretic question. But, uh, I had another classmate who is Chinese, very smart. He always believed that if no one else, you know—if he couldn't answer, no one else can answer. Okay? A question like that. And the last question he couldn't answer, so instead, he used a program. He wrote—he wrote a program. But a program can only implement a heuristic algorithm. So, that's not what the teacher, you know, uh, expected. So, he get in to like—the teacher give like three points for the first question, 10 points for the last question, something like that. So he got a 57 or something. Uh, I got, uh, the highest one. Yeah, uh, the highest is 75; I got a 72 because I .... So that kind of question, if you are able to answer, you know it's correct. So, theoretic proof, you know, you know it's correct. Un—unless you—you really do not know the answer.

**[1:01:07]**

So that one is fine. Then the other one is fine. But, uh—but, uh, yeah, compiler I dropped. Okay, and then database—database, I didn't do good. And the second examination, the teacher just didn't grade—didn't, you know, just, uh—we kept asking teacher. Teacher just say, "Uh, I was busy. I was too busy." So, you know, I was just, uh—whole semester! You know, I was, you know, I don't know. I don't know, you know, which level I was at! You know, that's terrible! You know, if you know yourself, right? If you know, that's good. I didn't know, and that teacher does not grade until about when we planned to, you know, prepare for the final examination. Okay, so I—I—I was, you know—feel kinda—I didn't know, you know. I—I said, "Everyone get 98, and everyone get 100."

And then, until, uh, the time when we—I remember that day, you know, we wait in library with my friend, younger—younger brother. [laughs] He called me big sister. We have another Taiwanese classmate. Uh, she was very nice person al—also, you know, because she—her husband is American, and then, they always ask us to—to go to their church, you know, something like that. Yeah. And, uh, we 3 together, uh, reviewed together. And then, all of us get a big stack of the, you know, old tests. And, uh—and that day—and then she, you know, we—we waited for her. And then she came late. And then we said, "Why you were late? We said we—we want to, you know meet at 3 o'clock." And she said, "Well, the, uh—the database

teacher has already had a grade graded." And I said, "Yes? Really?" Said, uh, "How did you get?" And she said she got 70-something. Said, "How could you get a 70? I thought you get 90-something or 100 because the question is so easy!" You know? She said, "Well, I get a 70-something." And she is kind of like a B student. And, uh—and I said, "Why?" And, uh, I feel strange she get a 70.

And then, uh, we saw another classmate and we told to hurry to the teacher's, you know, office. And, uh, then, we just hurry there. And we asked the teacher, said, "How much I got?" And then, I do not quite remember, anyway, I got like a 97 or something. My classmate a 96 or something. And then, we started to—actually, 97, 96 is not good news for us because we need to ask how much others get. [All laugh]

So we started to ask teacher, "So, how many, you know, others who got in the 90s. Uh, he said, uh, 3. I said, "Why? Why only 3 people who get in the 90s? And you only ask 5 questions. They are all easy question." And then, the teacher said, "Because, only you 3 answered the last question correctly." [laughs] Because the last question he ask, you know, database—is this database—are the—are all the tables of this database normalized? Okay, so the teacher, the old questions, he always give un-normalized tables, and the student would answer, "No, not normalized." And then start—if not normalized, please normalize them. [clears throat] And then I saw those table, so very well normalized! You know, I said, "Why the teacher ask this stupid question?" I just say, "Yes!" [All laugh] And then left. That's why I only take—they only take me 20 minutes. But all the other students, they just said no! They started to normalize, try to break the tables. They do two tables, and then that would [tapping sound] be a horrible thing to do actually! [laughs] Real normalizing cannot break.

**[1:05:10]**

So then, you know—so then I got that, and then [laughs] we were soon released! [MG laughs] And then I started to tell my, you know, classmates, "Okay, uh, at least this time—and uh—we get even." Last time we didn't get a good score; they got a good! This time, we get a good score; they didn't get a good score! [MG laughs] And then—so then final examination, we got to do a good job. And then, my classmate started to—he said, uh, "Big Sister, I will—I will talk with the professor, ask him to give aggressive questions!" [laughs] So, "Don't give too easy questions. IT will not be able to distinguish between good student, and, uh, you know—and—and poor students" [laughs] like this. And, uh, he did. [MG and JJ laugh] And he did! And the teacher gave another book—[laughs]

**MG:** Oh no!

**JJ:** —on the final examination because we practiced a lot, and then, we finished. [laughs] We finish on time, and he—he finish on time. So then finally we get—the teacher gives 3 A's. We 2 plus 1 more, Indian student I guess. Yeah.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** That's a—that's the first semester. But, actually the whole semester, I was not in a good mood. You can—you can guess—you can guess that. Okay, that—actually, that compiler—you know, at the time, when I know I get a 38 on database, and then, my classmates, you know—

another classmate who didn't drop the compiler class, and he helped me to pick the homework I turned in. And he said, "Ji, all together—" Say, uh, "All together, about, uh, like 270." You know 270 in the—because I didn't finish the program, and, uh, uh, 270. But among these 270, and like 170 is for that 5 theoretical question, which I answered correctly. So, I get all that 170 credits. And then, the program, only 100. And I didn't finish, so the teacher like deducted like 23 points. So, I get a pretty high score! And then he told me—my class—classmates told me, "So, you get a pretty high score! You dropped? You should not drop!"

And, uh, you know, so, at that time, it's really a kind of like big, big mess for my first semester. I feel kind of like, uh—the database I thought I was very confident to get the low, almost the lowest score, you know? The one I dropped I thought I could not do that. I dropped, and then, say, I got a pretty high score! Something like this. That's the first semester.

But after first semester, and, uh, it seems to me I started to be able to adjust myself better. Because first semester, like, you know—and also, I got in car accident also, first semester. Because when the person sold the car to me, and he told me, "You need to change brake." I didn't know how important the brake is. And, uh, on a kind of a night—rain day, you know, I—I—I hit the car in front of me. You know, I couldn't stop. And, uh, I didn't know. I thought that person just say, "Lady, what happened to you? My new car!" Something like this, which is really—gentleman scared me! I said, "I'm sorry!" I said, "I'm sorry!" I kept saying, "I'm sorry!" And then, "Sorry will not work! Will not solve the problem!" And, uh—and then, he started to, uh, ask for driver license from me, and, uh, uh, insurance card. And then, that's the first time, uh, I didn't know anything, I just give him everything. And then, he also write down his, you know, driver license number and give that to me. And, uh, he said, "Well—and, uh—I am nice to you. I will not call police. Otherwise, you will get a ticket." And, uh, he didn't call police. And then, you know, I—I just went—went home, and I drove home. And then, at that time, you know, I, uh—I lived far away from university. I lived in Gessner!

**MG:** Oh! That's so ...

**JJ:** Very far away. It's just because one of my friends in Austin, he own a house in—own a condo in Aus—in, uh, Gessner. Uh, he said, "Ji, I can rent you the—this, you know, condo with, uh, you know, cheaper money." At that time—because 1986, and, uh, economy was down in Houston. The oil, the gas was like 60, 67 cents per gallon. Very cheap. And a lot of people get laid off at that time. So then, he said, "You know, you can live." I just feel, "Oh, that's good! I do not need to find an apartment myself!" So then I lived there. But, uh, then, you know, for me, a new driver ... so every day I need to drive. Every day, sometimes—I dare not to go highways, so I go local from Westheimer and drove a long time here.

**[1:10:33]**

**MG:** Wow. Was, um, was your family living with you at that point? Like were they here [overlapping] your husband and son?

**JJ:** [overlapping] No. No, at the time when I was—accident, no. At that time when I—that's first semester. My husband and my son came here at the about the end of second semester.

**MG:** Oh. Okay.

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**JJ:** Yeah. Otherwise, I couldn't—I—I dare not to get them here. Actually—actually, I didn't plan to invite them come here that early. It's just because, you know, China changed the policy.

**MG:** Mm-hmm.

**JJ:** I work in international studies office. And, uh, uh, after the person from, uh, education section in Chinese Consulate here, Houston—and, uh, they had a meeting, uh, to talk with us. Okay, so we went to, uh, uh, Houston room in University of Houston. And then they start to announce the new policy. Say, “Okay whoever want to come to U—um, a spouse want to come, the child want to come, and then, the—the policy is open.”

And then, after that, I just feel, well, I didn't have sponsor. And, uh, so, I always—I feel like I need to ask American sponsor, uh, in order for me to—to let me husband come here. So, I didn't have money, how could I? So, I—I—I—I—I simply ignored that news. Uh, but then, the—Debbie—so, Debbie? The—remember? The first stop I met her?

**MG:** Oh, yeah.

**JJ:** Debbie came to my office, said, "Ji, and, uh, many Chinese students came to our office today." So the second day. “Came to our office today! Uh, said that they—they request their spouse to come to join—join them. Why you do not want to do this way?" I said, "Well I do not have sponsor." And, uh, then, she said, "You have a job! You are an RA! You have a job! You can sponsor them!" I said, "Really? I can sponsor them?" Say, "Yes, you can!"

So—so then, they said, well, because, you know, I work there. So then they said, "Okay! So just tell me your—the name of your husband, birth date, and those things; then we do, uh, IAP-66 form for you. And then you try to get a bank statement. How much money do you have in your bank?" I said, "I have about, uh, 10,000 dollars." Because at that time - you know - my boss in Austin, and, uh, he was so nice, actually, to me. He said, "Well, you want to go to university, even though your government, you know, gave you some money, and, uh, I want to sponsor." So he gave me 6,000 dollars as scholarship. So I have that money in the—in my bank. So I said, "Yeah, I have." "Oh, that's enough! That's enough!" Like this way. So then I got a bank statement, and then he got, you know—she got me those IAP-66 form, those things.

And then, I send to China, and my husband feels surprised! [JJ and MG laugh] Because I never told him that I would invite them to come to United States. I said, "What happened?" They just feel, "What happened?!" [All laugh] They do not believe! And then, I have later like explain to them. So they started to apply to come to United States.

**MG:** [overlapping] Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah.

**KE:** How did you keep in contact with them while you were here?

**JJ:** So you mean, after my graduation?

**KE:** Yeah, um, 'cause I know from some of my family's experiences that it's really hard to contact people from different like countries, like in the 80s and 90s. Like did you—were you at all able to call them? Or did you write letters? Okay.

**JJ:** [overlapping] Oh yes! We are able. But at that time, phone bill is too high. So, usually, we wrote letters.

**MG:** Ah.

**JJ:** We wrote letters. Yeah, yeah. We wrote letters. My husband collect, uh, stamps, so I—I bought those like, uh, 50 state, uh, animal stamps, those little set. So, I used those. So he was so happy see he's able to, you know, collect those stamps. Yeah.

**MG:** So, for that period of time when they weren't in Houston yet, did you, um, find yourself, um, connecting with the other PhD students? Or did you seek out the Asian community in Houston? Or how did you—

**JJ:** [overlapping] I—

**MG:** —kind of like find resources or find your niche here?

**JJ:** Okay, okay. When I was a student—

**MG:** Mm-hmm.

**JJ:** —every day, international studies office—

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh, okay.

**JJ:** —classroom, home. [MG laughs] Three points. Almost three points. And, uh, the—the only time I could meet with other classmates, either in the classroom or in the—we have a kind of like a Chinese Student Scholarship Association in University of Houston, okay? And then, sometimes they got a movie from Chinese Consulate.

**MG:** Oh, wow!

**JJ:** They can show us the movie. And, uh, I almost—actually, when I was in China, I was a kind of like a good student. Every day, I just studied because, you know—you know that I lost so many years, and I just feel that time is precious, and I love studying. You know, just try to use the time to study. And, uh, I—I—I do not want to go, spend time to go to movies. So all my colleagues and my friends, they all know. They say, "Okay, bye bye, Ji!" [MG laughs] And then, "We go to movie!" They—they know I will stay, you know, uh, in my room and study or write letters to my parents.

Like a Saturday night, always the day, always be the night for me to write letters. So I wrote a lot of letters to communicate with my parents, my, you know, sister, brothers, and, uh, uh, friends. I did a lot of that. But the University of Houston, I think the only time I would be able to meet all other Chinese, you know, people is when they show movie, you know?

**MG:** Oh, okay.

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**JJ:** Actually, I—I said I didn't go to movie when I was in China, but here, almost every movie I went there. It's not because I love movie. Because I want to meet with other people. Uh, it's like, it kind of solved my problem of—of homesick.

**MG:** Mm-hmm.

**JJ:** Yeah.

**MG:** Okay. Wow. Um ...

**JJ:** And, uh, we didn't—yeah. I—I didn't get in—too involved. Actually, uh, at the time, about, uh, uh, graduation—that's, uh, hmm, uh, at the time about, uh, graduation, that's about 1989. And, uh, uh, we do have some Chinese students there. They formed a, uh—a kind of association. They formed individual association. And, uh—and, uh, they told me, but I didn't join them. I said I—I didn't have time. [MG laughs]

**MG:** I noticed, um, since—since then you've joined some organizations in Houston.

**JJ:** [overlapping] That is true! After I—after I, you know, started to work, and, uh, Sam Houston State University. And, uh—I started to, you know, uh, participate as a volunteer and do community work. And, uh, the first one is the Chinese—uh, Hua Xia Chinese School. Since at that time, actually, my husband also graduated from University of Houston. And, uh, hmm, he—my husband is a little bit different from me. He's the kind of person—you know, he is a good student while he was in China, and, uh, okay student here. [laughs] And, uh, uh, he loves, you know—he is very open. He loves to do community work. Okay, he loves to do community work.

So, therefore, our friends who know him, you know, uh—knows his characteristic. He—you know—and then, they want to form, uh, a Chinese school because at that time already had some Chinese who worked. Who—like me, you know, started to work in United States, and, uh, we have kids, uh, who did not have the opportunity to learn Chinese. So then, they want to have a Chinese school, and, uh, they ask my husband to join them.

So then they started to, you know, try to rent a, uh—the—actually the first time they rent a place in a middle—in an elementary school, I think. A—an elementary school, weekend, on Saturday, Sunday. And then, uh, I was a volunteer there.

**KE:** Oh, okay.

**JJ:** And, uh, well, a volunteer there. So then, we started that, uh, school, starting with about 86 Chinese student, or something, you know? It's kind of fun because, uh, the children, they stay (?) Chinese. And then the adults, we can chat—chat each other, and, uh, then, you know, communicate, and, uh, exchange those—uh, those interesting things together. Okay? Like, uh, how should we fill tax form, okay? How to do this? How—you know, the insurance, car accident, how to solve those problem. You know, we can share each other. So then, I—I was a volunteer there.

[1:19:47]

And, then, pro—probably half a year after, and, uh, I got a call from a person who actually—who was the Vice President of Chinese Association of Profession, uh—Chinese Association of Professionals in Science and Technology, okay? And he called me. He said, "I'm—you know, I'm [*name in Chinese*]." I said, "Oh, I didn't know you!" "Yeah, I got your name from who and who." You know, another person, you know, we all work together in Chinese—in Hua Xia Chinese School! And, uh, "I got your name from her! And then she recommend you to me," he say. And then, "We would like you to join, uh, this professional, you know, association. And, uh, uh, we"—So they already, actually they form that association in 1992, but, uh, I didn't join until 1995.

Okay, and then they said they—they have those activities, you know, they have seminar. And, uh, then, you know he said, hmm, "How—" Um, he said, "Well, uh, the reason why I call you is because we have several board members, they either found a job in other city" because at that time, we're just start to work here, and then, you know, people are not stable, okay, not stable. Sometimes work here for a couple of years, they found another job. And—and we also have some other, you know, uh, people who decided to go back to China, uh, to work in China. So he said, "Well, several board left, and I would like to invite you into our board." [laughs]

And then I said, "No, no, no!" I—I never, you know, did anything on this because in China, you know, it's like, I do not want to touch politics." [JJ and MG laugh] And, uh, so, I hate those politic-oriented meetings, those things. You know, I hate to do political study. Uh, you know, I—I hate those things. So then I said, "No, no, no! I'm not good at any of these kind of thing!" And, uh, and—and I—I, you know—I turn him down, and then he kept calling! [JJ and MG laugh] He kept calling! You know, like finally, he ask his friend, you know—my friend - you know, from Chinese school, also called me, say, "Ji, just accept that! Just accept that! [MG laughs] You will be able to do a good job!" Something like that. You ... definitely. So then I joined. I joined there and then I become a secretary general in the board. Okay?

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Do some—you know, anyway, the meeting minutes. I do those minutes, those stuff, and, uh, do other things. But it actually—and, after that, I really met a lot of friends, professional friends in that society.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** So I get heavily involved there, and, uh—and we had, uh—we actually organized several international conferences, and, um, several international conferences. And, uh—and also we—we organize a lot of seminars for community every year. Okay. We had a picnic every year, and, uh, annual conference every year, and many other things. And, uh, uh, met a lot of friends, also learned a lot from them. Yeah, I feel good. I feel really, really very good. So now I still, you know, feel .... So those are friends, like friends forever. Yeah.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah, very good.

**MG:** That's great. [to KE] Do you have any more questions?

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**KE:** Um, well, we were both kind of interested in you being a member of the Jeremy Lin and Yao Ming Fan Club.

**MG:** Yes!

**JJ:** Oh! [indistinguishable] [All laugh] Oh, okay! Yao Ming, actually, I brought a book. [taking book out]

**MG:** Oh!

**JJ:** And, uh, actually, I myself then wrote a book, which tells all the stories. The one of the stories I told you about that, uh, uh, test—taking test thing is one of these articles in here actually.

**MG and KE:** Oh, woah!

**JJ:** Yeah. Let me see [overlapping] if I can find a picture with Yao Ming.

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh!

**KE:** [overlapping] Would you mind—would you mind if we took pictures of this to after the interview?

**JJ:** Oh, sure! No problem! Yeah. Let me see. Oh yeah!

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh cool!

**JJ:** Here is, uh [noise] Yao Ming.

**MG:** Oh, there he is! [laughs]

**JJ:** There's me. [All laugh]

**MG:** Oh my gosh!

**JJ:** Yeah, there's Yao Ming, and there's his wife.

**MG:** Oh, really?

**JJ:** Yes and these are all, uh, Yao Ming Fan Club founders.

**MG:** Wow!

**JJ:** Founders. Yeah. So, you know—

**MG:** [overlapping] So—



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**JJ:** —when—when Yao Ming was picked. You know, when—when—when we found Houston had the first pick. And then, Yao Ming was the first, uh, seed. And then we started the, you know—we started to actually .... So the—the board president in Chinese School, you know, he—you know, he and us, you know—I was at that time considered myself as representative of, uh, Chinese Association of Professionals.

**MG:** Mm-hmm.

**[1:25:01]**

**JJ:** Okay? And then we have some others, uh, like, lets see. We have, uh, uh, U—uh, United, uh, you know .... So he is, uh, uh, lets see. Uh, this is a, uh, uh, Chinese, uh, [noise], uh, Basketball Association. President of Chinese Basketball Association.

**MG:** Oh, okay.

**JJ:** This is the Sino-US Professional Association. Okay? And, uh—and then we have—this is the, uh, alumni association. So, United—actually, so all the, you know, uh, China universities alumni association, he's the president. Okay, we have, you know, they—almost everyone of them .... See, he, you know—he's the board director, uh, chairman of Chinese School.

**MG:** Oh, okay.

**JJ:** Hua Xia Chinese School. So then almost every of us represent a very much like [noise] a—a head of one association. Okay, we all get together, have a meeting, and especially, you know, we all get together and had a meeting at the Chinese school. [shuffling sounds]

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** And then we said, "Well, and we need to, uh, ask Rockets to pick Yao Ming!" Because the Rockets got the first pick!

**MG:** Mm-hmm. You know, we need to ask Rockets to get Yao Ming. So we had the videos, uh, of Chinese students, you know, so they say, uh—they say, "Rockets, please pick Yao Ming!"

**MG:** Oh!

**JJ:** And, uh, they say, "Yao Ming, please come to Houston! We'll welcome you!" Something like that.

**MG:** Oh.

**JJ:** So we had a video. We had a video. And then we have that video, give that to Rudy. And so Rudy brought that to Shanghai. And, uh, so, since Rudy team went to Shanghai to try to talk with Yao Ming, right? You know, to try to get him. And then—so, uh, actually at that time, Yao Ming

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has not decided to come yet. We already had this Yao Ming Fan Club. [overlapping] We already had this Yao Ming Fan Club.

**MG:** Wow. Wow.

**JJ:** We said, "Well, and, uh, we want to have, uh, you know, his fan club." So then—and, after he came here, on the first, um—first game, we organized about 1500 Chinese people.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah, we sold that many tickets.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah. We sold that many tickets. And, uh—and then after that, you know, we tried to, you know, periodically organize Chinese people, fans, to, uh, watch the, uh, game—watch a game. And then in, um—and then in the, uh, Chinese, uh—but not the Chinese—the New Year Eve, so December 31st, New Year Eve because at that time, it's been several months, right? From, uh—from the start, and we sold a lot of tickets, you know, for Rockets. So definitely Rockets like us [MG and JJ laugh] very much! So then we started to talk with the Rockets. We say, "We want to have a picture with Yao Ming." And then, uh—and then we had a deal that said, "Okay so not only we will let you to have a, uh—have picture with Yao Ming, and—but also—so, and, uh, all your founders, everyone, we will give you, uh from, uh, Yao Ming and whole Rocket team signature ball, basketball." So I have a basketball in my house.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** I have a ball. Yeah. Uh, so, yeah we organized a lot of—we had a meeting with—

**KE:** [overlapping] Cool.

**JJ:**—Yao Ming, and, uh—and then after Yao Ming left, and, uh, uh, Jeremy—Jeremy Lin came, and then this club then become Lin's Club. [All laugh] Lin's Club, yeah.

**MG:** That's great. I guess I just have one more question that's kind of—like, how have you maintain—you've already mentioned kind of some of this with the—the community you built here and everything. But I guess how do you maintain your ties to your culture here while being so far away from China? I know you have, um—[overlapping] there's a strong community of immigrants here, but ...

**JJ:** [overlapping] Oh, okay. Oh, yes, yes. Actually Chinese community, um, we try to—so I say number one we have Chinese school, and, uh, teaches Chinese kids, you know. So now Chinese school not only have—most of them still, you know, Chinese, you know, uh, children, uh, kids, but also we have some American there to learn Chinese also.

**MG:** Oh, cool.

**JJ:** Yeah, and, uh—and then also, you know, a big thing in China is, uh, the Spring Festival.

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh, okay!

**JJ:** A Spring Festival, which is very much like a Christmas here. Okay? In Spring Festival, we always have big celebration. So, uh, uh, like, um, Spring Festival. I am also a board member of Jiangsu, uh, Association. [All laugh] Jiangsu Association is formed by all those, um, people who came from Jiangsu. Either you were born from Jiangsu—it's just like a state, Texas state. Jiangsu is one province.

**MG:** Mm-hmm. Okay.

**JJ:** Yeah. Uh, was born from Jiangsu or you studied in Jiangsu, University Jiangsu, or you worked in Jiangsu before, and all those people can join this association.

**MG:** Wow.

**[1:30:34]**

**JJ:** So this association, and, uh, we just started a couple of years ago. Uh, every year, Spring Festival, we have a big dinner together. Uh, this year, we have about 500 people together to celebrate.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** We sing Chinese songs and have dancing, Chinese dancing. We have lion dancing. All those things.

**MG:** [overlapping] Wow.

**JJ:** Yes. And, uh, hmm, yeah. Yeah. Actually, Chinese—you know, we call Chinese New Year, Lunar New Year. We call Chinese New Year. So in Chinatown, there were a lot of—a lot of activities there. Yeah, almost every association, you know, try to have a get together, yeah, to celebrate.

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh, okay.

**JJ:** Yeah, our alumni association—the university I graduated from, Huazhong University—our alumni association this year, we had, uh, you know—we did the dumpling egg rolls by ourself. And we cook some, you know, uh, vegetables which you are not able to buy in—even—even Chinatown because we planted ourselves.

**MG:** [overlapping] Oh. Wow.

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**JJ:** So, only—you know, actually only that area, you know, can plant. I don't know why Houston is so good. The—the climate is so good [MG laughs] we can plant that. And on that day, every, you know—every alumni whoever plant that bring that vegetable there. We cook together.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah, we cook together. We have— this year, we have about 200 people showed up—

**MG:** [overlapping] Wow.

**JJ:** —just from same university. [indistinguishable several words]

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Same university, and with, you know, 200 people, including kids. Yeah. Maybe probably, 150 adults and, uh, 50 kids. [quietly] You know.

**MG:** Wow, that's great.

**JJ:** [overlapping] Yeah. That's a big thing. And every year—uh, every time in Spring Festival, they usually—every family—so we will call—call our family in China. Uh, my parents passed away, so now I will call my brother, sister. My son in China, he will call me, okay?

**MG:** Oh!

**JJ:** My son works in Shanghai in China, [hits table] and he will call me. That's a kind of Chinese, uh, you know, uh, tradition that, uh, like, uh, lower level, uh, uh, the children, should call their parents, uh, uh, greeting them, and then, you know, say some good thing like, uh, "long live," [laughs] like, uh, "Be healthy, strong," and "Everything is smooth." [MG laughs] Uh, something—"happiness," uh, say these things to their parents, grandparents.

**MG:** Oh, okay.

**JJ:** Yeah, so every time during Spring Festival, and, uh, we all found that that line is busy calling China.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Yeah, line is busy.

**MG:** Wow.

**JJ:** Go through that way, yeah.

**MG:** Wow. [to KE] Do you have anything else?

**KE:** I have no more questions.

**MG:** Okay, yeah, that—that was really interesting! [MG and JJ laugh] Thank you so much!

**JJ:** No problem, you're welcome!

**KE:** Um, yeah, I guess we just need, um, to take a picture.

**MG:** Oh, yeah.

**JJ:** Okay, sure.

**MG:** Oh, we can take a picture of this book.

**[1:33:46]**

**End interview**