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A family history unearthed

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By NIU YUE in New York(China Daily USA)

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Amy Chin discusses her family story in a lecture at the Queens Library in Flushing, New York on Wednesday night. NIU YUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Why research and dig up your family's century-old history as Chinese in America? And how?

Amy Chin, a New Yorker and arts consultant, has a few answers.

"Often when we learn history, we focus on famous people and their events, we don't normally think of ourselves. But it's all of these individual stories out of ours together that make up history, and if we don't tell our stories, large chunks of the history are going to be missing," Chin said in a lecture on Wednesday night at Queens Library in Flushing, New York.

Chin grew up in the Bronx, New York, the daughter of a laundryman and granddaughter of a Chinese American who entered the US in the early 1900s.

For decades, Chin's family carefully saved records, objects, and other personal artifacts of their immigration story, which, in some ways, made the family unique.

The Chin's kept an old coaching book for immigration interviews, which Chin found in her father's safety deposit box after he passed away in 2007.

The coaching book had the questions that an immigration officer might ask printed in Chinese translation in the language style of the 1920s.

When Marci Reaven, vice-president for history exhibitions of the New-York Historical Society, started to prepare an exhibition on Chinese-American history, she asked to borrow the coaching book from Chin for a display.

When they talked, Reaven learned that Chin had more old documents and memorabilia, almost enough to make a family museum.

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Chinese American: Exclusion/Inclusion, an exhibition about the centuries-long history of trade and immigration between China and the US that ran at the New-York Historical Society last year, chose Chin's family history to give a personal side to the story.

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