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Interview by Chau, Carmen Kar Man

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Translation:

I am so honor today to be the representative of Lingnan University and have a change to do the interview of “Talking Tales Oral History Project – Hong Kong Childhood” with you.

The conversation of the interview is as follows:

(R stands for Interviewer, Carmen Chau)

(E stands for the interviewee, Mr. Chau)

R : First of all, can I know where and when were you borned?

E : I was borned in Tin Shui Wai in 1932.

R : You were borned in Tin Shui Wai in 1932 that was borned in Hong Kong, right?

E : Yes, I was borned in Hong Kong.

R : Next, can you remember which hospital or where were you borned?

E : I was borned in Pok Oi Hospital. At that time, Pok Oi was a small-scale hospital.

R : What’s your occupation of your father when you were child?

E : He was a farmer.

R : Farmer, then how about your mother?

E : It was the same, she was a farmer too.

R : Before and after her marriage?

E : Yes, the same.

R : Oh, I see. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

E : There are nine brothers and sisters in my family.

R : Nine brothers and sisters, were they living together?

E : Yes, we were living together.

R : Then, I want to ask you about your education level? Have you ever attended the kindergarten?

E : No, I have never attended the kindergarten, as there was no kindergarten at that period.

R : There was no kindergarten at that period. How about the primary school?

E : Yes, I have attended the primary school. In my childhood, we learnt the Red Book 紅皮書, it's about The Three Character Classic 三字經, The Thousand Classic 千字文, Confucian way (Text of great moral learning) 昔時賢文, Chung Yung 中庸, Great Learning 大學 and so on.

R : You learnt these kinds of knowledge.

R : When did you study in the primary school?

E : Eleven years old.

R : How many years did you study in the primary school?

E : I have studied the Red Book for two years.

R : Two years of learning the Red Book.

E : Yes, and I have studied in primary school for about one and a half years.

Then I stopped my studying.

R : How did you feel when you were in primary school?

E : I took a basket and studied for the full day.

R : For the full day.

E : And I used the Chinese writing brush for writing.

R : What's your favourite subject?

E : My favourite subject was The Thousand Character Classic.

R : The Thousand Character Classic, then do you remember who were your teachers and how were your teachers teach you?

E : I can still remember. The teacher who taught me the Red Book is Au Chi Shan 歐值生,. My primary school teacher was Wong Sin Tao 黃仙島 in Dongguan Primary School 東莞學校.

R : Oh! The Dongguan Primary School 東莞學校. How did you go to school?

E : The lesson started from 8am to 4pm.

R : Well, were you going to school on foot?

E : Yes, on foot.

R : How far was the school from your home?

E : It took me for about 40 to 45 minutes.

R : 40 to 45 minutes. OK, then let's continue with our interview. I can have the clear mind that you were borned in 1932, so you are now 68 years old. According to the old history of Hong Kong, at that time, people were lack of chances to have the education. Can you tell me that why you could attend the primary school for learning?

E : I was so fortune that I could have the chance to get the education. My father let me to go to the school for learning and writing.

E : At that time, not too many people could go to the school.

R : I know that you were attended the primary school for only two years. I want to know why you know lots of the Chinese words and can read the whole passages of the newspaper now?

E : At that period, I met many people. I would ask them about the Chinese words that I don't know. And I asked them to write the words on the sand,

and I remembered them by my heart. So I could learn lots of Chinese words and can read the whole passages of the newspaper now.

R : I would wonder to know whether your father was educated?

E : No, he didn't.

R : He didn't. Well, in your childhood, what's the most impressive event or thing in your mind?

E : The most impressive thing was that I would see the movies 粵語長片. I hadn't got any other hobbies and nothing to play at that time.

R : No toys?

E : Yes, there were no toys in my childhood.

R : What would you do in your leisure time?

E : In my leisure time, I just worked for the others when I was young around 10 years old.

R : Oh! You started working for the age of young ofchild.

E : Yes.

R : What's your job?

E : I got the job of feeding ducks, making the squash ducks, and drying the rice at that time. My wage was HK\$38 per month.

R : HK\$38 per month. Was it a high-paid job?

E : Yes, it was the relatively high-paid job at that time.

R : How could you take this job?

E : My father helped me to find it.

R : Why you took this job?

E : Because I was jobless at that moment and there are not enough working opportunities.

E : Anyway, while doing this job that waged HK\$38 per month, my father would ask me to give him HK\$30 for home use. The rest of HK\$8 was belonged to me, my pocket money. However, I couldn't use up all the HK\$8 at that moment. In the past, we used the dollar value of cent.

R : HK\$8.

E : I couldn't used up HK\$8.

R : I would wonder to know how did you spend your pocket money?

E : I would use the pocket money to see the movies.

R : Were the movies shown in the theaters?

E : Yes, the movies were shown in the theaters, such as Dong Lok Theater 同樂戲院 and Kwong Wah Theater 光華戲院.

R : Those were the ones in Yuen Long?

E : Yes.

R : Those theaters were built up at that time?

E : Yes, the oldest one is Dong Lok Theater.

R : Was the movie showing through the camera or the opera?

E : It was shown on the screen.

R : Those should be Black & White, right?

E : Yes, it was Black & White. And it was in Cantonese. I liked to see the fiction one and the musical one.

R : Who were the popular stars at that time?

E : Sun Ma Sze Tsang 新馬司曾, Tang Pik Wan 鄧碧雲, Fong Yim Fan 方艷芬.

R : Were you going alone or with friends?

E : I went alone. As I was doing the job in my childhood, I stayed in others' home in Yuen Long.

R : You didn't live with your family when doing the job?

E : I seldom went back home.

R : Since you were borned in 1932, there was the Sino-Japanese War in 1937

to 1945. During the period of the war, how was your life?

E : The life was very hard. We had to eaten all the sweet potatoes first. Then my dad would allow us to eat the rice.

R : You still got the rice to eat.

E : Yes, I got it. But I must eat the sweet potatoes first.

R : I am so wonder to know the reasons behind?

E : Because there was the shortage of food.

R : Is it means that you have to eaten all the sweet potatoes, then you can eat the rice last?

E : Yes, you are right. My father said we must eat all the sweet potatoes first, otherwise there would be the shortage of our rice.

R : Then how many meals would you have for a day?

E : Only two meals per day.

R : Two meals only?

E : The first meal would be at 10am, the dinner would be at 4pm.

E : There were only two meals per days, we hadn't got any snack food.

R : How did you feel about the Sino-Japanese War?

E : At the wartime, I was keeping the cows. I had got so many cows. The cows

were used for farming.

R : How old were you at that moment?

E : My biggest brother was around 21 to 22 years old and I was around 8 to 9 years old.

R : Were there any boom or fighting within Hong Kong?

E : At the beginning of the wartime, there were some Japanese flights booming Hong Kong. They boomed from Kam Tin to Tsuen Wan till Hong Kong Island.

R : Were you afraid of the boom?

E : No, I was not afraid of the boom, as it had become the habit of our daily life.

I do believed that the Japanese Army would not be boomed or attack the Hong Kong citizen, but for the British army on Hong Kong Island. Wow... there were lots of Japanese flights flying across the sky of Hong Kong. However, Hong Kong's British Army used the boom to flight against the Japanese Army. The most impressive thing in my mind was that I could see there were some Japanese flights shot down by the British Army.

R : Was there any great change in your life during wartime?

E : There was only enough food for our family. We had to growing and processing the rice by the steps of shirking and drying.

R : Then it should be self-sufficient.

E : Yes, it was.

R : Was there any things that impressive you most during the wartime?

E : The most impressive thing was that I had to ploughing the farm. And I hurt my toe, you can see here.

R : Oh! I can see it.

E :Wow... it's very hard. I have to farm since I was a kid.

R : At that time, your age should be 8-9, right?

E : Yes, the plower was taller than me for 50cm.

R : Why you were strong enough to hold the plower and farmed?

E : We were trained to be strong. We practiced every day and we had to shoulder the rice, grain...as a habit. So every kid was strong at that time. The environment forced us to be strong. During the wartime, everyone needed to work no matter the kids or adult. We nearly had to stop studying in the school.

R : At that time, was your living standard better or poorer than the others?

E : It was comparatively better than the others, somebody would got only one meal.

R : Do you think you were fortunate at that moment?

E : Yes, I thought we were so fortune.

R : What is the family order for you in your family?

E : I am the fifth son.

R : Would there be the perception that boys are more important than girls?

E : Yes, boys were more important than the girls.

R : How was it?

E : For example, girls needed to go out for working. However, boys needed to work in the farm.

R : If you do the wrong things or make false, would you get the physical punishment by your parent?

E : When I did the wrong things, my parent would hit and scold me.

R : What would they used to hit you?

E : My dad would use his hand to hit my face. When I was at school, my teacher would hit my head if we couldn't recite the passages.

R : Was it the way of "Pop Pop Chai"?

E : Yes, at that time studying was in the way of "Pop Pop Chai".

R : Then how was the studying of "Pop Pop Chai"?

E : We had to go to school in the morning, then recited The Three Character Classic and The Thousand Character Classic. After that, we had to copy for the passages for at least twice times. So every student would get knowledge. Besides, I made the exercise book that for writing by myself.

R : Would you got the examination?

E : We did.

R : How was your result?

E : I did well in the examination. And I was so grateful that my dad let me go to the school. Also, I am so intelligent who could get the good result. Haha...

E : Just look at my little brother, he was so lazy and not intelligent enough, so he didn't get the education.

R : Was it needed to pay for the school fee?

E : Yes.

R : Then how much was it?

E : It was not in terms of money, but for the grains.

R : Then how much of the grains that you needed to pay?

E : Normally it required for five hundreds kilos of grains per year.

R : How much was it out of your family income?

E : At that moment, our family got nearly two hundreds kilos of grains per field.

And we got around ten acreages of field. Also there were lots of members in my family, so there were around twenty people to have the meals together.

R : Around twenty people, then how was it?

E : Including the kids and adults. There were nine brothers and sisters, my elder brothers' wives and their sons and daughters.

R : So there would be around twenty people to have the meals together.

R : Would your grandparent lived together with you?

E : My granddad did, my grandma was dead during the period of my childhood.

R : Would your granddad took the responsibility to take care of you?

E : Yes, he took care of me as I was the kid.

R : How about yourself, were you needed to take care of your little brothers and sisters?

E : I needed to take care of my little brothers while I was studying. The three elders sisters needed to take care of my little sisters.

R : It means that your sisters took care of the sisters and boys also needed to work in the farm.

E : Yes, it was.

R : Actually you were very fortune.

E : We were very fortune. We were in-named to called studying and earned by our own. Actually my dad would not let us to go to school at anytime by asking us to help him to work in the farm. Then I would not go to school.

R : If you were punished by your dad, girls or boys would be punished more?

E : Boys were punished more as girls were seldom be punished, because boys were naughtier.

E : Well, if I don't know some words, I would ask the others to write on the sand and I learnt them by heart.

R : That was self-studied.

R : In my memory, you never scold or hit me in my childhood. I wonder to know why?

E : It was because I had experienced from the physical punishment, so I know there was no need for treating the children with physical punishment. You are well-behaved. But for us, sometimes we would be naughty, then my dad punished us. Anyway, he was still my dad. I would not angry or rebel him even if I was doing right.

R : Do you think your childhood life has affected your adult life?

E : It won't. Since I got married, my life was not so good.

R : You are my granddad, in my memory, you never scold or hit me in my childhood. I wonder to know why?

E : It was because I had experienced from the physical punishment, so I would not teaching my sons, daughters or grandchildren with the physical punishment. Even they were doing something wrong, I would let them to have the chance for correction, as the proverb, It's never too late to mend 知錯能改,善莫大焉. We have to teach the children what is the right way to doing that thing, but not by hitting and scolding.

R : You are really a cultural and educated person.

R : Do you still remember that who gave me my name?

E : Yes, it's me.

R : And I also got the English name, you gave me the Chinese name first or the English name first?

E : Chinese name.

R : Chinese name and then English Name.

E : At that period, there was no courses of English, I learnt it by myself, too.
From the beginning of 26 letters (alphabets).

R : You learnt English through self-studied.

E : I learnt it by my own. So I know some English words even through I am 68 years old now. In my childhood, I never learnt English, but now I did it. we should learn through our life 活到老, 學到老. Today I would learn the English from seeing the LRT's road showing screen.

R : You are very energetic, hard-working and actively for learning.

E : Yes, we have to pay attention for learning. In short, there is one sentence that can conclude, that is we should learn through our life.

R : Ok, that's all for the interview. Thanks for your help.

E : Never mind, thank you!