**Index**

00:40 – Limited opportunities and worldview

6:20 – Eldest child and females lack support

10:40 – Changing traditional family roles

12:20 – Dropping out of high school

14:45 – Chinese restaurant as secure business, money and self-fulfillment

20:00 – Success, school performance, quality of life

24:45 – Preference for males

28:15 – Parenting

29:15 – Chinese restaurant upbringing

30:35 – Nanny upbringing or satellite upbringing (taken back to China)

34:00 – Women and men parenting role in Chinese family

**Transcript**

**Today is April 11th. My name is Jenny Cheng. Today is my second interview with Person B. Our last interview was more situated around immigrating to America and your experience and your family’s experience living in New York City and working in a family restaurant business. This week let's talk more about your family, your upbringing, what your parents taught you growing up, and how it has impacted you.**

**Person B:** Even though my mom taught me to be independent, but she has some choices for me. For example, I tell her I want to do something, but she said no you know we're going to restaurant actually is also a limitation. Let's say I want to be a fashion designer before. She said no it doesn't bring me a lot of money, I couldn't a lot of money with it. Because she's my mom and I’m still young so I listen to her, I didn't go for it. Let's talk about college first. I want to go to college. I was so happy that there was a youth advisor in high school tell me you could, and you should go to college because my mom thought that her way of thinking [was right]. I wasn't born in America, and I wasn't speaking English very well so she thought that I couldn't make it to college until someone advise me and give me a better view, [someone] who went to college and give me a better idea about college. That’s [how] I was able to complete my college degree. And then I told her I wanted to go to law school and then she's say, “No, you won't be able to make it.”

She wants me to start earning money because she has anxiety too. If I go for too high of an education, I may not be earned money right away. I also have my brother and my sister. Well, the way she thinks, basically money is very important to her because she was very poor in China. I guess my choices are limited because of that, so I mean I really don't know what to do [for my occupation], if you say no to me all the time, I was thinking what I can do so I figure out probably the restaurant because I've been there for a long time. Since when I was little teenager, I've been already working in restaurant industry, [and it] become my first choice.

**Why do you think they thought like that? Was their view of like the world? Of course, for you that was very limiting, your upbringing and what your parents thought was best for you. Why do you think they thought that that was good for you? Why do you think they thought that the restaurant business was so stable? Do you think [your parent’s] upbringing influenced that at all?**

**Person B:** So, about limitation, this is also about her education background, her limited background. What she thought is totally her view about the world, but she doesn’t know a lot about the world. So, that also limits the kids to think about how the world supposed to look like. Her limited [views] is not helping me but according to what she knows, she tells me this is what you’re supposed to be. I think she also expect me to understand a lot more. I guess for kids, it’s really important, how parents can see something and can bring you up to a next level. but I heard her choice very limited. She should offer a solution for me but she wasn't offered solution for me so that made me think, “I really don't know what to do, unless I’m doing something that I’m good at.” So, I've been working a restaurant and has been coached in the restroom by my aunt. She's really good, the neighbor also knows her really well and she's making very good service. That's what made me go to the restaurant industry because this is something I’m confident with, I’m good at so that's why I picked the restaurant industry.

**I’m not sure we touch upon this last time, but could you elaborate bit more on your mother's educational background?**

**Person B:** Maybe I should tell my mom educational background because she graduated from elementary school. It was mostly passing word by word, [learning] from mouth. She didn't read a lot of books. It [China] was very poor at the time so her goal, she knows was to earn money. I guess doesn’t know to earn more money aside from the restaurant, her views are limited because she only working in her restaurant. She did not really talk to a lot of people. She really limited to herself by not reading a lot of books or talk to a lot of people. She knows that, “I’m ready to work every day. This is my focus.” She wasn't doing much about other things. It was poor poor at the time when China just wins the war, so that makes a difference.

**Which war was that?**

**Person B:** It was the war where Japan and other countries of eight other countries tried to attack China and want to take over, including United States. They want to take over China and then, at a time China also have an internal wall. So, it was a long history of fighting to try to be independent in the country but the because the war our country are so exhausted in resources and moneys. People barely can be anything, don't have a lot of enough food to eat. Money at that time, for that group of people age, the key for them is the money.

**How do you think your mother is childhood and her upbringing then influenced her to become the mother that wanted you to choose what she believed to be the more secure path, the more secure career? You were educated in United States and went to college. Were there was any rationale in wanting you to stay in this family restaurant business, despite your additional skills?**

**Person B:** Because I’m the first [eldest] kid in my family, so I guess she's more, how do you say, make sure that I’m going to the right path. But she wasn't aware the world is changing. American fashion industry actually is very popular. From my point of view, from now on, because I have some life experience now, I an 30 some years old. I realized that every industry you go into, you will make it great as soon as you put mind and effort into it. But she didn't know because at the time, people is all about [mainly cared about] getting enough food to eat. I guess fashion wasn't a trend in China at the time. But in America is totally different story but she wasn't updated on her side so that makes the contradiction between mine and hers and her advice.

**Other than restaurant work, which jobs in which fields were considered to be more attractive to your mother and to relatives you have? What do parents want their kids to achieve? For you, it was to succeed as well, but it meant to continue working in a family Chinese restaurant.**

**Person B:** I guess the fast way they know is everybody copy each other, you own a restaurant and then you have your own properties. There's one way but she wasn't aware there may be other ways. To be successful, of course you are business owner, or you own some business and then you have a house. Basically, you have money down for house, that's considered successful. But she wasn't aware [that’s] how to make it happen. I was a little too, so I didn’t know how to make it happen. Of course, those lawyers and doctors also is what they're [parents] look for. That [career goal] takes a long time to finish school.

I’m also the first child or maybe [as a] female in the family, so they weren’t so much in supportive of me. Because I have experience [to support this stance]. I have someone I went to high school in 14 Street, Union Square Washington Irving Square, it wasn’t a good school but then I have a classmate. He’s a boy and he's the only son in the family. I guess how you treat a kid when they're little also matters [affects them] when they grow up. So, he actually ends up with going to Harvard, so I guess female or male role also make a difference in a family.

**Could you elaborate a bit more on how parents treat the eldest versus the middle versus the youngest child? How is the dynamic and the relationship different?**

**Person B:** We all know that all the property goes to the male, goes to the male in the family. I guess because that’s the tradition. Men are masculine and back then, there's more masculine work in the city unlike today. We have machine replaced the masculine. Parents have to rely on men to earn make incomes for the family. The world today is a little bit different because more female go out and work. All that that keeps [stays] in their mind, they have to pass down to the male for the family because if you have more than one kid, the first one is very important. They want you to earn money right away so they can have a relief on their side as well. So, there's both of them [factors] may contribute to what they have in mind.

**Do you think that's changed at all since your family has moved here? Do you think there are changes to that traditional mindset? About which child was born first, and then female and males and how they are perceived in family?**

**Person B:** I think it's changing but it's changing very slowly because my mom now lives in my house. In the past, they say, **“Oh it’s a shame to live with the girl side.**” But now it's different. She has to work for us and she's helping out, we have to live together. That's different story so it's changing but it’s very slowly.

**How would you describe how you view the first child versus the middle and then the youngest role? What you think are the differences between a child based on gender?**

**Person B:** My view would change a little bit because I know my pain as a female. Few times back in the countryside, I only thought it my mom and my family love me until one day, someone passed away or they are doing something important in the countryside and they say, “Where's your brother?” I don't know why; I feel like crying because I feel like my brother is more important than me. The way they ask me, it’s a certain way that make you feel [less important]. There were a few occasions where it happens like that, and I feel that male is more important to than the female. The second kid[‘s upbringing] usually will be relaxing a little bit because they born second and usually, they will spoil the little one and then the third one. Usually, they put a lot of pressure on the first one.

**In your extended family, relatives that you have, who have a similar upbringing as you, who also immigrated to America, when they were young the American educational system, what are their lives like? Do a lot of your relatives work in family you know restaurant** **businesses as well?**

**Person B:** Actually, this question is very interesting. You know why? Because when I went to high school, a lot of girls drop out. And the boys, well they also drop out too, but mostly girls started first. If the boy still wants to continue the education, their parents were support it. If the girl drops out, they just drop out because you're going to get married to someone anyway. So, there are actually a lot of dropouts. I was really surprised girls are dropping out of school. After finishing high school, I was about to not going to college. I was lucky enough to meet mentors in the school. Back then, I was able to make it to college. Also, with my family’s support, one of the my uncles told my mom she just send me to college. That makes a big difference. So, if the girl doesn't have the support in the family and the school, most likely they are dropping out, a lot of them. And then, they end up working a in restaurant.

Two or three years ago, I met a high school girl [an old high school classmate] who I used to be classmates with. She had kids, my kids and her kids actually go to the same pre-K school. Her English was still broken, and she was a waiter in a restaurant, in a buffet restaurant. It's very interesting because if you don't continue [to] progress, you're not going to make it. You will still keep in your status back then and you will still [stay] in your circle. You're not going to go out of your circle because this is your comfort zone, it’s hard to get out because your English [is] not improving. It's very interesting.

**These classmates you had that dropped out, they were of similar upbringings as you, culturally too. Yes, that is interesting.**

**Person B:** And actually, one of the drops out, another girl that I know, she really wants to have a boy. She had a two girl already and then her mindset is still the same. She's not changing, she's still get the mindset from her parents, where the boy is more important, so she tried to have a boy. And then at the end, the third one finally is a boy. They're still in that circle, they never get out of this circle.

**Your mom did not really push you to go to college then. Do you think a lot of Chinese immigrants who work in Chinese To-go restaurants, the secure path is just to stay in the restaurant business?**

**Person B:** Yeah, I do think that the secure business will be [the] restaurant [business]. They want their kids to get higher education but then the money is the cost. I was happy enough to get into CUNY and the financial aid covered my expense. Otherwise, my mom thought it was expensive to go to college. She didn't even ask and then it wouldn't be able to cover up. She was thinking [she would have thought], that's too much money I wouldn't be able to pay you for it [pay for tuition]. So, their focus is restaurants, restaurants, restaurants, or laundry store, or liquor store. Those are the ones [businesses], they want you to earn money right away instead of thinking in a long term. I would say long term goals and the long term is not just about earning money.

Right now, because I understand that now, I’m thinking that the money is one part but also your own self-fulfillment and satisfaction is also important too. I actually learned that from my husband. Because the man, how do you say, his words count more in a family. So, it helped me calm down a lot about money. I realized there are different family view about money. Money in my family is very stressful and very key. I was like strong [money-oriented?] all the time until my husband family comes. The money in their family is not important. When you hit that point [financial security], you kind of relax down little bit. You realized not everyone treats money the same as you thought it would be.

**In your husband's family and his view, of course money is still important but once you reach like a good place, once you know you are secure enough to not stress so much about money anymore. You touched upon these very important goals, such as self-fulfillment, happiness, and finding things that you want to do, what you think is worthy to pursue in your life. Do you think these are values that your mother also thinks about? What do you think that looks like to her? She focused a lot on financial stability, is that fulfillment for her? Being able to earn more and feeling secure in that way?**

**Person B:** So that has to do with my grandma, my mom side of mom. My mom thinks, she's getting retired, she wants to go out and have fun, singing with other people. There was a very popular singing group of people she want to join in. She [Grandma] say, “No, you cannot go.” I guess it's really one generation affecting another generation and another generation. My grandma actually stops her from going. She says, “You're not supposed to do that. There will be male and female blending in a singing group. People will say something about you being out with a male.” In her mind, she understands self-fulfillment is also important, but she don't know how to express it.

My grandma also doesn’t understand too. **In their mind, face is more important than have satisfactions, enjoyments, enjoying yourself**. But it's getting better, it's slow like I said. My mom's open up [her] mind a little more, she wants to sing, go out, have friends, have fun. While my grandma says no. In my part [for me], I’m getting better because I know that money is not as important as my mom might have thought is important. So, I’m getting more chilled out than her mind. She still working right now even though she has good savings. She still works.

**What are some of your hobbies? What are your passions? You mentioned that at one point you really liked to draw, and you wanted to become a fashion designer. You thought about law school and pursuing law. How about now? What are your passions? What are your extracurricular activities?**

**Person B:** Now I just wanted to stay quiet and do my own things. Whatever I feel like. Before, I have a lot of hobbies. I like to learn piano, my mom say no. So many rejections. Actually, all those things I learned from my kids while interacting with my kids. I realized, “Oh OK, I really like drawing before. I didn't realize that I like music before. I like singing, I like dancing I participate a lot in school.” When I was back in China, every Friday we have talent show.

A lot of these I learn through my kids, they're like a copy of me. That’s why I’m trying to do [parent] as much different as I can. With them, being more encouraging if they want to learn, I will encourage them to learn instead of saying no all the time. Because I know how it feels when you are rejected all the time. I like to do a lot. Actually, when you’re a kid, you like to learn everything. I was interested in everything but then so many things are going on, your parents are not supportive, you don't know what to do. You just kind of start searching for life, what do you want. But right now, I’m just enjoying my quiet time on my own.

**What do you envision for your kids? What type of life would you like them to lead? What is your definition of success for your kids?**

**Person B:** I don't want to push success in front of me. I will say as long as they enjoy their life, they have some financial stabilities, I guess that's pretty much what I want for [them]. Because you know life is so short, you don't want to keep giving pressures. Keep having pressure, like I need to make something, to prove something to someone. Enjoy your moments, every moment. Because success in my mom's age, they thought is going to a good school and be smart. But right now, [it’s] probably a different story because we have some research done that even kids [that] didn't do so well in school, but they still are business owners or like earn a lot of money. We just have to change our mind a little bit about what success is about or maybe there's no success. [For] everyone, what quality of life that you want. I guess that's successful already.

My expectation for my kids will be at least a college degree but whatever after that they can do whatever they want. I know that I realize every field right now, there's always people, if you're focused and interested in something they [the field] would do, you would do better, you will be successful in your field. Right now is not back the, there's no limit in everything. You work hard, you go to school, and then you got a job. Right now, the job is variety [more diverse] than in the past.

**There are more opportunities nowadays.**

**Person B:** There’s more art and music going on instead of just work for a company, electrical company or gas company.

**Can we talk a little bit about your grandma, when she moved to America, her views, and what she considers success to be? Do you know at all her idea of what she wants for the larger family?**

**Person B:** Her [definition of] success is definitely kids are business owner or owns properties because she’s been telling people about it. She's proud of it but I just feel like she shouldn't talk to people too much about her background because what if someone thinks that you are rich and try to rob you something.

I don't have a good childhood with her, actually. I was living with [when] my mom came to America. I was about 8 years old. Her [grandma’s] way, always spoil the little ones. I was living with little my sister; she had all the things going on. I see that in my second kid too actually, so now I learn how to deal with it better. She cried all the time or make tempers all the time, just to get some kind of candy or treats or money to buy something. I was the one quiet, listen to all the time. I was the easygoing one, say OK all the time. For example, I remember this very well. We fight for apple because I always been eating apple in the house, and this is the last apple. My sister says, “I want it because this last one.” After I had discussed with my husband, my husband says, “She could have split the apple instead of just give it to my sister.” So, my childhood wasn't a good childhood and the way she brought up the kids, to me, it wasn't a right way. Because there was too much pressure on me and put too much [feelings of] unfair[ness] inside of me. So, when I was raising my kids, I tried to be fair, as fair as possible because I know how that feels inside. It affects you when you grow up.

**Is that common then, having a grandmother raised grandkids?**

**Person B:** I’m not sure if it’s very common, maybe very common. Because my husband’s sister, she had a same complaint like me. She say, “You always care about brother and not care about me.” Back then she was living with her grandma, also her auntie because her mom and dad was in America too. So, she also made a complaint like I was complaining, “You always listen the boy and do whatever the boy asked for and you never did what I asked for.” Maybe it’s pretty common, I would say a majority of family, but some family do respect women, so it depends. [For me], it had to do with my personality because I’m OK [with anything] all the time. They just make [decisions] for me, they say, “Oh she'll say OK, don't worry about it. Even my husband’s mom will say, “As long as I talk to her mom, she will be OK. So, let me talk to her mom instead of talking to me [her.]” But in a long term, there's no respect to it. To me, there's no respect, right? Because you just thought you can skip me and make up decision for me because this is my personality. Secondly, I guess just like the country[side], they rely on men heavily at a time because more masculine work back then. Then thirdly, because the countryside people, they always pass on the words about you need to have a male. They had the same mindset; the same mindset is among them, and they keep talking, talking. You can see the big difference when you have a brother, and you have a sister. When you have a brother in the house, the way they speak, it just different. It's just different and you can feel it. It's hard to explain but the difference, how they speak to him and how they speak to you.

**For your mother’s and your grandmother's generation, there is definitely a big preference for males. You mentioned that you have a friend or a classmate from high school who also really want to have that son. Does having a son in the same to you?**

**Person B:** I do think it affects a little bit, but my husband is standing on my side. He's like, “It's OK, we don't need to have a boy if you don't want to.” He gives me the choice. Let's say if I’m going to have a boy, I will just pass down all my money split among children, instead of just passing it to boy because I don't think it's fair to just pass down to the boy because I know how it feels. How you been treated and the way it feels. Everything in my thinking is about how I was feeling back then, when I was a kid, from my past experience. I don't want it to be the same again.

**Do you think your view on life or even family, sons versus daughters, would be different if you stayed in China? Ff you never had like immigrated to America?**

**Person B:** I would say my life would be terrible, for sure. I wasn't a smart type of person so when I was in elementary school, I know how I was being treated. Yoo much drama is going on, to be honest, in Chinese [culture], among Chinese people. Too much drama going on and everything is about money. You need to be wise about certain things, and unlike America. In Americans is like, “This is what you do, step by step.” A lot of things are shared, I feel. Whey would tell you what to do and you just follow step by step to be successful. But in China, it's different. They're not going to share to you, they don't even tell you the secrets about being successful. Right now may be different, I haven't been to China for a while. I do have [watch] a YouTube talk show about how these people share their success.

But back then, it was terrible experience. I wouldn't even be able to make it to middle school I was staying was in China. And getting married and still in a bad situation. Maybe you got yelled at most of the time because I wasn't those kind of smart type people. Because there’s some people, they just stay quiet. They know, they just don't say out. That's why I feel important when your kids are there, you have be to next to your kids, tell her when to say it, how to say it. Because if you're not there, you just thought kids going to learn on their own, they are not going to learn their own. You just have to tell your kids there are certain point, you need to say something. If you don't say it, you're not going to breakthrough. You're not going to be different. You’re just going to be another normal [person] or someone like you when you’re in the past.

**That is pretty important. As a college graduate and as someone who works in the Chinese family restaurant business and has extensive experience working in Chinese restaurants, how do you think you will guide your kids?**

**Person B:** In college, I actually learned so much. You see different people and right now, I can communicate better in America. So, I will tell my kids to just focus on what you're doing. I would say money is important but self-satisfaction also very key important too. I won't push the money is not successful. That's not the only one to be success. That's my only advice to them. And then just have fun and enjoy, have some friends and when you have time to relax, you just got to relax. Don't push yourself too much. My understanding is in America, even if you have a high school degree, it depends on the job. You can still find a pretty good job, enjoying yourself there so you don't need to push yourself too much.

**Do you think children who grow up in families that work in Chinese American To-go restaurants have a different upbringing than, let's say other American children, including parents who immigrated to America? First generation immigration families is similar in that like the culture is similar, but how does the restaurant itself or having parents who work in the restaurant business, how do** **you think that affects the kids’ upbringing?**

**Person B:** I guess they just see the world different, that you work in the restaurant compared to some parents coming from China but got really high educations. They live in different places. They will understand more I guess, or maybe not. They will pick the environment that's fit for their kids. Working in a restaurant, my kids probably will see me… they will see more like working parents. They will be different for sure, but I try to make it not the same [as other children who are brought up in Chinese American To-Go restaurant businesses] because I know that's still a lot of Chinese restaurants out there, they send their kids to other people [to raise]. They hire nannies to take care of the kids than themselves taking care of their kids because they think earning money is more important.

I will see there will be a lot of kids who may have the same experience like I do, but they were born in America so that language is different. They end up with the same concept, like what I was learning from my parents, not so much different. Unless they really want to make changes, very few kids will see a big difference between what they want to be in the future and how they want to because I don't know if there will even be a discussion about between parents and their children. What would they want their future going to be? Those serious questions conversation about their futures.

Could you elaborate little on workers in Chinese restaurants who hire nannies to raise their children?

Person B: [For] a lot of people, the trends in the restaurant industry is you have a kids, you send them back to China, have either grandparents taking care of it. Or if you're financially a little bit OK, you want to take care of the kids by hiring nannies. Or you'll take care by yourself but majority of them that I know, they send their kids back to China because they want to earn more money, save more money. And then they just throw away to their [kid’s] grandparents. My sister-in-law, when the [her] son is ready to come to America, he had a big teeth surgery. Only two teeth are OK, the rest of them [needed to go] through a big surgery by the dentist to have all the teeth removed because the older parent’s way of training kids is just hand them the candy. It’s very, very bad for the kids. It’s tradition, that's tradition, how you raise up the kids.

I feel bad for those kids who’s been sending back to China because they don’t feel comfortable. Even you hire nanny, they won't feel the same. Like, “Mommy, I want this. I want that.” It’s the way conversation [flows] is totally different. I don’t know. Every adult can feel if you talk to your mom, [it’s in a] different way than when you talk to the nanny. It just feels different when you have like all week, maybe only one day you go out parents and you don't feel like you're close to parents enough, it just insecure. Daddy also provided security to the kids but if you don't talk to kids a lot, it’s insecure to the kids [causes insecurity in kids], and it really affects their future development too.

**You talked a lot about your mom and then your grandma, how they raised you. Are the men in your family maybe not so involved in like children raising?**

**Person B:** So, if I didn’t pay attention too much on child education, I assume that my husband will not bother too much with children too. Because most Chinese family around me, they are feeling like it's women’s job to take care of the kids, men's job to earn money. That's it, there's nothing else. If I wasn't aware of my childhood feeling, how I've been treated, I [wouldn’t] want to make improvements in my children's life. I guess most parents will do the same. They just, you know, mom raises the kids, the father is not doing any roles in the families, aside from earning money.

**Do you think there are any good values, any good thing that you learn from working in a family restaurant? Do you think having family members and your parents, also as restaurant owners instilled any special value you that you otherwise would not have?**

**Person B:** I guess working hard for the family, you will earn money. You will get what you earn. That's the thing I learned from my parents, working hard and you will get what you pay for, and I did. After I graduated from college, I work in a company in California. I do feel like I earn enough money and I can join myself.

**Great. Thank you.**