

AN INTERVIEW WITH ZHEN “REIKA” SUN

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans and Kristel Peralta

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE

"I just want to show them that you're not alone; we have a lot of things in common together."

Zhen "Reika" Sun was born and raised in Shanghai, China, during the one-child policy. Because her parents both worked, she was raised by nannies. Wanting a better life for their daughter, Reika's parents immigrated to the U.S. in 2009, choosing to settle in Las Vegas, Nevada, because her mother's sister lived here. However, before Reika could join her parents in Las Vegas, they sent her to an English as a Second Language program at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. After arriving in Las Vegas, Reika worked in a few restaurants before being hired first as a host and then as a server at the Bellagio. Reika talks of Chinese New Year and Moon festivals, superstitions, and foods; anti-Asian hate; Kansas; and her membership in the Culinary Workers Union Local 226.

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June 29, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

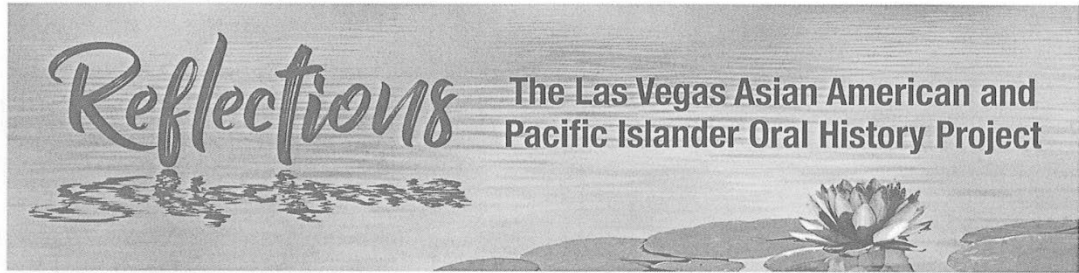
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Zhen “Reika” Sun talks about being born in Shanghai, China, and what it was like growing up in there and the industries her family was involved in. She expands on her primary school experience, including long hours and teacher tutors. After immigrating to the United States, Sun remembers being sent to Kansas State University and recalls that experience of learning English and the friends she made there before finally joining the rest of her family in Las Vegas.....1-7

Sun discusses the various jobs she went through when first living in Las Vegas and the difficulties she encountered with the adjustment before finally ending up as a runner at the Mayfair Supper Club. She talks about her first thoughts and favorite things when coming to Las Vegas, what she misses about Shanghai, and how she got involved with the Culinary Union. While discussing her thoughts on Las Vegas, Sun touches on the topic of Asian hate and how people have treated her because of her language barrier. She continues on with the topic of COVID-19, how it affected the food industry, and her passion for the union.....7-14

Sun names the most important Chinese cultural celebrations she still partakes in and the Chinese folktales she remembers. Finally, she discusses some of the most memorable and favorite foods from her childhood, Chinese superstitions, how she is raising her daughter to learn Mandarin, and the importance of collecting interviews such as hers.....14-21



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Good afternoon. This is Kristel Peralta, and I am here with Stefani Evans and Reika Sun at the Culinary Union.

Ms. Sun, would you please spell your first and last name for the interview?

Yes. My first name is Z-H-E-N. My last name is S-U-N. But people call me Reika, R-E-I-K-A.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Tell us about your family and your childhood; where you grew up; what it was like growing up; and any siblings or grandparents you can remember.

I was born in Shanghai, China. Our family emigrated to America in 2009. At first my aunt, which is my mom's sister, they came first with my uncle, my aunt's husband. Then a couple of years after, my aunt applied us to move in here, like ten years. Luckily, our whole family moved here. I stayed with my mom and my husband and my daughter, together right now.

What was it like growing up in Shanghai? Did you have any siblings?

Unfortunately, in Chinese policy by the time, they only allow one kid per family, so I don't have any siblings. But my childhood, I think it's pretty fun because we are all close to my cousins because my aunt has a daughter and a son, two aunts, and my uncle has their kids, so we usually spend time together. I remember every weekend when my parents have off that day, we always go to my grandparents' home. We spend the whole day there playing and talking, and my grandma makes a lot of good food. Asians love the family getting together, just the whole table full of food, just enjoying. This is how basically was my childhood.

What did your parents do for a living?

My mom was a manager working at a retail store. My father, before he passed away, he worked at—what's that called, Browning Water Company?—the water company. But it belongs to the

government because in China the government controls the electric, power, water, and gas. It's basically a government shop.

What about your grandparents?

My grandparents, interesting. Let me think. From my mom's side, I think my grandfather worked at the harbor, like port, as—what's that called?—always carrying the heavy stuff, labor.

Cargo?

Yes, something. My grandma, what I heard from my mom, she started working when she was thirteen or fourteen, really young, working at some clothing factory, by that time, sixty, seventy years ago.

Do you remember what your grandparents on your father's side did?

Yes. My dad's father, he's a businessman. My grandma from my father's side, she just stay in the home and take care of my dad and my uncles.

What was schooling like in Shanghai?

Pretty much the same as here, I think. I went to the preschool because during the time when I was really young, both my parents worked, so I don't have a place to stay, so they sent me to daycare. I think at that time it was called daycare, the same, and then elementary school. We started learning English, I think, when I was in the fourth grade. *This is table and that is desk. This is not table.* Those things. We do have an English class and mathematics. I think pretty much the same as in America besides we are not off earlier because I know that in America usually the kids are off really early, like two o'clock, three o'clock. My schedule, pretty much, go there at seven o'clock and off at five o'clock, including the meal. Elementary school, I have breakfast and a lunch. After five o'clock, go home and take my dinner.

STEFANI: *How much homework did you have every night?*

A lot. A lot. Elementary school, I don't remember really clearly. But in my middle school, I have to write a lot of homework, and I'm not a good student, so they always call my parents if I made a really big mistake or not follow the rules. I'm not a good student how they define a good student, by the time. My parents had a headache about my education stuff. By the time, I think it's really hard to get into a good university, even the high school. When I was in middle school, I have a lot of tutors. After off, I have to go to different subjects to make up my study, and it's not cheap. My parents spent a lot of money on me, though, and I'm still not a good student. I'm so sorry. But it was fun. A lot of kids, we're getting together, and teacher teaches us, but they have break time, and so we just play around, at teacher's home; we don't study at the school. But after the school, my parents have to send me to different teachers' homes to study.

For extra money?

Teacher, yes, of course, you pay extra for that. After the high school when I went to—no. Actually, it's kind of—how can I say? It's a college. It's not a university. I graduate and then my parents told me, "We're going to immigrate to America." First, they sent me to Kansas. I was studying in Kansas State University for my ELS to—

In the middle of the country.

Yes. A lot of people say there is nothing there. I was like, "No. Superman born there." But I really loved it there. People were super, super nice. The university I went to, it's a small town; it's called Manhattan. In New York there is a Manhattan. We say we are small apple; they are big apple and we are small apple. When I first entered that university, I was so surprised. I was like, "Wow, that's a hard reporter school," because the stadium, kind of like a castle, it was totally different from UNLV. UNLV is kind of unique. It's a city and...I don't know how to say it. Just different.

And it's new.

Yes, it's totally new for me. It was like, oh my gosh, wow, I like it. I stayed in a library. I loved the library. They have a basement or on top of the building, and you can see green outside and the state of people. I just love it.

What was the reason that your parents wanted to come to the United States?

I don't know. By the time I think they have some fantasy things. They think America was going to maybe provide me a better opportunity. Of course, they do this to me because I'm the only child, only one daughter in the family. My parents' job actually is good, but they think for providing the better future of me, they want to move here and see if there is any good opportunity that I can get.

What were some of the hardest things to leave behind when you came to the United States?

The first thing, they threw me in the middle of the states with no Chinese. At that time, yes, we do learn English, but it's just only to grammar and vocabulary; we don't talk; we don't speak. My spoken English is really bad. I think it's improved a little bit. Even to say not a lot of Chinese, but by the time I think they have one hundred ten students from China, international students, which is like I have to learn ELS and start English as my second language, ESL, I'm sorry, and then I can talk to just that limited people, but not that much. How can I say? At the beginning we chose to live in the dormitory at the campus. For some reason, I think we got a problem of not signing up, or we didn't register earlier; my parents didn't do that for me. I have to pay extra money to live in an apartment with some people. That's the apartments they offer to the master degree students, which is good. I love it. You have your own private bathroom. It's fenced in like a community, not like a dormitory where all the people have to share the bathroom. That part is good. We have one girl, she's from Spain; she is the one to speak English.

Most of the time two more roommates, they not stay in our apartment openly because they're a master degree or something, and they have a lot of work and job to do. I'm the only person that has to talk to her if I need something, and I would just cry out. I was like, "I want my surprise next day that when I wake up, I can certainly speak English. Really torture. I really liked it at Kansas State University at that time. They have some programs where they try to match one student, American local student, who wants to learn Chinese, and then those Chinese students who want to learn English, they match together. Every Wednesday or Thursday—I forgot; it's been a long time—my partner, her name is Leeds, and she speaks good in Chinese, surprisingly. Every Wednesday or Thursday, we just meet each other in the library, and we just can talk. I would talk to her in Chinese, and she would talk a little bit in Chinese and teach me a little more English. Plus, I also learned English there, so I get through. Luckily now I can speak not that good, but you understand, right, my English? I'm sorry.

It's very good.

Thank you. Think about that. It's kind of fun and hard time, but I think it's a good memory. I still love it there. I just want to go back if there's any chance.

To Kansas?

Yes. I love it there.

Are you still in touch with your partner?

Yes, we are Facebook friends. Unfortunately, we don't talk a lot, but I still can see her Twitters and daily stuff. Yes, I'm happy. I still have some friends from Vietnam, and we're still talking to each other, and the locals. When I was in Kansas, there was a Korean American boy. He was like, "Oh wow, I want to be friends with you." He and his girlfriend at that time, we are being together a lot. That's another reason why maybe my English did improve a lot during that time.

Yes, we're still talking to each other on Facebook. I like it. It's so different, like culture and trying to understand each other. We even have culture shock. But I think they're interested in my culture, and I'm interested in theirs, too. This is how the Kansas life was.

You mentioned that your parents dropped you in the middle of nowhere, in Kansas. Where did they go when they came here?

They moved here at first.

Oh, to Vegas.

Yes. My aunt was here. The whole family is here. Asians don't want to separate from the family. When they arrive to someplace, they're not familiar. One year or two years before, they dropped me. They just let me go there. They're like, "You need to get used to it. You need to learn English." I know a lot of Chinese or Asian people, when they first arrived, they went to Los Angeles, but you don't get to improve your English. You have to torture yourself to get...I know for the moment it is really hard, but you have to push yourself, and then you can get improved. That's what I think by the time, how they wanted me to go there. But I liked it.

Was there a reason why they chose Las Vegas?

Yes, because of my aunt.

Was there a reason she chose Las Vegas?

Because of my uncle's job, I think. He gets over in Vegas as a mechanical engineer. He is union, too. He thinks, oh wow, that's a really good opportunity. He gets his green card, and then his family moved here, and my aunt applied us, I think.

After you graduated from Kansas State, you came to UNLV?

No. Actually after I finished ESL, my parents just called me directly. "You need to come back here to Vegas." I don't want to, but I have to because they are the person to pay my tuition fee. It

was like, “Okay, whatever.” Then I moved to Vegas. I was a studying citizen for a couple of months; for ESL, too. Then after that I found out my dad has cancer. My mom decided— anyway, you graduate from college. I think it’s the time to make some effort for the family, so I started working.

Where did you start working?

Of course, like a lot of Chinese when they start working, some fast-food restaurant and pick up the phone. The first day I went to a place called Little Dumpling. I don’t know if you’ve heard of that before. When I first get there, I think they really needed a person, but no one worked there, and they just hired me. I would just ask the customer, “What do you want to eat first?” They say, “Do you have any appetizers?” Then by the time I don’t even know what *appetizer* means. It’s like, what does that mean? They’re looking at me and they’re pointing out that it’s called *appetizer*. I’m like, “Oh wow, okay, what you want to eat?” Second day, they fired me. It’s really fun.

It was a short job.

A short job, less than eight hours. I think I need to improve on my English, so I started to go to CSN and here to just get some more English. Here it’s different than Kansas. Kansas people are more focused on the study field, but in Las Vegas or in here, they focus on their business and they talk more about street—book smart and street smart—they start teaching you how to be street smart. I was like, okay, why not? I studied. My classmate wanted me to work for his restaurant like a geisha, this hibachi place, as a server again. I tell her, “I can’t.” She said, “Don’t worry, I’m going to teach you, start 101.” I just pushed myself to try it, just try it. Luckily that restaurant is really close to where I live, so I can just basically walk there. Everything gets good later on. I not only know appetizer, I know wine, too. Also, it’s a real cool restaurant. Most

people speak really fast English, so I can catch it earlier, quick. After that there is opportunity to be a host at the Bellagio, so I just applied and get hired.

As a host.

Yes, restaurant host. Magic.

That's a great job.

At the beginning, I think, but it's really, really hard. It's a Chinese restaurant, not like the other fine dining restaurants. They think Bellagio is kind of fancy that you just be gorgeous and take them to the table. No. It's really hard. It's almost like a fast-food restaurant; you have to pick up for them and you have to pack and you have to take customers in. You have to handle a lot of...if there is some customer not satisfied with waiting, because it's a pretty popular restaurant, and they're waiting a long time. You have to say something or show them to be more calm or willing to wait. It's not only mental, the labor work, too.

But I think everything comes for a reason. I've been practicing a lot when I was a host, and now it builds my confidence talking to people that even I don't know them. I think what's the right way to show them that I'm friendly, don't scare me, and I don't scare the people, too. I think I learned a lot. Then after host, there is opportunity to be a server. Since I know all the food, since I've taken care of the orders even through the phone, why don't I just try it? I'm talking to my GM, and luckily, he promoted me, so I become server at the restaurant I used to be a host. Then everything goes smooth.

After that I'm just thinking, I cannot be a Chinese server in Chinese restaurant for all my life. It's kind of sad. I just stopped learning. I don't learn anything. Then the Mayfair opened, the new restaurant, at the Bellagio, which is American food. I was like, maybe I'll just try there. But the first thing I need to do is I have to make sure I move there. Doesn't matter busser or runner or

server. But I think server is really hard because my language. I still have a language barrier especially if the people are from Kansas or Texas and have accents, maybe I cannot catch it. Plus, the restaurant has a show, so the music is pretty loud. I think for me, I cannot handle as a server there, so I just choose the runner. I'm now working as a runner, still, but I'm happy. Yes, totally different.

I'd like to circle back to when you first came to Las Vegas. What were your initial thoughts?

Be honest, I feel like, oh my gosh, that's a countryside, seriously. Except Las Vegas Boulevard where you can go everywhere, it was like, oh my gosh. When you go to California and when you see the beauty, Chinatown was like, oh my gosh, maybe it's my parents' childhood place. In Shanghai, it's totally different buildings, the style. For me, it was like, oh wow, I think people are enjoying the life there; there must be a reason. But I like it now and I get used to it. When I went back to Shanghai, I kind of feel uncomfortable.

What did you miss about Las Vegas when you were in Shanghai?

Convenience. You can go everywhere in a car and get free parking. In Shanghai it's expensive. A business in the center of the city, if you have a car—at that time I don't have it, but my friend pays fifty-one, which is literally ten dollars per hour, for the parking fee. Except for the subway, it's convenience. After that, no, I miss Vegas because even here it's hot, but it's dry. In Shanghai, it's real humid, same temperature as here and humidity. You feel uncomfortable. If you don't have a car, you have to take a subway, and there are so many people. It's so crowded. It's like, oh, we're going to go back; we're going to go back soon. I like here.

Could you tell me more about how you got involved with the Culinary Union?

Oh, that's kind of like...a couple of years ago the contract is almost finished, so we need to collect more people to sign it. Maybe we have an opportunity to strike on Las Vegas Boulevard to tell them to sign a new contract. Then when people are talking to me, I think my coworker—I don't know. Asian people, we don't want to get this involved. Everything is like, "Oh no, yes, I'm not going to do it, but, yes, you want me to sign," and sign. I feel like especially Chinese, we don't participate in this field a lot, and then I feel like we should; we should, to show people we are strong, so I'm just enjoying that.

Now I'd like to touch on...what are your favorite things about Las Vegas?

My favorite things about Las Vegas? It was before, like twenty-four hours, middle of the night, if you're hungry, you can go to casinos for steak and eggs. Tomorrow my kids have some school stuff I have to buy. Twelve o'clock, where? Walmart. You can get into Walmart, real convenience. The road is clean and big compared to California. I like it. People are nice, too, here. I've just traveled to California, and it's a different feeling. California someplace, like a gas station, I saw them buy the cigarette by the piece. If you go to gas station and they have a store, they don't open the door, just a small window, because they say they get more chances to get robbed in those ghetto place. In Vegas, there is no place like that. If you want to buy something at a gas station, you stop the car and directly go to the door, and you feel safe here. People say, "Is Las Vegas safe?" Yes, of course, we are safe here. I don't feel nervous when I see a bunch of people approaching, but in California I feel uncomfortable, or maybe California I don't stay there. But I like Vegas. You go to the Fremont and you can see all kinds of funny things. I like it.

I think this ties into what we were talking about earlier with the Asian hate. What are your thoughts on that especially with the feeling of comparing it to California and then to Las Vegas?

I think how the government handled things is really important. I really like our governor, Mr. Sisolak. He tries his best efforts on things, like balance of different races in Vegas. On the street you see whatever—White, Black, Asian, whatever—it's the same. People don't have a weird eye contact when they see you, and I feel comfortable. You stay in the restaurants, even the Asian restaurants, there are a lot of Caucasian, Asian, African American; it doesn't matter. For us, we are the same, I feel. I think the government in Nevada, they did a really good job, and they don't have a lot of weird laws. I don't know if you know what I'm talking about. The forty-seven laws in California, it's like if you rob something less than nine hundred and fifty dollars, you're not going to count as guilty; they can let you go. I think that's the most reason why people attack Asians and seniors: They think Asians are rich and carry cash. That's the thing. I've been thinking, why California? Why New York? Those things. It's sad, the rules. It's called the forty-seven something, forty-seven rules, or seventy-four.

I'll have to look them up.

Yes. The governor in California, they allow the people to rob things. If you rob less than nine hundred fifty dollars, you are not as guilty; they can let you go. See, the timeline, after these rules come out, it starts. It's literally not Asian hate. Literally it's robbing Asians. They think, they think, but they don't know. Now times are changing, and no one carries cash. Why should we carry cash? Everything easy. Apple Pay and credit cards. That's why they do the senior Asians.

Oh, because they...

They think. This is just my opinion. Maybe it's wrong. I'm sorry, but this is what I think.

Have you or your family ever experienced these discriminations or any of these hate crimes?

It's not called discrimination. Of course, when I start first working, some people tell me, "Hey, you need to go back and learn your English." Yes, of course. I understand that part. But except that, there are no particular people doing the really racist stuff on me. If they say, "You need to learn your English," I will tell them, "Yes, English is not my first language, but can you just be nice to me?" And that's it. Everything is culture, like how people talk. Maybe they are mean, but if you think they are mean, it makes things worse, and you can just use their culture things to fight them back. "Hey, watch your language. Hey, be nice." Like that and they're aware, okay, maybe she doesn't speak well English, but she definitely knows what I said offended her, like she knows that. We need to protect ourselves, too. Not everything they say and we don't fight them back. This is one way to fight them back, I think.

Going on the topic of language and how what people say matters, how did you feel when the president of the United States and other high-ranking officials referred to COVID-19 as the "China virus" or "Kung flu?"

That's why now they do the delta; they say, "Delta." It's considerate. It is good. At the beginning that Trump says the "China virus," I'm a little bit shocked. It was like, why are you saying that? I know politics is ugly. You know they're doing this on purpose. For me, I just feel that he is kind of like a kid. Childish. I'm not going to take that serious. If I take him seriously, I lose. There is one disease comes from Japan, the kids' one; they used the Japanese man to define that name for the kids. I don't know. There is a lot of diseases named for the people or for—

Oh, right.

Like that thing. If you take it seriously, you're just making things bigger. Just think that he's a child and I don't care for his words. Like, oh whatever, yes, go.

On the topic of COVID-19, what were some of the biggest struggles for the food industry during the pandemic?

I think to serve to the customer because I have to make sure I'm safe, and I have to make sure the customer is safe, which is not going to affect on me. We really care about those issues. Even now in our casino, say, if you are fully vaccinated, you don't need to wear a mask, but I still do it because you never know. It's dangerous to each other. I think this pandemic is going to last a long time, to be honest.

Now I'd like to talk more about the Culinary Union. Why is being a member of the union important to you?

If one person to negotiate with a casino, it doesn't work, so we need the people, a union, together against a big power. One person is a chip; we have big chips to negotiate with the casino. Why not? Plus, we have good insurance. The culinary for this pandemic, the people who work in culinary have been laid off, and some people have worked since last March, and we're still keeping our insurance. Union works really hard to keep our insurance. Even now we have free insurance until September. Free, because usually we earn our insurance. If you work thirty hours per week, we have our regular insurance. But those people now, they don't have a job, but they still have their insurance, which is really important especially in America.

What does this mean for you being a part of something this great and this big? What does it mean to you?

We are largest union in the United States, one of the largest. In talking to my parents-in-law, my dad used to work at French restaurant or somewhere, and he told me, "That's the best union ever. You should keep it. You should do it." They provide a lot of classes for free, like if you want to be a chef, or if you want to be a cook, you can go to our union school to learn free. The winery,

you have a knowledge, and it's for free, too. Server, they have a training for server, too. All those things, zero cost. Our restaurant before, the chef is a celebrity chef. His name is Dai Matsuda. He used to study in the Culinary Union's school in New York and then built his career. Now he is a celebrity chef. Everywhere wants him to work with them. We should be proud of that. Yes, I'm really proud of our union.

Also, in the campaign time, we see a lot of those politicals. I saw Joe Biden and Harris and Warren and the senators. We got really close to each other and see and ask them questions. We participate a lot in society, and we know what's going on for those few, in America especially.

What are your favorite memories from being in the union, and why?

What's that called, like a strike, but we drive our car during the pandemic because we need to tell the casinos we need a job; we want you to open. The union members we drive cars on Las Vegas Boulevard and holding *beep, beep, beep* to support the union. Like, hey you guys, it's the time; we need to go; we need to get our job. It's kind of fun. They have six-foot distance, so we drive the car. We can see the friends that we used to go to the union together, just say *hi* and go drive the car. It's fun. It's really fun. I like it. And show the casino our power. Even the police cars parked in there, they just ring the lights, but they don't say anything to us. We just drive the cars and show them our power. I think some people even not the union, they join us, too. It's really rare chance, like you get some fresh air, to drive the car on Las Vegas Boulevard and make it loud. It's fun. It's really interesting.

Now I'd like to ask about cultural traditions that you practice, if any, and if you still practiced them when you came to the United States and presently?

Chinese New Year. Yes, of course. Even the casino, they're doing that. This is the most important festival, culturally traditional things that we do in each year, the beginning. We think the more that you participate during Chinese New Year, the more lucky by the following year. For example, this year is the mouse, the rat. Morning, I give my daughter a red dress, my own red dress, and a red envelope, and bring luck. That means luck. Oh, get your lucky...like this. It's really fun.

Also, Moon Festival is middle of August, literally, because it's counting by the lunar year. By that time, we give each other mooncake to celebrate the moon. That time is the roundest moon; the moon is the roundest in the whole year, so we celebrate.

What is a mooncake?

Mooncake is like a pastry, sweet. You've got all different kinds of flavors. You can have red beans or pumpkin seeds, flavor by mixing the coconut paste inside, or roll this paste. It's really sweet, but people like it. It means everything complete, so it's round.

Like the moon.

Yes, like the moon. We enjoy the moon, get a tea, and take the mooncake.

What other foods remind you of these festivals, and what kinds of food do you eat on the daily?

My husband is American, so we basically—I'm sorry. Let me try. Like fish, in Chinese New Year, we have to eat fish because fish means, pronounced means extra. We eat fish, which means coming years everything extra, extra money, you have more healthy...extra, happy extra, fortune extra. The day before Chinese New Year, Eve, we have to leave a whole chicken, whole fish, duck, meat, everything together; we have to stay there, which means that was extra from last year, and this coming year we need to get extra, too.

And you have to eat it all?

No. You can finish this until the fifteenth of the New Year because the lunar year is from the first all the way to the fifteenth that they celebrate, during this time; two weeks you celebrate. It's kind of weird, but it's fun.

That sounds great.

Yes. There is another...we have those sticky—everything, we think, is round is good, so it's complete. It means complete.

Were there any childhood stories from growing up that your parents told you, or any other folklore that you grew up being familiar with that you remember?

Like what? Like when you're a child, what things?

Here in the United States, we grow up with *The Three Little Pigs* or *Goldilocks*. Were there any of those childhood stories—

What's Goldilocks?

It's *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. It's the lady with the porridge.

Oh, fairy tale, yes.

Yes, fairy tales.

Okay. The Chinese one...let me think. It's been a long time. I think I have the red hoodie, also, but in Chinese version, and *Three Pigs*, also, but in Chinese version we have this story, too. And *Cinderella*.

You have Cinderella?

Yes, we do have a Cinderella, too, but we don't call her Cinderella, we call her Gray Girl. Gray, the color, Gray Girl, (Chinese word). But when I learned it in America, it's called *Cinderella*. I

figured out, oh it's the same story. And *Snow White*. Or maybe I was born in Shanghai and it's different. I don't know.

Oh, we have those histories, the Chinese history things, like a fairy tale story. There is the lady called a Nüwa; when the sky has a hole, she is the one to build human beings, and human beings is all her kids. When the sky has a hole, she has to stitch on that, but it's not enough, so she sacrifices her life to stitch that sky; something like this. Those are Chinese Asian fairy tales. We are Yan Huang Zisun, which means we are the grandchildren from the King of Yen and King of Yang; something like this, how they built us, how they teach us through the agriculture, and then how they teach us how to see when we're going to grow the seeds, when we need to harvest, by the lunar years; that's why we have a lunar calendar instead of the calendar that...Chinese New Year is the day that we need to bring the seeds. This is how they told us something like this.

All the festivals translate to when the agriculture and growing and farming?

Yes, following the lunar year, all those Chinese festivals and the middle Moon Festival, all those relate to the lunar calendar.

Would the Moon Festival be the harvest, then?

Yes. Before the Chinese New Year—and they call it something; I don't know how to say it in English—that's the time that you need to start to prepare for the new, for the Chinese New Year. It's time to prepare the seeds, start to prepare the seeds, take them from the storage. You need a plan, what you're going to do, what you're going to grow. I think the monsoon is from the lunar calendar, too, monsoon. They have a monsoon season here, too, right?

Yes. Ours is usually in the summer.

Yes, monsoon. For us monsoon is...I forgot. I'm not familiar about those dates, but I tried.

Thank you for sharing, great.

No problem.

Stefani, do you have any follow-ups?

I just had one. When you were in China and your grandmother prepared this huge plate of food, can you tell us about those foods that were on that table?

Specifically? Okay. Fish for sure. It has to be a fish; it means *extra*. Chicken, she makes a lot of chicken thighs and the drums. Usually just boil it and putting the sauce over. Vegetable for sure. Meat, pork, we love pork. But during when I grow up, I think we literally have a cow, the beef. I don't eat beef that much. Chicken, pork, and I eat a lot of bizarre food, like frog. Have you ever eaten it? Delicious. It's all muscle. I love it. Frog and snake. The scales will make as the salad and the meat we deep fry. But I don't eat a bat, I don't eat a dog, no, none of those things.

The skin on the snake, do you fry that?

No. You make a salad, use as salad, put it in hot water. The skin is kind of like a fish jelly. Have you ever tried a fish jelly? You've tried it, right? Delicious. Make the salad. For the meat part, they deep fry it with the bone together because it's hard to get at the bone. But when eat it, you have a lot of bones.

Oh, Chinese is really superstitious. Like eight is a lucky number, everything eight. Four is the death number, four.

So that's not a good one.

Not a good one. Even in some hotels in China, they don't have a fourth floor; they just say five or five-A-five; they don't have a fourth floor.

Like here we don't have thirteen a lot, right?

Thirteen, yes, unlucky number thirteen, but for us it's four. The best one is one sixty-eight.

One six eight?

Yes. There is a supermarket; it's called the 168. It's like you are rich all the way. Whatever you drive, all the way you've become rich.

That's actually a supermarket.

Yes, there is a supermarket named 168. I think they wanted more business.

And they probably got it.

Yes. It's good. There is a lot of really good ice cream there.

Really?

Yes, taro flavor, the best, really good. They have a milk tea Boba ice cream.

Yes, that was really good.

Asians love to eat. We just love to eat, right? Are you Filipino?

Yes, I'm Filipino.

Filipino I like...

Seafood City?

Yes, Seafood City. Oh my gosh, good. The pork, crispy pork. Everything eat, I think, yes. Eating is really important in our life. That's why my husband, sometimes he gets mad. He was like, "You just keep feeding me. I'm fat now." I was like, "You don't need to eat. I just want to make myself happy."

Does your child identify with the Chinese?

Because my mom lives with us and she barely speaks English, so she tries talking to my daughter in Chinese. My goal is...I don't want her to lose her ability to be bilingual. You never know what you're going to use in the future. A lot of my friends, their child doesn't speak in Chinese, so it's kind of sad. It's just like when you see Spanish people, you expect them to speak Spanish.

I think it's awesome. But some people say, "Oh I'm sorry, I don't speak Spanish." I feel bad. I shouldn't have this in my mind; it's not right. But I was thinking, oh, they should know; it's going to be awesome. I think it's going to be really awesome if you can speak in two languages. I don't know, just my thought.

I take her to Chinese school, and she speaks in fluent English, but her Chinese is limited. She doesn't speak fluently in Chinese, but when she's talking to grandma, it's okay. The dialogue, the topic is fine, but she doesn't know how to read and cannot see the book, not yet. But there is a lot of Chinese schools, and I'm taking her to one of those, and they try to teach her, so let's see. I don't know.

If she stays in the Chinese school here, they teach that?

Yes. She has summer camp. They don't have regular schools teaching Chinese. I just take her to the summer camp, so let's see.

They don't have one on Saturdays or something?

They might. I do an online class for her. China has a lot of online educational apps, so teacher teaches you one by one, so she is learning from there. Expensive, but I have to. I want her to speak in fluent Chinese. She is going to go to kindergarten this August.

Oh, she must be so cute.

She is okay. She is just talking a lot. She talks a lot. I want her to stop, but...My husband told me, "Oh, it's just exactly like you." I was like, "Okay. I'm sorry."

Does she like any particular Chinese dishes best, Chinese food?

No, she likes pizza. Pizza all the time. Oh, this one.

Oh. She is so cute.

Thank you.

Oh, she's adorable.

My husband is Hawaiian, so she looks Asian.

She is beautiful.

Thank you. Anything you want to ask?

I was going to ask if there is anything we didn't touch on yet that you wanted to talk about more.

I think mostly I talk a lot, anything you want to ask.

Our final question is: Why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews such as yours?

Because there is not only people who speak in English here, there is a lot of international students, too, a lot of immigrant students, too. I just want to show them that you're not alone; we have a lot of things in common together. If you can study well in UNLV, your future is bright. Like me, I didn't even study at UNLV or a university in America, but they provided me with a not really good-good-good job, but at least I'm happy with what I am doing now. Here in America you have a variety of choices of what you're going to be in the future.

Thank you very much for—

No problem.

—taking time out of your day.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]