Background:

Yang Qin was born in Shanghai, China in 1955. When he was only 18, he, along with 20 million other youths, was sent to the countryside as part of the Cultural Revolution in China. This was done in order to “reeducate” them and teach them what life was like in the country. These youths were called *zhiqing*. For five years, Yang Qin worked in the countryside of Guangyuan County, Sichuan (四川省 廣元 縣, modern-day Guangyuan City) alongside other *zhiqing* and farmers. This experience profoundly shaped his later life and instilled in him the importance of helping and supporting one another.

After the college entrance exams reopened, he was admitted at Sichuan University in China in 1978. After obtaining a bachelor’s in chemistry, he was assigned a job working at the Chemical Ministry of China. After working for a number of years, Yang Qin applied for graduate school and was accepted at the University of Houston. In 1990, he left China for the U.S. and five years later received a PhD in physical chemistry. Yang Qin currently lives in Houston with his wife and two daughters and, as of 2014, is working at Air Liquide America Specialty Gases in La Porte, Texas as Chief Chemist.

He has written stories for a book about the *zhiqing* experience, titled *Zhiqing: Stories from China’s Special Generation* that is scheduled to be published in June 2014. He has also been involved in the Houston Zhiqing Association, serving as its president for one year, as well as in the Overseas Chinese Education Foundation, where his role is currently to mentor and lead Chinese American youths in giving back to local, disadvantaged public schools.

Setting:

The interview uses as a springboard Yang Qin’s experiences as sent-down youth, a *zhiqing*, during the years of 1974 and 1978 within the context of the Cultural Revolution. The interview documents how those experiences have shaped the subsequent trajectory of his life, his attitude toward those experiences, education, and life in general.

The interview was conducted in Fondren Library of Rice University in Houston, Texas, and required one hour and 37 minutes. Much attention is given to anecdotes and recollections of memories from his young adult years (immediately post-high school), as well as a thorough account of his current worldview and attitudes towards life. Additional attention is drawn to his view of the Chinese state, a synopsis of his quest for higher education, and an exploration of his current responsibilities within the Houston Chinese American community in a philanthropic and communal sense. A central focus of the interview is Qin’s goal and vision for the *zhiqing* community, both in diaspora and in the motherland. He has collaborated with others on a book about the *zhiqing* experience to preserve their stories for posterity.
Interviewers:

McKenzie Johnson is a sophomore at Rice. She is studying anthropology and sexuality, women, and gender studies. She is a pole vaulter on the Rice Women’s Track team, and hopes to continue training after she graduates. She is considering a career in law or becoming a firefighter.

Michael Wu is a freshman at Rice. He is undecided but is considering a math-economics and anthropology double major with minors in business and neuroscience/biochemistry. He may also consider cognitive science, psychology, linguistics or Asian studies. Having parents of Taiwanese heritage and having lived in Taiwan for 10 years before coming to Rice, he is interested in the culture and political dynamics of Asia as well as the food. He enjoys performing for the annual Lunar New Year Festival and practicing and learning new languages. He is considering careers in law, medicine, pharmacy, or consulting.

Interview Transcript:

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<tr>
<th>Key</th>
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<td>Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]</td>
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Note Concerning Transcription of Mandarin

When Mandarin Chinese is spoken, all transcribed characters will be rendered in Traditional Chinese. All romanizations of Mandarin Chinese characters will be rendered in Standard Hanyu Pinyin with tones marked.

MW: So our names are McKenzie Johnson and Michael Wu and we will be interviewing Mr. Yang Qin for the Houston Asian American Archive.

MJ: Um, could you begin the interview by telling us a little bit about yourself and, like, your experiences in Houston and possibly in China?

YQ: Um, myself is just, uh—I mean, uh, if I talk of me, uh, I think of—first of how I started from the zhiqing, which means, uh, in China, uh, during the 197—uh, ’66 to 1976, during the 10
years, about 20,000,000 youths went into the countryside, which they call the “reeducate.” 'Cause before that I just—I was a high school student and I don’t have anything can talk because before my high school year, China had a cultural revolution. Uh, I didn't learn anything, mostly stay home play because so young at time. So, our high school—actually in high—during high school we didn't learn lot of stuff. And, uh, so, after high school, I went to countryside in 1974. And in—in—in countryside, uh, work with farmers in the high mountain, in the Sichuan province, the high mountain area, uh, about five years.

And I take the—China started change, China started reform. They called it economic reform. And they come like they, uh—from the political point of view, I don’t know how to call, but it’s kind of the abandonment (?). The revolution stop and they just started going to the open the door for the whole world and, uh, started reform follow the …. Uh, because economic reason, political reason, whatever the reason, they started follow the—the—the—the world. The step to change. So the—the Chin—China find out they need a lot of the—you needed knowledge; you needed science. And then can get the better life as other people in the—in the other—in the—in the world.

So, we take the test, the—the national-wide, uh, college entry test. So I get a chance, and take a test. I get into the college. That’s my basic, my life since there start to change. So, after that and then after four years in the college. And, uh, I—I got a job in the—in the, uh, engineering company, chemical engineering company, one of the biggest chemical com—uh, engineering company in the China.

I was living the Sichuan province. Is in—in—inside of Chinese. It's kind of like Texas. Uh, I mean they sometime they call the Texas, uh, Texan as the red—redneck, or whatever, you know? The—the inside of China province is not really open like, like the, uh—like the—the—the—along the—along the ocean province. They don't know lot of the—how society is. So, but anyway, my friend told me you have chance go to America. Just take the TOEFL. Just take the GRE. So I took all of them. And luckily, uh, um, UH, uh, uh, admitted me as teaching assistantship. So that’s why I come here and I get the—the chemistry PhD degree and working for the chemical company.

Uh … I think—I—I—I don’t know really that Rice, or whatever happening interview me, but I know what was happening. I come here is ‘cause we have the book going to be published called the Zhiting Story: From China's Special Generation, and, uh, our editor contact the—the Rice Asian—what? I don’t know. Asian research center or something called that, and, uh, I think that, uh, I don’t know the name. Lahni, uh—and, uh—Lahni, uh, [Tani Barlow?] … she the head of the—she or he, I don’t—I don’t really know. She is the head the Asian Chao Research. You should know something like that.

MJ: Uh-huh.

YQ: He [she] endorse our book, so, and, uh—so, I think one of the lady in charge of this research center, and I said okay. “We can have student interview and give our question we need to fill, so I—I send to you.” And that’s why I come for the interview.

[0:5:20]

YQ: Uh, if you want me say something, I’m not just only the people. It’s not—not special. It’s just like a lot of people, Chinese come to America because, uh, after China, uh …. 1949 China
And all the worry common, uh, language is bad, the farmers is bad, contribute you.

Uh, China because after World War II and the Korean War, China was isolated from most of Western country because all of the political issue. Uh, so, the China did—don't have any connection with—outside at the time. So until after the—uh, China finished the cultural revolution, then we have the chance to go out to look and, uh, it was, uh, totally different. Uh, so that’s why.

Um, since—for my whole life, um, from the growing in China and—and the stay already like the 20 years, 24 years in the America, look at both country. And, uh, so from my experience go through and my life is big change, is big, uh, lesson or whatever for me is called the zhiqing because when that time, I only 18 years old. So we want to write a story let our whole world know what was happening. And, uh, we don't know behind all the political or whatever happen, but we know we went through all this kind of stuff. So the book right now, I already saw it yesterday. I try to figure out the what’s going on for the book. And, uh, so I go to Google, and the book already started pre-order in the amazon.com, foyles.co.uk, and worldcat.org, and knetbooks.com, and e-compass.com. So, the book tell all of the story. I try to tell—we—we try to tell the whole world what were happening during that—that 10 years. And the rest is very, very—I mean … cannot forget the experience.

Uh, so we don't want the—the—the the people forget this, that kind of thing happen in China. And no matter the good, the bad, whatever, let the—the—the reader to judge what is happening is China, what is good for China, what is bad for the—all the you people, what is bad—let the reader to judge. And, uh, the happen in the 10 years the zhiqing, uh, movement to go to—I don’t know how much you guys know. It’s—it’s—it’s—it’s called, uh, sent down to, uh, countryside and, uh, uh, reeducated by the poor peasant or whatever. That—that experience is, uh, like, uh, you can think about it.

I bet [when] you—you guys 18, graduated from high school. You guys so happy going to the university and get the good high education and new out[side]—out world. Like my younger daughter right now is 16. She’s going to college soon. And that’s why she looking for the summer job. So—and she’s, uh, going to get her driver license. So, when her mom took her to the bank to open the account because of summer job will need direct deposit or whatever. And also, she going to take the driver test. She feel like, “Oh I’m al—almost be adult [MJ chuckles] and—and I'm going to have to be independent. I’m kind of scared what I’m—I’m going to know nothing about it. And I can—and through me to the—to the world, I have to do all by myself.”

[0:10:07]

But, you don’t worry about it because already is—is a good future for you, all open the door for you. You go to the college, and the college has, uh, dorm and has teacher, has all the—your—your—your—you friends. And you—you—you do there—you do nothing, just learning. You learn lot of knowledge, and when you grow up, when you really have that, and you start contribute to the society.

But that—when we was 18 we have no future. We just threw to the farmers. And no relative, no—no—nobody. And is there alone with the—with the farmers. I'm not saying the farmers is bad, buy they live there by generation by generation. They don’t know how the world is—is happening, so they just see the—all the new come. And, uh, we—we don’t have really common, uh, language and to talk to each other. You feel so lonely. And the—the—the life is so hard. And all the work, you have to survive for yourself. You have to earn that called gōng fèn
[working points]. Actually, like I say maybe, uh … I would like to say maybe less than ten cents American dollar a day! So it’s hard for live.

This is our experience. We want to write—write—write out. And since these 10 years in China, so so many people, there's a whole generation went through all this. So they—they start to write our story, but mostly in Chinese. And they call the shānghēn wénxué [scar literature], is a kind of the lite—literature is [about] hurt [of] our generation. That is, uh, very popular during the—after the—the China do the reform. But now, China is change so much. They follow the—the West country. They—they really right now follow and (?) the material. Everybody admires who is rich or whatever. If you have the inheritance from China, you probably heard the new word called the tǔ hào [wealthy yet uncultured people]. Uh …

MW: Like landlords or they got rich off of investing on the land?

YQ: No, not exactly. The tǔ hào, is—is—hào is, uh, millionaire rich people. Tǔ means kind of the, uh—[overlapping] the—

MW: [overlapping] Like country people?

YQ: [overlapping] Country people, redneck and the—

MJ: [overlapping] Okay.

YQ: suddenly rich. For example like the North Dakota, and they got the oil booming and suddenly the people get rich. I heard the all the newspaper say the story. The people—so I mean, they—they don’t know still, uh, how to—how to spend all the money. They just buy the truck, still truck, but load everything, load big speaker, whatever, and drive on the street. [laughing] They go on. They still don’t. So the Chinese rich people kind of like—like that. They don’t have, um—you know, right now the—the—for example like the Bill Gates, they—they—they—they know how to donate to help the poor kids. [laughing] But these people, they don’t know what—what to do with the suddenly so much money.

So China right now is focus on the material stuff. And the people don’t really care about the art, history, literature. Lot of people don't care. I mean, I’m not saying all people. So we want to remind all the people, not the people in China, to remind the whole world what the China went through, and al—almost destroy a whole generation. Because we—for example—for example, I—I'm kind of lucky ‘cause during the countryside the five years, yes, I didn't learn anything. I just work hard and try to get a—make for a living. But, since I heard the news, probably they going to reform can take the test, I study and luckily I get into the college. But meantime, I still—I’m really lack of some of the knowledge because I'm not go through systemly from the middle school, high school because cultural revolution. We stop all the class and we go home sometime, come back to school sometime. Go home, and then come—go to countryside. We didn't study.

So for example, the Chinese the word sometime always misspelling or whatever. And I can write really good it’s why because I like—I like to reading. And—and—and I know you guys go all through that. It’s—from the language, you are noticing I, uh—I study grammar. Whatever, no, you—you cannot get that—that improve your writing. Your writing help you read. You read more and you can write better. So I just like reading fortunately. And then the—
another thing is, uh …. But, so I can go—but science part I think is easy for me because it’s just math, phys—basic and math and physics, uh, chemistry you just learn. You can catch up quickly.

[0:15:15]

But basic some like for example, bioscience or whatever, the body, whatever—even—even just a couple months ago I have a kidney stone. And it’s so pain. I have no idea. And my wife sent me to the emergency and they did CT. And I found, oh here’s a kidney stone because it cause the pain. So [clears throat] and emergency give me some the—uh, uh, uh—some medicine and I go—went home. And—and the next day, I feel I was still not good. I’m gonna call specialist. So I call specialist, and they told me. “Oh, your kidney stone, you should come right away.”

So one of the—the specialist, the did, uh, uh, a—say the—they call the UV su—supersound [ultrasound?] whatever they call. So they go through here because CT go whole body scan. And then go the, uh—the supersound, they go one side and they want me turn other side, and do it again. I said, “Why you would want me to turn other side? I have the one, they told me here!” He said, “You have two kidney.” I said, “Oh!” [all laugh] I didn't know! I'm not joking.

So is—is—is kind of part I really lack of the knowledge because I didn't learn systemly. I may heard somebody mention that you people have two kidney, but I didn't learn from when I was young, so I couldn't remember. So I don’t want to pretend I'm so stupid, but sometimes it happen so. That—that thing happening is destroy—is whole generation right now this generation is lot of people still struggling, and they don't have job because they don’t have knowledge. And they just—no job stay home.

And then, in China, modern (?) China, you have the, uh, older generation. You have raise. You know, China is don’t, uh—is don’t have the, uh—the whole country don’t have the, uh, really system for the senior retire, whatever. It’s not like America. Even America has all the issue, but is China just don’t have. And then they start right now, but it's so many problem. So the—the—the kids have to, uh, help the older—older ones. Then you have to raise the younger one, so it’s really lot of burden for the generation like us.

But mean—meantime, the generation like us like the right now is like 50, 60. They going—they are—there’s some really good one and some ones, uh, are standing out. They went to the leadership, like the right now the leadership in China is—is zhiging generation. So you look at total different—if you look at China, uh, recent history happen is total different from the before the—the leadership. The right now the leadership focus on the benefit of the older people, and they try to stop corruption because like what I said the peop—China looking right now all the material. But the leadership, right now, they try to stop the corruption.

And, uh, I think the change—so, the whole experience of what I—we—we try to tell in the—in the—in the—in the book, we just tell the what would happen what we experience, but it affect the whole generation, affect the China, maybe affect the—the—the whole world because the whole world want to understand, the second biggest economic, uh, entity, what going to do. For example, even anything happen, the China slow down, then you will affect the stock market here too. So the—the—the—the whole every—we think the whole world want to know the leadership of this generation. What are they going to do? So, we—we probably have the common point because we all go through the hard life. We know how to do hard work, but this work we—we have—I mean this what I—I feel like this most experience I got from my—my—my life. Yeah.
MW: Okay, so, um, thank you. And also, uh, could we kind of like go through like I guess your life as a zhiqing? Like so … like you said that, uh, in high school—when you were in high school, the cultural revolution already started happening, right? So basically in schools they stopped really teaching you things?

YQ: Yeah.

MW: And so, uh, after you—you graduated and you were sent down to the countryside—?

YQ: Mm-hmm.

MW: What was a typical day like, while you were a zhiqing?

YQ: [sigh] Typical day?

MW: Yeah.

[0:19:56]

YQ: Uh [pause]. You know, uh, I think I have two story in that book. And all of the—the things that I do remember is just like all the youth and with, um—try to, uh, avoid the aloneness and try to make life more happiness. And so that’s why because, uh, when you study a little bit, just like question you ask me, when you study a little bit, and then you start a lot, a lot, a lot of question. Because for example, you started the your high school student, cultural revolution. Once the cultural revolution started—when the cultural … how it affect you—you—you—you—you—you—your—you—your high school whatever. There’s a lot, a lot of this the topic going to started. But we can't go through all this. So we just start. I think the book the same thing. We just start a little bit point and if you’re interesting, if somebody interesting, and then you can go through all the history.

So what I’m trying to say, in the—in the—in the countryside, the most that I still—I do really remember because you can see the all the central country is different. And sometime and they send to the—call the biānjiāng [borderlands], the—called the border of the China, and there the, uh, military constructing form—firm of there. So, we sent to countryside. We sent alone. We sent maybe one in the village, another one in the other village.

So what do we do, we just visit the—the—the zhiqing in the other village, and from there is all mountain. You go through all there. And, in the mountain, you—you probably spend half day of walk (?). And during, the mountain all the trees, whatever you can see nothing. Sometimes scare (?) and snake, all kind of stuff, and—but we just want to find the same kind of the people we can talk. We stayed overnight and then come back village again, probably this, the most I remember. And sometimes when you walk in the middle of the—uh, the—the—the—the tree of the mountain, uh, you can get water because is like the mountain water from the, uh, mountain and—and very nice, very, very, very, very good water because all filled by the—by the—by the mountain. But, sometime you couldn’t get any food. So we just—if we—we pass the farmers’ the field, they—they growing the corn they growing some vegetable, we just take that and eat it and find water again. So this the most [laughing] I remember. Yeah.
MW: So when you were traveling to the countryside and to other villages did you walk there or did you take a train or some other transportation?

YQ: Yeah that’s another kind of story. Most, uh—some, uh—first we go there we just take the—we walk there, and—but by walking can’t go very far. And, uh, from the whole high school we spread—I don’t know how to say—it’s very far away. It’s—it’s hard. You can by walk to go there, but I don’t know how many miles, whatever, but all by mountain. The mountain—what will happen in the mountain—for example, you are on the mountain. I’m on the mountain. I can see you very close. I can face you. I can talk to you. I can see you very clear, but if I want get you is hard because what would happen in the—you can’t fly up there. You have to go down, go the valley, and go up. And this is very tired because you have to go, down go up.

So normally we go around. Finally we figure out because first we don’t know if—mostly you follow the same thing like highway on the mountain. You see this highway always, uh, uh, waver and, you can’t go straight up for the highway. For the people, it’s the same thing. You go straight, uh—you go down, go straight up. It’s very tiring. So we figure out we go that way. And … of course, we spread so big area. So we start—finally started going to the—they don’t have a train they only have the truck on the mountain road. It’s—it’s paved but it’s not really good. And in China is—is there are little bit of public transportation for the bus, but it’s very, very few. And even with—we cannot—we cannot afford to pay it. But they have lot of truck they carry the material from there. I don’t know what, uh—what they do.

[0:24:31]

But anyway, one time we figure out what is called the military truck. They have to bring all the material, like the rice, food to the, other, uh, whatever base, or we don’t know. So—but anyway, we think—we—we went there and we want to visit our friend. We have—we cannot walk so far, so we just wave hand, stop the—all vehicle we can see. But of course, they don’t want to pick you up. They try—they try to avoid you and bypass you and … and—and … so normally we figure out, we have two people normally, walk together. One is standing in front. One is standing in back. If the truck can—want to pass another one standing in front again. So normally, they have to stop. But it’s very dangerous for both.

So … that time we stop one the military truck, find a military report to their, uh, top—whatever they call it—county, whatever. And they sent … I don’t know how. In—in—America is kinda militia is—is—is is has a weapon, but is not military, but is, uh, belong to government and they manage all the village and remote area. They come to our village, almost try to arrest us because you stop military truck is against law, whatever. But actually, China no law anyway. [MJ and MW laugh] So we …. But we protect by the Chairman Mao because he sent us to the countryside. We have another issue. So they have to—because if you—if you arrest us or—or—or put something and they are going to hurt 20,000,000 kids and 20,000,000—almost 20,000,000 kids sent to the countryside. And also how many family behind. So you will cause really—I mean—and even in—in the China. So China want to stabilize. So they want put this kids, continues to the countryside. So, they are, uh, I think that in American probably same.

For example the military finally get special protect. For example the—like the America probably, uh, heard a lot of story, probably different. The soldier going to the, uh, front, his wife, if you cheating his wife, you will put in you jail. If somebody involves a lover whatever with his
wife in—in home you get put in jail. But in America, probably different, oh whatever, you join. You leave and like all of the [unintelligible 27:17.6 until 27:23.9 ]. I heard my co—coworker said to me. The same thing happening. So the China have to protect the military, uh, family. So they have a special law—law. The law apply to the—the zhiqing too. So if you do something bad to the—the, uh, zhiqing in the village or whatever, you probably will put you in jail. So we are all kind of the, uh, anyway just happening. Uh, it’s like the young people we—we do something strange or whatever. [chuckles] And we suffering. And … yeah. We, uh, for—for—for—for boy we didn’t cry. All the girls all cry when we gonna [indistinguishable] because leave the family don’t know what ’s going on. But the … I think [laughing] this—this was my own life. [laughs] Yeah.

MW: Okay, so it sounds like you were almost protected by the government, but at the same time like the government didn’t like you—

YQ: [overlapping] Punish. [laughs]

MW: Want to—want to punish you guys. Um, so did you have to do any farm work with the farmers? And, like also, like, where did you sleep? Or did they build new buildings for you to sleep in or …?

YQ: Okay. Now this zhiqing movement is start from the central government. They push down. And, uh, it cause so many problem. And, uh, even one the teacher. He—the teacher is don’t make lot of money. He—he’s—he’s—he’s sent to countryside and cannot survive because the earning from the farmers. So he wrote about this all in history. He—uh, you can probably can Google it. Name call Li Qinglin. He wrote a letter to the Chairman Mao, chairman, you know, he’s a, uh, whatever you call it, chair man or you call it delegate or whatever it. He got a letter. He’s, “Oh, man. It’s—it’s—it’s really suffering.” So he give us 300 Chinese Yuan. That time it’s—it’s pretty big money. Sent to her—to—to the—the guy. So that give every government—local government a hand, okay? You needed—you need to give some zhiqing something for survival.

So, uh, finally, and also the central government give every zhiqing to the farmers. I don’t know if that … yeah, I don’t remember. 100 dollars something for … It’s—it’s—it’s a lot of money for especially have the—the room to live in, whatever. For the village, they got this—I don’t know. Couple 100 dollar—not dollar—yuan. They got the money. It’s—it’s pretty big money for them too. But they don’t want to spend the money for the—for you! They want to keep the money to buy the, uh, the—the—the tools. Buy the fertilizer or something, even buy the cow. Cow can—can—uh, can plow—plow the—the—the dirt and can—can—can plant the seeds or something.

[0:30:29]

So, they put us in the—in the—in the kind of the—the—the rice wheat storage. And the—the storage is just for store all of the—the—the—the harvest stuff for the year. And, because when you harvest the rice, you don’t want to put it outside because it raining. You—you—you have to be dry. But now, right now, right now they—all of the industry, you—you put the—the heater or whatever the—you know, the whole industry p—p—process. Before
they—the—the—for the farmers, they depend on the, uh—on the skies. You get it dry. It’s dry. You get it wet. So they have the storage where you put in. Uh, and then the sun come out, they move out. So the storage is wet, and all the molding, whatever. And—and also storage is made by the dirt. It’s not by the brick or something. And they— they— they— hamm— they— they have the mold—mold and then put the dirt on them. They hammered and make strong and they put outside, the sun to dry, and they make the— the— the storage. So we live there. A lot of cracking. You can see the moon from the cracking and the snake come in whatever [MJ laughs] all kind of stuff.

MW: So the walls were made of dirt?

YQ: Yeah, made of dirt.

MW: Oh, the whole— whole house was made of dirt.

YQ: Yeah, and— uh, yeah—and—and the roof made by the grass. And we— uh, not grass—

MW: Straw.

YQ: — actually rice.

MW: Oh.

YQ: The wheat.

MW: Wheat?

YQ: Wheat. You know, you—you cut the wheat, uh, uh, the seed and, then put the—the stem, put on— on— on the top. So this, they keep the money. And, uh, we don’t really have any. The only—but, uh, anyway, the farmers, they—they don’t have lot of food at that time either. Uh, before the—the—the, uh, uh, reform— uh, we’ll say open the door— the China is— was struggling, even for food. So the farmer don’t have lot of food. So we are same thing.

Uh, we work as farmers. Uh, but that time only 18 years old the farm the—you know, the man—for the man is—is, uh,—is, uh, most strong ages maybe 20 to 40 or something, the—the—the middle time. But we are only 18. So we are not as strong as, uh—as the farmers, and they are—they are used to plows. But we are more flexible ‘cause we are live in a city. We do all the sport and something. More flexible. They just started young, just start work hard, so they are not that flexible.

Uh, so I work in the—in the—in the, uh, village. I earn kind of like women ‘cause women—I have—I have my story inside. women kind of like the—you have the breakfast. You have cook for the men to work, and then the, uh, uh, dinner. You have come back early to cook. So you work shorter than the men, so you—you get paid less than the men, like 80 percent maybe I would say. So I—I get paid like the women. But since I start five years, I grow from 18 to the 23rd. So most of—I make much higher—they call the working point—is kind of like even, even higher than most of the men, which I working for the dam for the—for the—for the—
the build—build man-made lake.

And the reason ‘bout build a man-made lake is try to collect all the water at the dry season for the winter and spring come and they can let the water go into the field to grow the rice or whatever. So the what happen in just—between the mountain, you—you—you dig the dirt from mountain and put it in the dam, and you hammered. And all the man work [all manual work]. It’s not a—not machine. So I put on there and, you build it high, high, build it, uh, thick, and then the—the water come from mountain can stop in the middle. And that I—I wrote a story of there and that time because, uh, like I said, I’m more flexible. When you take the—the cart, the cart there’s two wheel and in front you have handle.

**MJ:** Like a wheelbarrow.

[0:34:58]

**YQ:** Yeah, yeah. And, uh, you from mountain go down. And the—the—the people put all the dirt, and you have to go down put on the dam. So, when the cart, you—when you push down, they going to—because this is a hill, it going to follow you. The first time I went there, uh, uh, our coun—uh, our village only one people know how to—how to do that. So I go there. I said it just two wheel like—like you said. What you call the bare [wheelbarrow], right?

**MJ:** Mm-hmm.

**YQ:** I said, it easy. I just push down and it started go down to the hill from mountain. But then, I realize it follow me. They not stop! You go fast. It go fast more than you! [MJ laughs] But then it’s empty because I just started. I feel, “Oh man, it’s so …. It’s gonna run me over!” So what I did, I just turn around and the handle go over from my—my head, and then I sneak out, and then the—the cart the rolling to the—to to the down of the hill. So the farmers, they are not realize so fast. So if first, sometime they don’t know how to handle that, and sometimes accident happening because when you put all the dirt, it’s very heavy. You have to push down and they can loading, otherwise not loading. When you loading, you have to be careful. They going to catch you! So you have to—you have to lift up and let the back to—to close to the—uh, the load and then start friction and you can start. You can start. You can load, uh, rest, uh, very, very —rest, uh, very, very hard. So the farmers, they don’t realize this kind of skill because they work from the kids and—and we—we know that anyway I saw that the only safety part you can do, if the heavy cart really try to rolling over, you just pull it close and then you sneak out like the—the fall. So the—the—the village people realize that I have this kind of skill or they let me to—to to manage. And they pay, uh, much higher than the normal the—the—the labor. So that’s [laughing] only (?) I can earn much more than other farmers, you know?

**MW:** So, [clears throat] you got paid by the farmers? Or the government paid the farmers—

**YQ:** [overlapping] Village.

**MW:** —to pay you?
MW: Paid by the village?

YW: Yeah, village.

MW: Village government or like the council?

YQ: You know, that’s another history happening in China was like what I said before the, uh, reform. I would like to say it’s 1978 or whatever, the China start opening the door and then the—the history is, uh, uh … China Party, the Communist Party … Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, I don’t know, is, uh—is, uh—that happened ’80, uh, uh, June 4th … uh, the China—

MW: [overlapping] Tiananmen.

YQ: —Tiananmen Square—Square that happening. He got threw out. He—he was supposed to take over. Deng Xiaoping. He got thrown out because he sympathize to the students. He is a reformer. He said the—the village should—should be independent and give the people more choice. It’s not all by government and they give them more motivation. And same thing like American have here. Why the American call the democracy, want the freedom? Because they give you freedom, you have the motivation. If I don’t give you this freedom use everybody same. What is make the Rice different from UH? Well nobody! People same! Why I have to work so hard to get into the Rice? Instead I just go to community college. My life will be the same. When I graduate, I get the job assigned by the government. Uh, it’s not up to, where you—you study, whether you, uh, have ability, whatever.

So, before that time, the village have no choice, and they—we were struggling. They don’t have enough food. Even they make some food, they have to give to the government. So the—the village only can reserve little bit of food, so … and when I go there, I—I would be the bur—burden for the village. But village at least have to pay—pay me for the food. In the end of the year, actually I didn’t earn any extra money. I just can barely can support myself to get the food. And they give you some the little bit of land and you grow in there, and you—you growing the—the vegetable, and you have vegetable. So, it’s hard to say who pay you. But the—because that time central government control everything. So village is controlled by the central government. And, of course, we do—we …

MW: So they—so they give you some money, and—but then you have to use the money to pay for food?

YQ: I don’t know if I have money. They just give food. [laughs]

[0:40:01]

MW: Oh, they just give you food!

MJ: [overlapping] So they pay you in food?

YQ: Yeah, village don’t have money either!
MW: Oh, they don’t have the money! [laughs]
MJ: Okay.

YQ: Now the back the before the reform, like I was saying, in 1978, the—the Chinese, they don’t have the private property. Nothing. So … I don’t know your background. You come from main China?

MW: Uh, so my parents are from Taiwan.

YQ: [overlapping] Your parents …. Oh you’re part of Taiwan? So you—

MW: [overlapping] Taiwan.

YQ: [overlapping] you diff—little bit different.

MW: Yeah, a little bit different.

YQ: So the main China—uh, mainland of China the people come from the—the—the United States is after, I think mostly the—the President Nixon visit China and they start Open Door. The Open Door is for the scholar, and, uh—and, uh—and, uh, finally go to the college student. So that time, all the Chinese students from mainland come here. Basically, no money. They just get scholarship. For example, like the, 100—maybe 100 dollar. They saving—parents saving give to them, come here, and they get a scholarship.

You know, I come here. The first UH orientation. Uh, I'm not saying American student, I—I know you—you you because this your country, so you—you know how to—but I know the—the—the Taiwanese student come. They same thing like us come from foreign country, no parents here, and everything you depend yourself. But I’—I’m so admired of the—the—the Taiwanese, uh, student come here. What was happening, they have money go to the vending machine. They have money go to traveling somewhere, and at the time I know nothing! The vending machine, I—I - had—I had my—my, uh, old one, daughter in China already at the time. I said, when I go to—to America, I have to earn enough money let my daughter come here and she can go vending machine buy some stuff. [MW and YQ laugh]

MW: Yeah.

YQ: So, this tell you the—the—the difference. [laughs]

MW: Yeah. That’s definitely very different now though.

YQ: Yes, right now it’s different. Right now it’s, uh—you—you can—you can read the—the news, whatever, they all rich people from China. They—they drive a Mercedes Benz, BMW, and they didn’t go to school. All the change. It change too fast. So that’s why we write the story. We—they need to know that. Yeah. Yeah.

MJ: Um, I think that earlier you mentioned that, um, your friend told you that you could take a test to enter into college, um, in China? Is that correct? [overlapping] Like have you—?
YQ: [overlapping] The— the— the— the college is not what my friend told me. It’s, uh— it’s, uh— it’s, uh, like— like what I said, the Deng Xiaoping, he is the Premier. And he— finally he control the— after the Chairman Mao dead, and he control whole— whole China. And he did all the, uh, reform, turn China . . . . Uh, I would— like I said, I’m not—if not politically, uh, because I’m not politician. I’m— I—I cannot use accurately words to describe, but for my feeling probably from communist China to the capitalism. That’s what he did. Like right now it’s so material in the China. Yeah. I mean, the— the— the capitalism has good, give you freedom, give you motivation, but the bad part is everybody so material.

So, he— when he go into the state to take control, he said, “We need the college student, really good student.” So we need to take a test. First, we are not going to destroy all our science, our— our— our culture, whatever. It’s what he did. So we— the China started a whole countryside test to admit. It only depends your— your— your— your score. Not from you— you are— compare who is poo— because what they said, the poorest will be more, going to be stay with communism. So they— they— they stay that principle. But then, Deng Xiaoping he changeover. He said, “No. I don’t care who you— you— your background. I want the people can help the country with science, with technology.” So this whole country started . . . the take test.

MJ: [overlapping] Okay. Okay. Um, so how did you study like for this test? Like how did you get the materials to study and like gain— like get a good enough score to gain entrance into the colleges?

[0:44:34]

YQ: Okay, uh . . . I would like to say, uh . . . in that time, like what I said, 20,000,000, about 20,000,000, probably. Some— some people say that, uh, 17,000,000 whatever. But anyway, it’s around of there— went to the country. The time, uh, accept the college student from there, I think, uh, one of thousands, probably. It’s only very few to get into college. So looking all these students went to colleges’ background, most people, the family, uh, from the, uh— the peoples’ like parents has knowledge, has— has, uh— has, uh— has, uh degree, has a bachelor. Most from the, uh— the teacher's family, from the college teacher, uh, their kids. And they know that because their parents taught them, you— you— you— you have to learn whatever and parents keep teaching them maybe.

For me, I have the different background because my mom, my daddy, in the— in the— in the factory. And I was— my friends, all the factory kids, they don't really care about education. But fortunately, my mom, my daddy has a degree. And— but they kinda do me as different because I stay with all the kids together. So we went to countryside together and then the China has the— the Deng Xiaoping control, they start the news. They going to change the test. So my mom told me. I don't believe. I don't study anything. So the first year they take test, and I didn't get in because I didn't really learn. But after half a year, because they know that they need it really right now, because we started— normally, you start in the— at the, uh, summer and get into the college fall. Same thing like China.

So they start the first year at spring because the Deng Xiaoping control is— is— is you— you can't timely for the right good time. You have to do by the— all the— the— the happening in China. So the started spring the first year. And after spring, another in the— in the fall, there another test. So I missed the spring because I didn't learn a lot. I didn't know, and— but
after spring to the—another fall that, about a half year. So that's why and my mom help me to get the book. And, uh, I stay in the city with my dad and mom about the one, two months, then I go to countryside, and start working, and we don't have light, don't have any electricity. We had to just … it's not a gasoline. It's called—called kerosene—ker—It’s—

**MW:** Kerosene?

**YQ:** Kerosene. Yeah, the—the light.

**MJ:** Mm-hmm.

**YQ:** And I study over there. And, uh … so I think it's—it's … it help me to catch very quick because I know the—the—the math is—is, uh—science is not hard. The languages 'cause like what I said, !—I like reading—uh, read. I didn't write anything but I like read any—any book I find. You may in the concept it was hard, still I like read. So that why it help me. So I get into it. So that's all those changed my life. Yeah.

**MJ:** Um, okay so, education—so would you say that education gave you the opportunity to, um, immigrate from China to the U.S. as like the ultimate—?

**YQ:** [overlapping] Yes. Yes, yes, yeah. Now the—the—after that, you know, after graduate from the—the college, I was, uh, in the chemical engineering company, uh, for eight years. The reason stay there because you cannot—you cannot change job. You know, that the government control everything. You—you you cannot go anywhere you want. Uh, and in meantime, in the China start open, and, uh, around the ocean province they now all can go to America, whatever. And inside, like what said, inside the inland of China, they don't really open. But, uh, I had my—that's why probably you mix up. That's, my friend told me. Oh, you could take the TOEFL test, whatever.

**MJ:** [overlapping] Oh okay. Yeah.

**YQ:** So I just heard that. I was like, “Okay. Uh, I'm gonna try.” But, uh, all the meantime, uh, I'm not so happy working in that engineering company because they focus on the engineering background. I'm in the science background. I said, “Okay, forget it. I got a chance” because before I try to move to any other company, you can't. You can't! It’s like—not—like right now China is different. It's kind of like America. Wherever you want, you just apply the job opening, whatever, the marketing (?), you go the—yeah, you hand (?) hitting (?). All—all kind of same thing. But before, all the government assign you to work at this company. You would—and then, all—all the company belong to the government. You can't say, “Okay. I want to go there.” No way. So I saw the opportunity I can be—come to America. So, okay, I go to take the TOEFL test—and take, the—take the—the, uh—the—the GRE.

And China started policy to specialize. Deng Xiaoping, that time, he said, “Okay. If you wanna go—go abroad to learn science, just go ahead.” And even somebody against the—in the government against this because these people go out, they never come back. And Deng Xiaoping, he don't care. They want to stay there. Let them stay. And he’s right! Yes, I mean the—the—the—you have to think about it. Ch—we raised by China. We got the higher
education from China and then we didn't pay back the—the—the—the—the Chinese government. But you think about the—the—the men can. No matter where you are, when you was young, you didn't contribute to the society. You didn't contribute. You—you—you just expend the resource from country. When you grow up, that time, you contribute. Yes, you’re right. You contribute to American society because you pay tax, whatever. You didn't do anything to the China. But the men can—is—is whole world—as long as you contribute to the world. What is the difference?

[0:50:49]

MJ: Um, so, why—why did you choose to come to Houston, as—?

YQ: No. I have no choice! [laughs]

MJ: You didn’t have a choice? [laughs]

YQ: No, no, no. The problem is what would happen in the—the—that—this you know the—be honest, I tried to bring my daughter, and she's 16. She said, “Aww. [MJ laughs] No, I'm not going. I know your old story.” I tried to tell her. What—you know, sometimes when I say that, you probably cannot imagine why you think about that way. Because that's what we raised by the, uh, like government control everything. You don't have own property. Everything was raised by this kind of background. So, when we start apply for the United States of—for the university, college, we don't have the lot of resource. We—we have the, uh, call the—I lived in the Chengdu. It's capital of Sichuan province. It’s a big province, and, uh—and a big capital city. So I have—fortunetely I have some resource. I went to the city library. Local don't have library. So I don't have library card, even. You only can stay seated there, and you write the notes. You cannot borrow the books on—on what kind of the, uh the—the—the the university.

So, I had a friend, uh, he—my, uh, classmate or—he,—he come United States before me. He—he went to the, uh, New York, uh, uh, Stone—whatev—Stony Brook. Yeah Stony Brook, uh, University. And I … like what I said, I work in the—in the—in the chemical engineering company. We have the, uh, cooperation with the, uh, American Carrow (?), uh, chemical engineering company, so they visit our company. I heard that I did not really work with them, but I heard that. Oh that Houston is chemical, uh, base. And, uh, any other universities I applied, but an—anyway, uh, UH just accepted me, so I just come here. Yeah.

MW: So, during which years—uh, so during which years did you—were you studying for like the—the Chinese entrance exam and during which years were you studying for the—the TOEFL and the GRE?

YQ: Oh which years started, uh, learning TOEFL?

MW: Uh, yeah, like which years did you—were you studying the TOEFL?

YQ: Oh, okay. The TOEFL—luckily, you know, the China. Yes. What would happen, I working in the engineering company and, uh—and my major is not engineering. They mostly want engineering graduate. And, uh, I go there because government put me there, or school put me
there, whoever, who knows. That time, you know, everybody controlled by the government. And the government—you call the central economic—it’s not like the market economy. Market economy is, uh, anybody I want to hire some people. I needed some people. Oh, I need to fire people because my business is not good. That time, the central—oh, that company has some people. That company need people. And the government assigned you. This is. And school start, oh, let’s go there. They go there. They do like that.

So, when I started for the engineering company, they really don't know how to use me. So I—I wrote letter to the general manager. I said, "I’m—I feel like boring in here." I mean I don’t know what to do and they can go, uh, do the engineer. I can learn too! I mean, it's not hard! I mean, I like, uh—I like I learn science. I can do that. Uh, he’s kind of the like me the attitude because I had my own motivation. But, that time the most people just, you know, you—you be good, uh, employee. Don't say anything mouth there. I said, [indistinguishable]. He said okay. So he—he said okay. Gave me some the opportunity for engineering product—project, and also, he—they have some opportunities going to the college to learn English. Call the, uh, "intensive training."

[0:54:50]

So I went there in the Zhengzhou. So, a—is a—is a Henan province. We have to take the train go there. And I learned there for one year. So after I come back, and I heard my friend—my—actually, my classmate told me, they have the opportunity. You can take the TOEFL. So then I started learn the TOEFL, take the test. So I take the test. I come here. It’s ’90. I think I take the ’89 or ’88. I don't remember exactly. But anyway after I take, test—test. And then I take GRE.

GRE actually much easier for the Chinese student because they—they—they know how to do all the math. The only problem is, uh—is, uh—is, uh, call the vocab—vocabulary. But vocabulary don't count They count—they count analysis and—and—and maths only count they two. So … GRE only take one week. When I was working in the—in the engineering company. And, uh, TOEFL take me—but I got intensive training, so I took—took—take TOEFL and I pass both and [indistinguishable] and you just give score to the college and they—they send you letter.

Uh, I was accept at the fall of 1989. However, that—the—the Tianamen Square happened in—in the 1989, June 4th. So, the—the whole mail stopped when they send the—send me the—the the admission letter. The whole mail stopped until past September or—or—or October, I start getting mail, already passed the—the—the the time. So I write letter to the UH. I said I missed because all the—they—they know. They understand. They said, “Okay, you come. Uh, you come—yeah, you can—we can keep your position for the one year. Come next fall or next spring.” I can—I cannot make spring 'cause there are lot of issues because Tiananmen Square. I went the—I didn't go parade, but I take the picture. So I’m—I’m one of the—the—the people have to go through all of the—the Chinese—the—they do the background. You know, the Cultural Revolution is very bad. They go all in your background. If you—if you live in China, you—you—if you family in the Taiwan, [laughing] you get really bad life!

MW: Mm-hmm.

YQ: So—but the—the—revolution is already over. Uh, China—Cultural Revolution is over. So
it’s not that bad. It’s just check, “Oh, what you do?” I said, “I take the picture.” I mean, I—I said I sent the picture to develop, and they come nothing! Because the government already give out issue. You can't produce any—any picture. So the—I come with nothing. I said I have nothing left! “Okay, okay, forget it.” So I cannot make it in the spring. I come the fall. When fall, I get, uh, everything done. Actually I come like the—I think like the June. And school start the September and maybe August, so I have two months I stay with my—my—my classmate because I said, “I don't know. I can get out now [laugh]. If they don't let me to get out, and [laughs] then I can’t get out, [laughs] I just go (?) a cook(?).” [laughs]

MW: So, yeah, yeah. So when you went to, uh, your undergraduate—undergraduate education, that was already when the revolution was over, but they still—after you graduated—they still assigned you to different companies?

YQ: Yeah, the—the—the Cultural Revolution is over. Cultural Revolution is—is—is very bad. Is destroyed everything. Destroy your science, language, all—all—all—all good part. But the … the—the central control, economic control, is after Revolution. Uh, Deng Xiaoping all take over and after, uh, I would—I would like say they called the reform from the '78 to '88 and continued—right now, continues doing, uh, going towards kind of like the marketing economy. So—so that time’s still central government control. Yeah.

MW: Oh, so when you mentioned that you studied for one or two months in the city and then you went to the countryside—

YQ: Mm-hmm.

MW: That was already—that was already when the—when you were done being a zhiqing, and that was like after?

YQ: No. That was still zhiqing, yeah.

MW: Oh that was still zhiqing?

YQ: Zhiqing, yeah.

MW: So they allowed you to study, like leave the—leave the farm and go back to the city, for—to study?

YQ: So the whole system is—is like what I said. Is—I don't think anybody could really figure out how this work. The zhiqing sent down to the countryside is kind of the forced on, is forced on, is you have no choice.

MW: Yeah.

YQ: And you have to go. And you know it’s not good for you because you—you—you can't learn, but you have to. [pause] And in the meantime, because so many people, central government want to stabilize the—the—the—the people, otherwise they start the turn around,
you know? They—they—so they have to help the zhiqing to settle down, to stay there forever. Don’t know how long. Nobody knows at that time. So the meantime, they have something called team from city to help you with any problems. They tell back to the government how to fix the problem, whatever, you know, try to figure out.

So the meantime, you work very hard and you feel like you get punishment, whatever, but … And the village, they have no control on you. Because you sent from nowhere. They even don’t know where you are from. So, only thing they can control because what happening, you have to be—do good to show you work harking [working hard]. You stay with farmer. You are the good people to help the Communism eventually in your future.

Uh, then, they have to because anyway city need some people. You—you can’t—you know, when I come from countryside back to—to—to city at, uh, like the holiday, or—or—or New—Chinese New Year, that’s like the, uh, uh, American Christmas. Our people back to the f—…. When sometime you come back, leave early before the other kids come back, it’s so quiet. City just look like empty. They are ghost town. Even I'm in the—in the—in the Chengdu. It’s capital of the—the Sichuan province. Sichuan province is one of the biggest province in China. It’s like gho—like feel like so quiet. So, you think about it's so many kids is going to the countryside. And, uh, the—the village, they don't know how to tell you.

But the—the, cities they need employee. The country—uh, anyway, so they have some openings that still go there, but they looking for you, uh, what you do over there. If you stay with farmers and you good and they recommend you—recommend you, and your background is clear. You don't have any people with Taiwan or with, American whatever. You are not the landlord. Your family come generation before, you good. They looking for this kind of background. Uh, so if you wanna have chance, have hope, so you have stay with the farmer. So you have—you—you can't leave the 1, 2 months.

That time I already forget. I mean, this only the chance because that’s what I said, uh, first I told you, my parents, they got high educated. And also the meantime, they teach me. You don't have any background, sorry. And your—your—your grandpa, grandma all is a kind of the enemy with Communism because they are landlord. They are the capitalists. Uh, my grandpa, Sucai (?), and you never see him. Uh, so the only chance is you right now. You have to study hard to get the chance, otherwise you will stay farmer forever.

MW: So technically they didn't allow you to go to the city to study, but you just went?

YQ: Yeah, just do it, and then the village have no control.

MW: Oh.

YQ: But only thing because, you know, hurt me, next time you have opportunity go back city, city, they don’t recommend you. You can’t go. You—you probably have to stay there.

MW: Oh, so if you stay at the farm the whole time then they would recommend you to—[overlapping] some other …

YQ: [overlapping] Yeah, so you work hard. You say—they say good words about—

MW: [overlapping] Oh. Oh.
YQ: [overlapping] about your work of there. The only place they can—on—only part they can control you.

MW: [quietly] Okay, okay. So, uh, in your biography it says your first job earned one cent a week? So was that this job—

YW: [overlapping] Yeah.

MW: —or was that—was that another job?

YQ: No. I think the first probably just talk about the farmer's. Uh, I probably stay home. I figure out one cent is—is that time worth ten cents of the Chinese yuan. And, uh …

MW: Yī hào [1/100 of a yuan]?

YQ: Bùshì, yī máo [no, 1/10 of a yuan].

MW: Yī máo [1/10 of a yuan].

YQ: Dui [Correct]. Yeah that's what I earn every day. Not week, I say day. Daily we got the 10 cents yuan, and one cent American dollar, kind of.

MW: But you never saw the money because the—

YQ: [overlapping; laughs] No, no money.

MW: —because they took the—they took the money from you?

YQ: Yeah.

[1:04:14]

MW: Uh, so—oh, from—so you had—you finished your PhD degree here, right? And your master's or—?

YW: The PhD.

MW: PhD. Uh, so from what you know about American education, um, what are the similarities and differences with Chinese education and like what—which do you prefer?

YQ: Uh, you know, the education—'cause I didn't go through the, uh, underground—uh, uh, undergraduate. Uh, I even didn't go through high school, whatever. Uh, only thing is my two daughter went to high school and then I—I can't …. But, college I don't know because they went by them—by—by—my old one goes by herself and my young one, uh, is going to. So for the graduate school, I don't have the graduate school in the China. Uh … I would like to say it's
really hard to compare the education from my experience because I only have the experience in the China for the undergraduate. And I don't, uh, really know here.

But for my experience come here when I graduate school, uh, the—the class [pause] it's not hard for the academically. Uh, we are struggling by the language, and even right now you can hear it. Probably you—probably didn't get my accent, whatever, English. Uh, so back 20 years ago, I'm more struggling language and, uh, uh …. Also, the—the hands-on experience. I actually I'm really hands-on person I can do things even [indistinguishable several words] In workplace I do a lot of hands-on, and then, at home, whatever. But still, this is more open. It's not like China everything follow the book. This more open. it's more free. And also, uh …

MW: Like do you feel like the teachers tended to teach differently, when like, um—like in China compared to here?

YQ: [pause] Uh, the most different—the big difference is more freedom here. I think that's why its really good for you graduate, at least. I don't know undergraduate. I don't know. I—I—I’m—I probably can have some, uh, uh, thought about the high school, whatever, but I don't have this kind of experience. But I feel like the—it's very good. The freedom is really good for the graduate student. Do the research. Do something good. Explore your own. The China mostly just follow book, and teacher follow book. And here, the teacher is just, uh, uh, not even not really follow book. They just give you lessons and then left and then you figure out your own. But it's more open. You can talk to the—your professor and your idea, whatever. Uh, it's very good for the research. And the—the most fitting like I have here …

For example, in China the—all the university is, oh, this chemistry building, this physics building, this math building, math I, math II. Oh, you know, “Oh okay, I go there. Oh, okay, I go class. I go there.” But China also the problem is for undergrad—graduate. You have class—uh, for example, I'm the physical chemistry class. You have class 30 people. The 30 people stick together for four years college, go same class every day, every time. But here, you go that building. Go—you choo—you pick your own class. So, the first time I come here I feel, "Oh there is some—some like the—uh, uh—like in the—in the—in the UH, there are some building name of Calhoun name or whatever. I said, “What is that building? What is that? I—I have the physics class, why—what I go? And why is it with the name? I can't remember name. Just give the—the—the subject. Give the science name or I just wandering, you know.” And then you have to look around and [indistinguishable several words you—you have no people to help you because all—everybody choose different class. So that's big difference. [All laugh]

MW: Yeah. So in China, in your undergrad experience at least, they didn't let you choose classes? There was just—

YQ: [overlapping] No, no.

MW: [overlapping]—basically, you had to take this this and graduate with that degree.

YQ: [overlapping] They—yeah, take this, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MW: So you ended up with a chemistry degree or like—?
YQ: Chemistry degree.
MW: [overlapping] Chemistry degree?

YQ: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MW: Okay.

YQ: Yeah.

[1:09:03]

MJ: So, um, in your questionnaire, you said now you work for Air Liq—?

YQ: Air Liquide, yeah.

MJ: Air Liquide. Um, what exactly do you do for the company?

YQ: Oh, the … mostly I do the, uh, analysis for the—the product, and, uh, the setup all the procedure, and help people. And uh, uh, my title was, uh, chief chemist, and now it’s—it’s the—I don't know what's the title. You put me like the instrument specialist or whatever. Uh … not do a lot, but, uh, uh … since I stay there, I didn't, uh … I even look for some other job, but anyway, I didn’t get really good. So stay that company is good for all the benefits, whatever. And I'm old, going to retire, so I'm not gonna looking for any other things.

And, uh, the year, uh, 2012, the plant I work in La Porte explode, and killed one people and hurt one people permanently. And we shut down the facility, tear down because whole plant …. That happened on the weekend, uh, so I wasn't there. It’s only few people work over there. But, uh, if it was a week—weekday, probably I’m gone too. And, uh, they start rebuild, and luckily they still have job and they haven't finished yet. I don’t know how long I—I can have job, but anyway. Uh, I'm old, get ret—probably have to go to—if they don't let me go, I have to go to early retirement. Enjoy my life. [All laugh]

MW: Okay. So, um, did you start working for that chemical engineering company right after you finished your PhD? Like—

YQ: Air Liquide [pronounced it li - KEED].

MW: Huh?

YQ: Air Liquide [pronounced it li - KEED], right. Air Liquide [pronounced LI - quid].

MW: Air Liquide. Air Liquide.

YQ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, yes.

MW: Oh, okay. Okay, so, uh, what was, uh, the responsibility of your first job at the—at the company? Did you go in directly and become Chief Chemist, or were you—?
YQ: No. It's just first that it's, uh—they want the—call the—they have—they have—uh, they call the GC Mass (?). It's kind of the high end of the instrument. They want have the people, undergraduate degree to do that. Now, that kind of the major, analytical chemistry, is almost obsolete. I'm— I'm—I would say because I heard—that's what I heard. I don't know. I'm not confirmed. The UH, they don't have analytical chemistry PhD no more. Because it's so science technology change. I mean, so easy. The instrument just automatic running and you don't have really. So the people with kind of like my [back]ground, you either, go to the—you hardly really get a job because they don't have a lot of opening for that. It's a job that take the routine job and research. They don't have that much. And, uh, so it just depends on whatever you had. Yeah.

MW: So, uh, also, in your questionnaire, you said that you were involved in the Overseas China Education Foundation?

YQ: Yeah, yeah.

MW: So, uh, could you tell us a little more about your involvement, what you do there, and all that stuff?

YQ: Uh, actually, what would happen in the—I involved—it started the, uh, 20—I started 2012 actually. The reason I involved because what was happening I—I was—in the 2012 I was the president of the Zhiqing Association. We just, uh, every, uh—we take turn. I mean you—you—you—you—you pick you or you volunteer and they take one year. So during—when I was the president of the Zhiqing Association and, uh, uh, Overseas Chinese Foundation, they start 20 years anniversary. So they invite the Chinese community, uh, leader to the—the anniversary.

So I went there. I saw the picture. The picture is uh, same like the—the time I went the countryside. It's a green mountain. You know, right now you see the all over the China, right know, all the kind of the pollution air. Air so bad, but in the remote area, in the poor area, countryside, still same green. And, uh, people still same poor. And kids don't have a lot of opportunity to go to the—the education. Then I—I really write the letter after this anniversary and read it to my association, Zhiqing Association. It said that, "We need su—help these kids because we come from there. I don't care what you do in the countryside, in the village. Yes, you suffered—suffering. But at least the farmers, you know, the people, no matter how the enemy, before when you—when you living together, you have to help survivor together. So they help you any—from any point of view. And, uh, we need pay back."

[1:14:10]

So I read the letter very motivate and very moving. So the—the all the Overseas Chinese, they saw the letter. They put me on the website. They spread everywhere, and they ask me to join them. I said, "Uh, it have to be after the—y president term because I can't involve to the position." And, uh, they said okay. So 2013, I start as board member of local, uh, Overseas Chinese Education [Association]. So they—they put me as the youth club director. At first, I don't know how to do that! What means youth club? Whatever I do? And then I really appreciate I help them. That's why I said, uh, I—I wish we can start early because I have a meeting 12 o'clock for the—for that group.
MW and MJ: Oh!

YQ: In the Chinatown. So, they put me the director of youth club. At first I said, "Well, what I do with the youth club?" And then I find I like that because that organization is collect donation help the Chinese, uh, poor kids in the mountain, remote area. But we don't do—local we don't do that. They do online, wherever, and then they say—uh, some—somewhere they—they have the , uh, headquarters and the people manage all the money, uh, finance, whatever, donation, whatever. We local just have the local donor and volunteer get some activity.

And now I feel like the most need our kids to involve. Our kids, you cannot go to China because the response from my daughter, 16 years old, I can't let her go by herself. So we have—I said, “It doesn't matter. The Chinese kids, American kids. American kids need the support too. We start local.” So fortunately, the local, they have the called Aīxīn zūzhī [Chinese American Relief Effort, C.A.R.E.; literally “heart of love (caring) organization”] Care something, something. It's actually organized by the Taiwanese people first because Taiwanese immigrate before the mainland. The have the organization, they call the Care. Every year, July 4th, we collect all the donations and we pick one the elementary school, uh, in the local—is, uh, uh—you can—you can look up the HISD, uh, profile, at least 95, maybe most like 99, 100 percent with, uh, reduced, uh, food, the—the lunch, breakfast. We pick that kind of school, and we—we collect all the stationery, and uniform, and then, uh, we collect all this, package, and we send to the local—local, uh, elementary school.

So I involved that activity twice already. So two years. So I said okay, I need to bring the—the Overseas youth club to over there. And somebody said, oh, that's not our mission. I said, “Doesn't matter.” Don't expect our young people to contribution too much. All of the kids, even like—like you guys even. You are already adult, but you—you guys didn't contribute to society yet. You still student. You still study. Same thing our youth club. They don't expect they—because they don't even have—earn money yet! How can they—they donate? They donate parents’ money! They don't care! It's not anything help them because it's—okay you wanna donate, fine. You don't give anything helping.

The only thing helping, help the local kids first. Local has a lot of poor kids too. And let them to realize, you're lucky, okay? You don't need to worry about the food on the table. But some kids do. And so, I like them to participate there and package all the materials and, uh—and—and support, they go to the, uh, school to give out to—to—to the kids. You—then you can see there. But this year, uh, uh, 2013, I have something to do. I didn't go and then the other, uh, group, who, uh, adult, he—he cannot go either so we missed. But this year I want the OCEF, the youth club kids go there to learning how to help others. When you grow up—grow up, it doesn't matter who need, which country’s kids, you just help them.

MW: So the youth club of the OCEF, it consists mainly of Chinese American kids? Like, uh, Chinese—like kids of Chinese parents?

YQ: Yeah, yeah, actually it doesn't matter! But the thing is OCEF is—is organization to help the Chinese, uh, poor kids in China.

MW: Oh, okay.
YQ: So most of the donors, volunteers is Chi—Chinese.

MW: Oh, okay.

YQ: So the—the kids, of course … yeah.

MW: Yeah. So what's like the age range of these kids?

YQ: These kids, right now we start mid[dle] school to the high school.

MW: Okay.

YQ: Yeah.

[1:19:02]

MW: So, like—so you just teach them like, uh, how to, I guess, care for the local—like the people who are poor in the local schools around Houston? So that they—

YQ: [overlapping] Yeah, started. We—we organized some—some activities, started. And also the OCEF some of the ac—activity. For example, like the, uh—we did the barbeque and let them to involve. And, uh, look you parents. Look you friend. And they help the some kids. But—but they cannot go China to help. They—we try to do something, other project with the like the, uh, long distance education because these kids can teach them English and China—China need more open. Especially poor kids, if they can learn English, they have more opportunity. And the—the—the problem is only the … same thing like the—the—the kids here. It's not really the poor is the problem, but of course, the poor is, uh—is, uh, problem. But poor is come from the education or come from the not open eye. They in the mountains. They just limited the—the—the view. They don't know what the—the—the whole world doing. And also the here, mostly—I'm not saying the—the race whatever—mostly the poor kids is mostly Hispanic from Mexico. And they—sometimes they don't have the documents even. And they got limited. It’s not by their poor. Of course poor is a reason, but it’s by the—the parents. The parents—“Okay I—I do help with the, uh—the—the—the—the con—construction.” Mom stay home and kids don't worry about the—the study. But we need to give something more open let the all kids have opportunities.

MW: So, um, could you tell us a little more about your involvement in the Houston Zhiqing Association? So, like what is, like, the mission of the association and what's—like what do you guys do?

YQ: [overlapping] Okay.

MW: What are you guys involved in?

YQ: Yeah, the zhiqing—actually—actually, they are the, uh—the mission is very simple. It’s, uh—they are, uh, uh, [pause] jiǎo péngyǒu, zhǎo lèzi, uhhh, zuò hǎoshì, xiē lìshí. Okay. I wanna remember. Uh …
MW: Make friends.

YQ: Make friend, uh …

MW: Look for fun?

YQ: Look for fun. Uh, good! Uh … uh … do—do good things. zuò hǎoshi. Do good things. And, uh, uh, make history. This basic. So we don't have any really mission to do whatever. We just because come from background—same background, suffering all the time and we—we know we get older. We don't have any—not like other local Chinese organization. For example, like they have the professional. Uh, they have the, uh, gè zhōng tóngxiānghuì [from hometown associations of fellow provincials], the—the—the kind of from same province. They have the, uh—this kind of the … They always have newcomer[s]. We don't have. So, we just make friend because we have the same background. And we try to do the good things because when we suffer—in—in the countryside, the farmers help us. We—we try to repay to the society.

And, uh—but we really limited by the language because the—the people like old me and I am kind of lucky to have the college education. Sometimes they don't have, so they really struggling, even mostly still with the things in Chinatown. So we—we can't go whole affect the American society. That's why I said anyone get educated in America, please join to write the story. Don't—don't be afraid you cannot write English. You work for the American company. You write a report. That's it. As long as people can read, you don't have too fancy, or literature, whatever. You just—you can read—read the report you can just join. And write the history, to let everybody know, uh, in the—in the China whatever happening. I don't want people forgot we went through all these things. I don't know it's good or bad. I don't going to—want to judge. Let the whole world to judge. So that's why the, uh, make friend, looking for fun, and do the good things, and, uh, write history.

MW: Oh okay. So it's kind of like an association where because you all from the same background, you can sort of support each other, and also—


MW: —like and also, uh, like work together to make sure that people don't forget about like the zhīqìng experience in China—

YQ: [overlapping] Yeah, yeah.

MW: —and remind people that like this was a thing and it was important.


MW: Okay. So, uh, have you, uh—during your time in Houston, have you encountered, like, any sort of, like, discrimination or racism based on your Chinese ethnicity?

YQ: I—I would like to say—be—honestly, America is very, very open. It’s a melting pot. Be
honest, I—I would like say I don't have any discrimination. Maybe one time, whatever, but I—I—I—I—I take forget. For example, the I think at one time I went to the—that time before the electronic store. Even forget the store name. I went there and I looking, uh—I looking for some the—I just walk around looking TV. And the guy come here and my—my—my English is poor and the he just kind of now—what, you know, uh, "You have money," whatever. I took the cash. "What do you want?" Like kinda …

[1:24:54]

But I—mostly, when I work wherever …. Even one guy right now he is really my friend. And he said—he always call me “Chinaman,” whatever. Some people take that as—is that—like the insulting, or whatever, but I don't think so. They just—whatever, I probably can call you “American guy.” What—what is difference? We—we—I didn't see any discrimination. The—mostly, something to back you—to—to hold you up is your language. You can't really express what you wanted to say. That's your problem. So that's why it hurt me a lot. I try to—like—like I just said, my plant explode. I was working in the lab. Do lab things. Kind of the isolate, kind of the, you know, it's not a really …. But right now, it's everything wipe out. And I work with the, uh, blue [collar] work together. And the people, they, even one the guys said, "Oh, I saw—before I saw you kind of like mean because when the lab, you don't say anything, and, uh, right now, it's nice to—to work with you!" So what would happen is before he come here. What I can say? I don't know. I—I don't have the same background to talk about the movies, sports. I don't know where to start it. But right now we put all together. We make fun together, and, uh, uh, I—I didn't see any discrimination. Only you need to improve your language.

MW: All right. Uh, so, uh, also going back to the, uh—the Cultural Revolution? So during the time period it was going on, you were probably in middle school and high school, right? Is that correct?

YQ: Uh, Cultural Revolution?

MW: Yeah—[overlapping] during the Cultural Revolution.

YQ: No that's—that’s, uh—that’s the elementary school.

MW: Oh, that’s elementary school—

YQ: [overlapping] Yeah.

MW: —and high school. So, um, uh—so you probably went through like all the like, like writing like big posters about people? Or like writing, um, posters to like condemn other people, or like …. Uh, what was your experience in school like as a—like through elementary and middle school? Was there a lot of like the Cultural Revolution influence during that time in school?

YQ: The—that—that time, you mostly don't have the school. And you stay home and you stay
with—play with your—your—your neighborhood kids like all time.  

MW: Oh.

YQ: And, then sometimes, “Oh! We need come to, uh, class!” And then few people go, few people don’t—uh, kids don't go, stay at home, whatever. It—they totally destroyed for the 10 years.

MW: Right. Did you ever partake in like, uh—like, um, Red Guard, or like those types of things?

YQ: [overlapping] No. I'm not qualified, too young. [chuckles]

MW: [chuckles] Oh, oh, too young. Okay.

YQ: Yeah.

MW: Yeah. And so, like, I remember there was this period of time when, um, Chairman Mao told everyone to sort of melt their—melt their steel, like homemade steel items, and make like a lot of steel?

YQ: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MW: Did you go through that period?

YQ: What you mean make steel?

MW: Oh so like they would have like their—like their teapots, or like their—

YQ: [overlapping] Uh huh. Oh make steel.

MW: [overlapping]—or like forks, and like melt it in their backyards—

YQ: [overlapping] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MW:[overlapping] to create—did you go through that?

YQ: No. That—that way bef—even before the Cultural Revolution. Yeah. I—I—I know that, but I didn't go through, yeah.

MW: Okay.

YQ: That’s—that—that one is destroyed the villages. [MW laughs] You know, before the villages independent, they can support self. And then they—they put government caught up the capitalism. Cash every property. Villages—farmers don't have their own property. They are put all together. Take teapot, whatever made of steel, and they lost everything.
MW: [quietly] Yeah, that's true. [normal volume] Um, so, uh, do you hope that, uh—I know that currently like in Chinese education from what I've, uh—what I've learned from like the Chinese international students here that the Cultural Revolution is still not really, fully taught in schools. Like they might like talk about it a little bit like in one sentence or one paragraph. But do you hope that like in the future that like that will change?

YQ: Uh, I don't know they talking about it now. That's why, first, I don't know. Second of all, I don't think so. They not allowed. What I'm thinking, people don't care about that. That's why we—we—we try to write the story because Chinese people going to forgot the history. It's just happened not really long ago, but people choose to forgot because looking for all the material. It's not good. It's—I think that the—the material and I would say the tú háo, the—the rich people show off. They kind of show off. It's probably happen in America when America start of 1960s whatever, they probably had some such things. But the—the American got more mature and that material is nothing. The people is not looking how much you make. The people looking how much you can give! And then you are—get respect. That you get [indistinguishable] .... For example, like doctor, they don't really say doctor make more money, but they don't care doctor how much make money. In the—in the boom—in dot-com booming time, the IT people make more easy money much quicker than the doctor. But they don't get the respect. Why the people respect doctor? Because they save the peoples' life. But in China, no! In China, they beat doctor! Anything wrong they start to beat doctor.

[1:30:19]

MW: Right. So, um, after I guess your experiences being in the countryside and, uh, all this, like, time that you sp—all this time where, like, uh, you couldn't have education and do a lot of things, um, what are your views on, like, Chairman Mao and, like, the Chinese government?

YQ: You—you—current government, or—or—or—or?

MW: Or like—or really—or just like Chairman Mao, I guess.

YQ: Chairman Mao, okay.

MW: Chairman Mao.

YQ: Uh, Chairman Mao, he has a good part. He has a bad part. Uh … the good part is he stop all corruption, uh, from China and united China. China was invaded by the Japanese. And right now there all kind of stuff, on the website, they talk about, “Oh, no! He’s, uh—he’s, uh—he’s, uh—a communism” or whatever. Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao did nothing that time! It's Japan just invaded China. Think about it! You are Taiwanese, right? [gestures at MW] Uh … I'm not talking political, Chi—Taiwan belong to China. China belong to Taiwan. I don't care about that, but what I'm telling about it, how can Japan invade China without resistance? And how can the big country invaded by China? Is some story talk about—you know, especially I want to mention the, uh, Iris Chang. It’s Taiwanese lady, wrote the book Nanking—

MW: [overlapping] Massacre?
YQ: [overlapping]—um, mode (?) or what call the—

MW: Uh, Nanking Massacre?

YQ: Yeah. Man—him—um, yeah, he—she start suicide. She—she’s killed her—herself. Iris Chang.

MW: Iris Chang?

YQ: Yeah.

MW: Uh, what's her—what's her—?

YQ: Zhāng Chún Rú.


YQ: Okay. She's a writer. She write the Nan—Nanking Massacre, whatever they call this, the book name. I—I don't read the book. I'm scared to read the book. I mean, I—I—I probably feel [indistinguishable]. But I read other book she wrote. She wrote the immigrants—Chinese immigrants to America start from the New, uh—New York, uh, tāngrénjìé [Chinatown], whatever. She wrote—she write a lot of book. And I like reading her book. And she tell all the kinds of story about that.

MW: [overlapping] Like the cultural, like cultural stories or like her experiences?

YQ: Yeah her experience. Her—her—her—she’s same thing, like her parents come from Taiwan. She studied here and graduated.

MW: Oh, okay.

YQ: Uh, so that's what I’m saying. Uh, uh, the—the—the Chairman Mao, he united the—the Chinese people to—to help us and independent country. And, that time, China is so motivated and wanna be, you know, the good life, whatever, but then he started most of the worst part, started Cultural Revolution. So … [glances at watch]. Oh, I probably have to …

MW: Go soon.

YQ: Yeah.

MW: Okay. So …

MJ: Um, I guess since you have to leave soon, is there anything else that you'd like to say about, like, your experiences in China or I guess your experiences here living here in Houston?
YQ: Uh. [pause] I mean the experiences living, I mean, uh, it just depends on what you choose. You choose different lifestyle. And here is, uh, uh—my family is here. We are all settle down here. We just take this, uh, our home country, just stay here and if get chance, now I don't have really, uh, direct relatives in China. I just—sometimes, go to China if I just go back—back and visit, will be fine. Uh, yeah. I have, uh, friends they live in the China, and most of my friends like zhiqing, they are not really, uh, good, make fortune off the China reform, but, uh, they still can be better than the Cultural Revolution. You know, uh, don’t wo—right now Chine—I mean even Americam China don't have any people starving to die. I mean food right now is a—is a lot. Any—I don't know, is Africa, but, uh, China, America, I just say that. Yeah, American homeless, whatever, but actually they—they—they are not starve—starve to dying. I mean they—they have all kind of food. China same thing. So both countries okay.

[1:35:00]

MW: So you have distant relatives there, but they're doing fine?

YQ: Uh, I don't have direct relative, but I mean I have the all friend like my background, they’re doing fine. I mean, uh, uh yeah, they—they—they retire or they don't have job or whatever you call, but I—I—I hope I can retire too. [All laugh] They don't—maybe don't have money, I can—I can visit China. I—maybe I can go Europe, or whatever, as long as I get time. But they cannot go because they don't have money, but they—they have all food and enjoyable and go—go the park every—every morning because they don't have to go work, and, uh, dancing, you know China people dancing on the street. [All laugh] You know that? [All laugh] Like exercise, and …. Even sometimes I wanna—wanna find the time to walk around, and sometimes don't have the time. Yeah.

MW: Yeah. So I guess in closing, like, uh, ever since you've been here, and your experiences here, do you feel like you've ach—kind of, like, achieved, maybe what they call like the American Dream or like achieved like some sort of like better life?

YQ: I think I make the right choice. And the first of all I always tell my family, my young one is my last one. And, uh—and, uh, she—I say that, “if we—if I don't come to America, the world—you—you—the whole world don't have you. And, uh, you—you—you would not be—you—you won’t be exist!”

MW: Wow.

MJ: Mm-hmm.

YQ: I mean because the one child policy in China. I have old one 12 years older than her—than—than her. My old one just married. And so, I think I made a choice and I find I can have the second one. Uh, so I'm happy.

MW: Okay.

YQ: Make right choice and they don't—here don't have the one child policy. [All laugh] Yeah.
MW: All right. Um, so, thank you very much for your time!

MJ: [overlapping] Thank you!

YQ: Thank you! Thank you! For your time, and, uh, really I appreciate it, and, uh, let me to talk to you, to take time.

MW: Thank you for coming.

YQ: Okay.

[1:37:05]
End interview