FHS Oral History Project – Paulina Lu

Description:

Paulina Lu was born in Shanghai, China, in 1971. She recounted memories of her upbringing, particularly growing up in the hospital as her parents worked as physicians. At the age of eleven, the state-sponsored Chinese Ballet Society selected Paulina to attend the Shanghai Dance School, a boarding school in which students professionalize in ballet dancing. Paulina detailed the process of her selection, from how the society recruited children into the program, tested them before acceptance, and conducted background checks on their families' histories. The latter partly worried Paulina, as her father's side of the family carried a deep and traumatic history extending back from Japanese occupation during World War II and Mao's Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s. Paulina recollected such happenings while also explaining how, by the early 1980s, when the society considered her for the boarding school, China had loosened its authoritarian practices that affected Paulina's father and his history. She shared how her family still voiced objections to her prospective dance career, as it conflicted with traditional Chinese attitudes about professional careers. As a result, Paulina agreed to abide by three promises that her family created to reconcile, letting her pursue dance further. Paulina recalled her boarding school experience and what she learned about dance and Chinese culture during that time. She joined the Shanghai Dance Company after completing her education at boarding school, yearning to learn more about Western ballet following her tours outside China. As a result, in 1990, Paulina received several scholarships from American institutions to study dance, accepting the University of South Florida's (USF) offer primarily because of the resemblance of the weather between Florida and Shanghai. Paulina performed in various locations during the 1990s, including the Splendid China theme park in Kissimmee. During this time, Paulina recognized the differences in professional dancing between China and the United States, particularly the financial struggles that accompanied pursuing a full-time professional dancing career. Thus, she attended Schiller International University, majoring in international business, to sustain herself economically. In 2000, she founded the Royal Ballet Academy in Celebration and discussed how her teaching mirrored and differed from her educational experiences in China. In 2007, she left the Royal Ballet Academy to work alongside her husband overseas, returning to Shanghai and establishing a dance school there. Once Paulina returned to Central Florida, she joined the Orlando Ballet Academy in 2013, teaching at that school until she retired from dance in 2017, when managing classes and three kids proved too difficult for her. In her dancing retirement, she transitioned into the nonprofit world, supporting organizations such as the Greater Orlando Chinese Professional Association. Lastly, Paulina shared her broader observations about Florida and its cultural changes, continuities, and challenges over the past thirty-five years.

Transcription:

00;00;03 - 00;00;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Paulina Lu on May 27th, 2025, in Orlando, Florida for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, date of birth and where you were born?

00;00;19 - 00;00;27

PAULINA LU: This is a Paulina Lu. My birthday is May 24th, 1971. I was born in Shanghai, China.

00;00;27 - 00;00;35
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you tell me about your childhood growing up in Shanghai, China, during the late 70s, early 80s?

00;00;35 - 00;03;44
PAULINA LU: Yes. My parents are doctors. I was born there, and I grew up in the hospital when my parents were working there 24/7. And then, at age of eleven, I was accepted into a Shanghai dance school, the official name and become a boarding student there and trained as a professional ballet dancer and graduate there when I was seventeen, and I joined the Shanghai Dance Company as the youngest principal at that time. So my desire was I wanted to learn more dance. Of course, ballet is coming from Western worlds. So my natural desire was wanted to come here to either Europe or America to learn a little bit more. And I got a scholarship from San Francisco Ballet and got various different scholarship for coming to US. It was denied. Just the system over there was very different, you do not get a passport automatically. You have to go through the process. At the time, China has not open yet. So, I went with the company with the tour, so the more tour I did to go outside of China, more that I wanted to learn modern, contemporary, all of different forms.

And so, eventually I got opportunity. My sister [was] graduating from [college in] Japan. And so I got opportunity to be able to visit Japan, as a private visit. And so over there had a chance to go to the US embassy in Tokyo. And I talked to the consulate over there. And I said I was not able to go because of the restrictions. But now I am here, I have this scholarship. I remember I had about, I do not know, nine or ten different universities that give full scholarship. At the time, I was only nineteen, so I said I wanted to go and just wanted to learn. So I did not speak a word of English. It was all translated by a Japanese translator. So, it was fortunate enough that, the consulate over there, granted me an exception visa. And they told me I have to choose one of the school. I cannot just come here wondering where. I did not know anything about America. And so they told me that, the location of the school was south, north, west. And I just randomly picked University of South Florida because they told it was warm, it was south, and I wanted to be in the warm weather, coming from Shanghai. So that was how I landed Florida, 1990.

00;03;44 - 00;03;55
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And before we get to sort of your transition into Florida, what attracted you about ballet or dance in general at a young age?

00;03;55 - 00;05;52
PAULINA LU: In China, very different. And you were chosen to do that. So at the time we only had two professional boarding school one was in Beijing, one was in Shanghai. So the Russian ballet came to help the China Ballet Society to establish those schools. So it was a very early on. And they came to basically the teachers would go to all primary school, and they are looking for kids between nine to eleven. They will come to you, they will go to the classroom, they will pick you out, they will look at you. They give you a series of tests. And so the government tell you, say, okay, you were selected. I was selected one of the four girls in the whole country in that year to be in the boarding school. So at the time that, there was not really

a question of you wanted to do it, why you do it. I had a very little knowledge of dance at all, ballet. And there was just an opportunity presented to you say, oh, it was going to be boarding because it was a state owned. So the government is going to provide everything, financially works very well for your family and you are going to just come live in the boarding school and learn that. So it was five to seven years. It was actually a seven year program that they take you through your secondary school, you basically go to middle and high school in the dancing school. [In] my case, it was a shortened for two years. They needed to skip me into company because the dance company was in great needs of new dancers. So they shortened four of us to only do five year program instead of seven. You were chosen.

00;05;52 - 00;05;59
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You were chosen. And did your parents encourage it or voiced some opposition?

00;05;59 - 00;08;26
PAULINA LU: Absolutely. My grandparents, one is doctor, one is, journalism. So they are all in very academic driven, as you probably know, here in the States, you Asian, you either from doctor or lawyer. So they expect me to go through the same path, which I was doing academically very well. And so ninety percent of my family said no. And it was difficult to say no to the government, but I thought it was fantastic. It was something that, I do not know, never, know, never had encountered. And my mother, she was the only person told me, you can make your choice. And till today, I think she is a somebody very important to me that open all those opportunities and let me make my choices in my life versus very traditional Asian Chinese way that you do what you been told. So quite a bit of objections from all the rest of the family, even my sisters, said "No way you are not going to go, you are not going to dance because you have to follow the family legacy tradition to do that." And eventually they made me make three promises, which is very silly at the time, like saying that you are not going to come back and say it was hard. You are not ever going to come back say that you are not going to make it. You are going to have to be the lead dancer, work hard and be the top. No complain and they told me said that you are not going to—because they do not want to continue with this trend with their families—that you are not going to date in your company, your fellow dancers. Nothing like that. So if you decide to go it, it is going to be a hard, lonely road path. And it [was] not. It was fantastic. But I agreed at eleven. I said, no, I am not going to say, I am not going to complain at all no matter how hard it went. So I did and I loved it.

00;08;26 - 00;08;34
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And was there an official name for this program, like this government supported initiative?

00;08;34 - 00;09;37
PAULINA LU: No. At that time, there were only two professional boarding school. So Beijing Dance School and the Shanghai Dance School, there was only two in the whole nation. And I think I was the fourth graduate group from that school. So each almost every ten years they would audition about thirty to forty kids and then once they graduate, they were split into both companies. But after ten years, they realize there is shortage. The dancers grow older. And [so] they audition another group. So I was like the fourth group. Not it has been changed quite a bit.

China is opened up and the system has been changing quite a bit. So I know my school, they audition and accepting kids every year now. So it was very different than [in] early 80s.

00;09;37 - 00;09;42
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you mentioned your sisters. How many siblings do you have?

00;09;42 - 00;11;21
PAULINA LU: I just have a one sister. My grandfather came back from Tokyo, Japan, to marry my grandmother, and it was during World War Two. So he has extensive relations in Japan. And we went through a very harsh cultural revolution time, being that they were doctors, being that my grandfather from Japan. So our family went through very hard time during that time. And so only two grandchildren, which is my sister and me. And I can remember like maybe twelve or thirteen, that was all my grandfather said, "I am sending you guys back to Japan." That was his goal. And so my sister left when she was seventeen. She went to Japan for college. I join her graduation from her college, Kyoto University, which is one of the top university there. And I did not like Japan, it did not fit because I think that in my heart, I just wanted to continue dance. That was everything that I had, and I loved it, the form of the art. So I just always wanted to explore. And so I did not stay there and luckily get that visa and be able to come to the States.

00;11;21 - 00;11;36
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am glad you brought up you know sort of your grandparents generation and the Cultural Revolution. Can you specify a little bit more about some of the challenges that they face during that time?

00;11;37 - 00;16;47
PAULINA LU: 1976, I think it ended. So when I graduated from kindergarten, it ended. So all I remember was what I heard from my parents and grandparents, and they were not involve anything politically, but because the fact that my grandfather studied medicine in Japan—he actually came back during World War Two. And actually it was longer than a Cultural Revolution, we say ten years, but there were things happening before there was different other, as you probably know history more, so every time there was some sort of a movement, then they would be in trouble, because the fact that he was in Japan for so many years for schooling. But he was actually the very first doctor [who] brought the X-ray machine back to China to help pneumonia. So they did not throw him in jail. But they I think the biggest thing for both my parents and my grandparents was that they eliminated them from able to see patients to be able to do what they love. And that was difficult for my father as well. My dad is doctor. So when they classify them as anti-communists, instead of he being the lead doctor in the field, he instead had to be the janitor for the whole entire hospital. I grew up, I remember my father could not come home for holidays. He was the one who stayed back, clean up, be the security there. But during the time that they have a difficult case, they would ask him, put on the white coat and then go out and do the diagnose. Then once diagnose, finish, they would send him back to the bathroom to clean up. And I remember those horror stories that they have to went through like they had to chain on their neck with the sign in front of them saying they are anti-Communist. They are terrible monsters. They have to kind of parade, like walk through the town. And just to say that I am wrong, I am a sinner and all of that, so it was public humiliation, mostly for scholars, for teachers, and professors. And I know that my grandparents have a lot of

friends that their college professors and some people just did not want to face humiliation, a lot of suicide. And I would hear, “Grandmothers, passed away because of that. Grandpa.” And happened to quite a bit of families that the couple did not have children or not yet. So they did not have anything to live on. And my dad went through that too. Actually the reason that I was born because, family was in a difficult situation and my mom was not planning to have a second child, but because my dad was locked up and you never know, right? During that time, nobody knows that it is ever going to end. And so my mom found out she was pregnant. She actually went to visit him, could not see him, but visit him outside of the camp. Not really a jail, per se, but camp. And she had to scream, speak really loud. “I am here to see so and so, and I am the wife, and I am pregnant. I have a baby.” I was the hope. She was hoping my dad can hear that, so he will not lose hope, he will continue on. So she sent like, she handmade some winter shoes for him. And it is just a touching story that I still remember because my mom keeps saying that I was trying, through wall, trying to scream loud enough that your dad can hear that there is still hope. I need him, he cannot give up. And he heard it. Finally when everything was cleared up and he said, yeah, I did hear it. And that was one of the things that, my wife and children, you guys are the reason that I hang out, not to give up.

00;16;47 - 00;17;16
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Thanks for sharing that. That is a really touching story. I know by the time you joined the boarding school at eleven, the Cultural Revolution “officially” ended. But did the legacy of that event or process impact dance? Because dance is part of culture or no? I am just curious.

00;17;16 - 00;19;26
PAULINA LU: Not really at that time, it was, ’82, ’83 when I went into the schools. So, China has welcomed a new era, and which it is the reason why China became China right now because they opened a door, and it changed. But it did impact my sister when she had a chance to be an athlete, because in China, if it was a state government, sponsored the program, which programs were state government sponsored the professionals. And they will check your parents background. So in my sister case—she is four years older than my sister—when she was ten, eleven was able to join a diving program. She was rejected because my dad, my grandpa situation, the status. So they thought it was not the right fit, but just over four years, and this how society has been changed quite a bit, and they opened up. And when I was nine, I remember, they have removed that title from my dad. My mom was never in trouble, but from my dad and from my grandparents. So they are no longer wear that title that it was anti-communist. They said it was wrong. They did not do anything wrong other than being a doctor. So they removed that. So they were able to went back to hospital, recovered everything that they they had. So luckily, after two years, when it was time that I was chosen to be in the dance school, it no longer become a serious issue. They still knew. I think they hesitated, questioned it, but there was an option that they can [go] to my mom's side. They said, oh, okay. It was okay.

00;19;26 - 00;19;37
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did you learn about, obviously dance and ballet during your boarding school experience, but also Chinese culture in general?

00;19;37 - 00;22;09
PAULINA LU: You grew up being there, you have all the Chinese cultural heritage, has a lot of beautiful beliefs and traditions. One of the things [was] classical Chinese dance. So when you are in the school, you learn both classical Chinese and the classical ballet. So you learn a lot of art related culture. So the dancing school went back to all the major composers. We had to do arts appreciation classes. So you really learn in the Asian China through dynasty. Dynasty through dynasty, what they had art wise in the form of music and dance. And also they taught us with all fifty-six different nationalities that China has. Each nationality has its own folk dance. So we have being touched and learned all of that. And along with the Western culture, we have to go back all the histories with the ballet will take us to the painting. And then you see the very different Eastern, Western culture. I was so fortunate to see that. I was fascinating because you have a calligraphy here, then you have Western literature. They exposed all of that to us. And I think my school did a wonderful job. And it was a good timing because they were not limited to teach anything. And there actually was really no political classes was involved in our school. Very pure arts. I was in this, I feel like we grew up in the museum in this, like protected dome. We do not really know what was happening outside. All the teachers were previous dancers. So they were really feeding us all those wonderful arts and music and painting, and the state program are very close funded. So we be study with musicians, Conservatory music school would be studying with the art school. So small group of people in this cultural art bureau.

00;22;09 - 00;22;32
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So, in 1990, you finally get that visa to come to the United States, to Tampa, specifically University of South Florida. I know you said you did not really have any perceptions about the US but just talk to me about that initial experience of coming here. Did you experience any cultural shock cycle?

00;22;32 - 00;26;36
PAULINA LU: Absolutely. What [I] learned [in] the past maybe [was] New York, Paris, all those iconic figure. So coming [to] Florida [was] very different. And then the program here is not what I would have seen in San Francisco Ballet. Not what I would have seen in ABT [American Ballet Theater School New York]. So it was very elementary and a very beginning—as a matter of fact, I think at the time, I did not see a lot of arts here, arts and a culture that we are familiar with. And Shanghai was a still very big city, just like Tokyo, like New York. So even [in] the late 80s, early 90s, you would see a lot of exhibition, theater, and there were a lot of things for you to experience. But coming to Florida, Tampa, it was really far from everything like that. But I remember the good thing was that I met the nicest people in the world. The school put me with an American Mom. They call it American Mom because I did not speak English. So they put me in an ESL [English as a Second Language] program. They assigned me to this American mom that I [hung] out with every weekend. I was part of the family. What touches me was that I did not know that people can be that nice, especially south. I know south people are even more warm and sweet and Shanghai is very similar to New York—very arrogant, people rushing to everything, it is big city. So that was a big change for me, but I loved it.

After a few months here, I had opportunity to [go] to New York and to do a dance program over there. I actually was very intimidated by how it was then. And so I did not stay. I choose to

come back here. The one thing that I have learned is also that it was not state sponsored. It was all private. I went to audition Miami Ballet, actually, when they first established and there was big realization was also financial world that I cannot sustain myself without the scholarship, without a good job. So I think any college students will realize when they facing the world the first time and so I faced that as well. But I just faced it with a different culture. No languages. Speaking of daily food even, I did not know what hamburger was. I did not what fried chicken was. I went to the cafeteria of the college, the only thing I recognized was bread and ice cream. I did not even know any of the dishes they had over there. And I did not speak English, so I could not order anything. So I think I had a bread and ice cream for the first three months before I can even tell okay that is the chicken. So yeah. But I just think that people are, I mean, I love right now here, I love Florida, I have never encountered all the people that will and come lend a hand and help you in a guide. Even you do not speak the language, they come and they give you a hug. So that was nice.

00;26;37 - 00;26;43
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you how long was your scholarship at USF for the dance program?

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PAULINA LU: It was year by year that you have to fulfill the requirement. They will extend that. After a year, I stayed there. I realized that it dance was different. What I understand when I grew up with the with the boarding school, it will not guarantee me a job. I have to go out to audition. If I do not have the scholarship—just like any other immigrant, when I came here, I did not have nothing. I did not even think I needed money. So I quickly realized that I need to get a job, but I was an F1 student, so I could not really do anything. So after a year, I actually had a help with the Miami Ballet in Miami. I had a very limited English, so I do not know how the relationship [was], but I was told that I could not work until my visa changed, which is true. And so they had a lawyer contact me so that they can help me to adjust my status. And I did not know that was my opportunity to get a green card, to get a permanent resident through my abilities. So they were helping me [with] that, and eventually I got my green card. I was able to work, so I find a teaching studio job. Then I actually transferred myself out of USF to Schiller International University, majored in international business. I realized that I needed to sustain myself. So my life was teaching the ballet studio to make money and continue with that, [and] at the same time, support myself in the college for business.

00;28;35 - 00;28;55
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How different and similar was the dance curriculum program from your experience in China in the boarding school to when you were here in Florida, whether at first as a student on the scholarship visa, but also when you taught?

00;28;56 - 00;33;31
PAULINA LU: Very different. But I think a very different in the sense that I do not know because at the time when I grew up in China, there was only two conservatory school. I did not know here, the kids, at three year old they can go out to dance studio to dance. It was not opened to the society over there, but here you had all private studios that teach dance, and it was very different talent searching process. Here you have all those students, the kids dancing

and when they probably rising to a certain age, ten, eleven, they go to competition. And if they are really following it, they want to pursue the career, it is their choice. Pursue their career, the parents who support it. And they maybe go to trainee of the ballet company. They go to the studio ballet too. It is a very different path to become a professional. Over where I grew up, you were told at eleven when you go to boarding school, "your life is going to be a dancer." This is your start professional life. So it was a very different I feel here. I really enjoyed teaching, I taught ballet, even [while] working in business. I taught ballet until 2017. So many, many years. I give up because, I was busy in the work, and I have three kids, and I feel like I could not give enough adequate time to my students in Orlando Ballet. So the last place I taught was Orlando Ballet. And I love teaching because I feel that I was able to share my passion and love to many, many, many kids that they do not necessarily have to be a professional, but they can enjoy. They can dance, they can experience, and they can make choices at the end that whether they want to pursue this career. And also once they do pursue this career, they can also make choices. They may dance for five years, ten years, however long, then they can move to their next career. They can change careers. I was forced to change it because financial reasons. But here there is still an opportunity for you to change. It was not offered. Ever. As I grew up as even an opportunity. So I am very grateful that God led me to this path and to be able to come here and really open my eyes, open my life.

As a professional dancer that is a major changes. Even over there, I was chosen, with those two schools. By the time I [was] close to graduate [in] dancing school over there, China established four different schools. Instead of Beijing, Shanghai, there were two more professional conservatory schools. So they have a national dance competition. Each school can only send five, six kids. So think about it, out of the thousands of kids, thirty and forty were chosen. And then out of those thirty, forty, there was maybe only five or six were chosen for a national dance competition. I was able to go to that competition and got the awards for it. But here, when I was teaching—and actually for six years, I had in my own dance studio in Celebration—all of them were able to go to the stage, compete at different age, different level, different genre. I think the opportunities just for dancer alone whether, pre-professional, professional, recreational, it is all there. And I think that is what is amazing about this nation and that to me as a as a dancer, that is the biggest difference because as far as, technique, curriculum, all of those—we all coming from there is a couple of major methods, whether it was from Cecchetti, whether it was from Russia, there is only those few major ones, and then everyone is following those curriculum. So technique wise there is no difference. But the platform is where that makes huge difference.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was the name of the ballet school you created in Celebration?

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PAULINA LU: Royal Ballet Academy.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what years did you...?

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PAULINA LU: 2000 to 2007. The school stayed on for a couple more years. I had to follow my husband with his business overseas, so I had to leave, brought my daughter and lived overseas for about six years from 2007 to 2013. But the school went on for a couple more years. And with this, the teachers [were] here locally. So we have a lot of teachers working for Disney and Universal. So they were teaching not only ballet, of course, they [were] teaching, jazz and tap and lyrical, all sorts of genre. So they stay on with the lease available, a couple more years.

00;34;34 - 00;34;45
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So generally, you taught from 2000 to 2017, give or take. Like how long did you teach ballet?

00;34;45 - 00;37;29
PAULINA LU: Yeah. So actually, my teaching started in ’91. But then I went back to Hong Kong Dance Company. Danced as a professional. I went back as a contract lead dancer over there. And then also I worked with the Splendid China—I do not know if you know that theme park that they were here in Kissimmee—in the entertainment department. So from ’93, after I graduate, I did work in entertainment and dancing all the way to 2000. And in 2000 was when my baby girl first child was born, so I walked away from the stage and then started my own dance studio to 2007. And then I went to overseas, work with my husband for a few years, about six years. And over there, actually, we went back to Shanghai. We base our office in Shanghai over there from 2009. So I break for two years, 2009 to 2013, I establish a dance studio over there. Because we are from the US, I actually named the studio Broadway Center and also because I wanted to be able to offer other genres—over there again, mainly [it] is classical. So we offered a jazz, musical, tap, lyrical, to contemporary ballet to the kids over there. But during that time, because my kids was in Shanghai American School, so our main students body [were] people like us, worked and lived in Shanghai. So I wanted to offer those kids thousands, thousands of kids at that time a place to go for continued their, whether they dance overseas in the studio or they want to start, so that was what we doing. And the studio is still there actually. One of my junior teacher who also graduate from the same school that I graduate, and she has continued with that studio, still there and still dancing. So 2007, when I come back here, after year, I was pregnant with my third baby. So after he was born and after year I joined Orlando Ballet and taught another two, three years to ’17 and then my other work, my business work just take over. It was just too much with three kids and you cannot teach anymore.

00;37;29 - 00;37;33
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Do you ever consider going back to teaching or no you are retired?

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PAULINA LU: Probably not, but I think I will always support dance. I will always support arts and so now I am involved a lot of in not for profit organization. And I actually helping oversee to create performances and organize their galas and things like that. I think that my background can help in those aspect, whether it is backstage, stage managing and all of that, because it does require a lot of knowledge on those events.

00;38;08 - 00;38;25
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did you learn about a) Florida and b) the immigrant experience throughout your dancing career, whether first performing in the 90s to then teaching, what did you learn about those two things?

00;38;25 - 00;38;26
PAULINA LU: As immigrant?

00;38;26 - 00;38;28
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah.

00;38;29 - 00;41;33
PAULINA LU: Very welcoming. I have heard many stories [of] obviously there was always this sort of a disadvantage or discrimination, people do talk about it from time to time in different field work. I think for dance, I honestly can say that I personally did not encounter any of those situations because I feel like from the university from dance program, from go to Osceola County to open a studio that it was always open arms, and the parents, I think arts also give you a platform. It is very diverse. So you are working with all kinds of people, and everybody is very open minded. So that I think it is a fortunate that I did not really feel that way. And even the business, in the banking world—I do notice that there are not many females, but I think because I worked the recent ten, twenty years, there are a lot of changes in the whole world. So, you will be able to find organization, like in my bank, my executive director is a female. You will be able to find other females in the leading positions that you can count on [and] work with. So my experience being pleasant.

The only the only thing I feel that is somewhat limited is the social services for minorities, not so much in the professional world, but in the daily life. And I am heavily involved, and I wanted to believe that I can make a difference for senior services. I feel most minorities, not only Asian, most minorities that the seniors that retire in Florida—when you go on website, there are a lot of resources—but there was a missing bridge connecting them. The seniors are actually home, and they need help with the service out there. There is that bridge that they do not know there are programs out there helping them, and the program is not able to reach out to them. It could be a language barrier. It could be a cultural barrier; it could be different barriers. So this is part of the reason that we met there [at the Asian Cultural Festival in Ocoee] because I am now very involved with the not for profit organization, we want to—and that is my passion—focus on senior services.

00;41;33 - 00;41;44
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Speaking of change, how has Orlando changed since you have been here in 1990, generally and culturally?

00;41;44 - 00;43;20
PAULINA LU: I think we have so much more to offer. And not only we invite more companies or performance or fine arts coming into it, [but] the fact the population grow a lot of, [and] migrants from other cities, other countries bring in so much culture and talents here and make this very vibrant right now. And I think about how aware, whether it is the government setting

those museums and theaters and they have a good facility to have the artists coming in, but the growth of Orlando itself and the people that moving into Orlando have brought so much into it. And I think with that, not only the new blood coming in, there are enough artists now [that] can dig into the history of the culture of Florida. Even my kids, they will tell me, "this is what happened in St. Augustine, it is the oldest city." There [is] so much attention to find the native arts here because those people coming in, I think, brought the energy to embrace what we have here originally and then enhance on their new methods to kind of demonstrate what we have. So big difference. Huge difference.

00;43;20 - 00;43;27
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Conversely, what challenges does Orlando face today?

00;43;27 - 00;44;22
PAULINA LU: I am going to go back to that. I think that, because the fast growing, do we have adequate resources to support this growth? And I know the state government has done quite a bit of infrastructure to support it, but not just the hardware, the software. I think that need to be pointed out. Like you got to have enough lobbies to say that this is what we need to look at it, because oftentimes we are looking at new buildings, the fixture, the hardware. But what really makes city alive is the people and what they bring in. So hopefully we will get more focus on the software.

00;44;22 - 00;44;30
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how will Orlando or Florida change in the next thirty years since you have been here for thirty years, give or take?

00;44;30 - 00;45;22
PAULINA LU: I see it moving more towards a metropolitan city and open doors, welcomes more diversity. And once we appreciate our differences, I think the city is really going to be a beautiful, what do they call it? City Beautiful. Yeah. I really think that it will become a reality, and I hope it is because I love this place. Like my whole family love it. And to me, this is more home than any other city or even where I was born, I have been here long enough, so hopefully that we can all contribute, bring a little bit to it.

00;45;22 - 00;45;31
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your Chinese heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Florida specifically?

00;45;31 - 00;47;42
PAULINA LU: China has a 5000 histories. There was so many good things, ethical, moral standard that comes with the old tradition and we respect the elderly. And then when you are looking down deeply, all kinds of culture has those good solid sides and I always often tell my kids, "I love America, and I also love my heritage. I am proud of the heritage." I think that my Chinese heritage set a foundation of where I needed to go. And in America is like, I often make that joke, I said "My hometown Shanghai is like my mother, and Orlando, Florida, US is like my father." So here I have a foundation that what my mom taught me like a three year old, ten year old, and my father opened all the doors and encouraged me be courageous, be positive, and

go out to reach the world. So I hope my kids and everything I do with our non-for-profit, with the OCPA [Greater Orlando Chinese Professionals Association], like all of that, I think that there are a lot of immigrant, Asian immigrant—the common ground is that we want our kids or the next generation to build on what they have and what they already have in their DNA and then continue to extend, explore and to appreciate what this new era, this new society have offered to them. The opportunity they would probably not have it otherwise. I think it is good. You just have to take a good from each side and build on those.

00;47;42 - 00;47;53
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording fifty or hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;47;53 - 00;49;06
PAULINA LU: Oh, wow. Difficult question. I think the number of years does not make a difference. I think that we all human, we all people, no matter a hundred years ago, a hundred years in the future. Hope they all remember where they come from, their history, what they based on, and how they going to continue advance the civilization, move forward. I think that the most important thing is that I just hope humanity see each other. We may be different but embrace that difference. Not argue with the difference. To embrace that, then we together will be stronger, better. Divisions never going to suit any nation, any people. And I think that will be something that as you grow from one place to the other and continue on, we all as one.

00;49;06 - 00;49;11
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Paulina, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to share your life story. I really appreciate it.

00;49;12 - 00;49;13
PAULINA LU: Thank you, thank you.