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Interview by Li Sai Wah Brian

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Interviewer: Li Sai Wah Brian (Li)

Interviewee: Chan Yeuk Fong (Chan)

Li: Can you tell me your childhood in Chaozhou? Happy or not? Any differences comparing with the childhood in Hong Kong?

Chan: I was in Chaozhou for 7 years. As a girl, my living was very simple but unhappy. My mother is a Chaozhounese. She has only two daughters in that period (she has 3 daughters and 1 son now). 3 of us went back to Chaochow and my father was a mariner. He had to work overseas and he had only gone to Chaochow to have a visit once in several years. A twenty-something woman brought up 2 daughters in Chaozhou and could not stay with her husband, she was unhappy. So, she used to expressed her unhappiness to her elder daughter, i.e. me. She regrets that her elder child is a girl but not a boy. In 1953, the Hong Kong economy was in recession and we need to went back to Chaozhou for living. Maybe her education level is low. She did not know they lost job and the living was tough because of the economy recession. I knew that when I grew up. But my mother did not think so. She though that I brought them misfortune as my parents lost their job. Because of unemployment, she had to come back to mother town. So, according to this reason, my childhood was not happy. My mother had a partiality to my younger sister. She had treated my younger sister better in purpose I think. My sister younger than me 18 months. For example, in the dinner, she used to gave the fish head to me and gave the fish body to my younger sister. She always blamed on me but not her even we had done something wrong together. I seldom saw her scolded my younger sister, but I was always scolded without reason. I reached to the age of having education, my mother did not give me the offer with poor temper and bad attitude. I was over the age of having education. Until my great-grandmother requested, I finally had the chance to study. My great-grandmother though all her grandchildren should have education. I was very happy in school as I like studying very much. Before entering into school, my elder cousins were studying. I always got the little pencil and the toilet paper, begged my cousins to teach me words, like my name, number 1, etc. But they usually rejected me with very poor attitude. Sometimes they were in the mood, they would teach me some words and wrote it on the toilet paper. I liked to hide in a corner and practiced the writing. But my mother hated my such doing very much. I had a very good result in school and always at the top of the class. I still remember that I got the awards in front of student many times in the morning assembly.

Even the prizes were only the paper or the pencil or the Chinese writing brush, but it was happy enough for me to memorize it. Before I went back to Hong Kong, I gave the prizes to my friends in Chaozhou. I still can remember that. I grew up without parental love, so I was not happy in my childhood. I could not get those a child should have in the childhood. Even education is a basic need to a child, but I had to strive for that for long. I came back to Hong Kong when I was 9. I was not familiar with speaking Cantonese as I lived in Chaozhou since I knew how to speak. It was a bit difficult to adapt to the new environment. I wanted to continue my study. My neighbor brought my younger and I to a nearby primary school for making registration as she knew that my mother won't let us go to school. I was so happy that I could study again. My father was working overseas. He only came back to Hong Kong once every year. my mother went for working from early morning to the deep night. Actually, my mother's main interest is working. Maybe she had been in poverty, she emphasis on the value of money. She left money before she left for work. I was only 9 and had to lived independently. I made the meal myself. Sometimes, I added salt in the porridge, then we had the salty porridge. If added sugar, we had the sweet porridge. We had no other choice.....

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Li: Why you are badly impressed by the left wing school?

Chan: Not really badly impressed, but just a feeling of dislike Normal education should include Not only the moral education, but also being a good person, respect of teachers and seniors, respect to parents, love among brothers and classmates, etc. All of them are included into moral education. We should also be responsible for our society, loving our nation, having a sense of belonging to our nation. Though all of the above are important, however, they cannot be over emphasized in our daily life. I think the normal education should mainly base on the teaching of knowledge, it is initial to be included. In addition, moral education is also important, but that should not over emphasize on being loyal to chairman Mao and our country (thinking). Well I mean if they too much

emphasize on the writings and readings about the communist party, but neglect other materials.... Or putting less time on teaching books, it is not appropriate. Meanwhile, I pay for the school to acknowledge things, but not... actually students are like a piece of white paper to write on, learning at school does not mean that I should be imbued with the communist thoughts.

Li: Actually the reason you dislike your school is that it imbued you with the one-sided thought of communist.

Chan: I agree with you.

Li: But what's the point of the objection, as you know there are many famous figures who were also brought up in the left wing school.

Chan: What we can see nowadays....those who speak for the communist party are all beneficial, surely they won't say that they were being made use of.

Li: You've told that, there were discussions about the nation's affairs at school, what kind of affairs were they? About politics or public affairs?

Chan: They were more or less related to the politics. My objection to my secondary school is that, as I remember, the education I was given always put undue emphasis on how good the people's living was, how strong our nation was. Indeed, those sayings were not really factual but unilateral, or even fabricated. How good was our people's living? Actually, they didn't even get enough clothes and food, how good could it be? I think what the school told was not really factual in many ways. As I can recall, our leader who told us to love our nation, indeed....as I remember, chairman Mao also made many mistakes. Surely, everybody makes mistakes, but many rulers or leaders abused their power, which was out of their ambitions. Being loyal to our leader is always mentioned in our country, it's necessary. However, as a student to live a campus life, our education should not put too much emphasis on (being loyal to the leader) this, and I learnt that....nowadays, from the modern point of view, I think it's not proper to emphasize too much on this.

Li: In fact, apart from China, there are also something like political education and moral education in the foreign countries, like the USA, the UK, students from there also love their nations. Actually, was the education you received like

theirs?

Chan: I'm not so familiar with their educational system as I live in Hong Kong. At that time, our school always objected what the Hong Kong government did, as well as other countries' education and success. It only emphasized on its own achievements, it's too one-sided and unfair. And such kind of educational attitude was not correct. Education should be fair, which doesn't aim at overstating other's mistakes. The thought of 'We're perfect, they have mistakes.' was unfair. Unfairness should not appear in our education.

Li: Many years after, as you've told me, you and your classmate promised that if you had children, you'd never let them study in such kind of school, have you ever changed your mind?

Chan: So far I haven't changed my mind, it's because my children are educated in the Catholic school, and I'm favorable with their education. Of course, they have mistakes, but on the whole, their education is the correct one and the teachers' efforts are welcome. The education system in Hong Kong still has loopholes, and the government is continuously re-adjusting them.

Li: You don't agree with the previous political education at school, do you think that the political education should not be included in the standard education?

Chan: It should be included, but not over-emphasized or over-educated.

Li: Do you think that the political education was far too much emphasized in the past?

Chan: Yes, I do.

Li: Can you talk about your childhood experience and the environment where you lived. And which region you lived in?

Chan: I lived in an old building in Sham Shui Po, but I lived in a small flat with bad environment.

Li: Was there a big difference between there and Chaozhou?

Chan: The living standard between Hong Kong and Chaozhou is beyond comparison! My grandpa was an official, living in a big house which consisted of four living rooms that relatively facing four directions, a garden and a big dining room which were as large as a small sports playground. The house was really really big.

Li: Can you describe how your life was after coming to Hong Kong?

Chan: We lived in a tiny room without a bed, a table and a chair. We'd to take the floor as our table when doing homework. However, such bad environment didn't affect my study.

Li: How long did you live in there?

Chan: Less than two years, as our parents earned enough for buying an upper room in a two-floor house in Shekipmei. That's enough for my family with four members.

Li: You studied in primary school at that time?

Chan: Yes. However, there was a blaze broken out in shekipmei, and as the government had to carry out a re-construction, we were assigned to a public housing in Chiwanshan, and the environment was improved.

Li: How long did you live in there?

Chan: Until I was married. Because we had babies, and we were assigned with one more apartment with fair living environment.

Li: Living in a public estate together with many families, what's your memory about it?

Chan: (Thinking)

Li: Which period of time was that when you first moved into Chiwanshan estate?

Chan: That's when I was in secondary school. I went to school in the morning and tuned back home in the afternoon for doing homework, I seldom played with

my neighbors as I assigned much time on the school activities, so there was not much time left. On holidays, I usually spent time with my classmates like going on a picnic, swimming, playing ball games, such activities were so enriching.

Li: How far from your home to school?

Chan: It's quite a distant!

Li: You were educated in a left wing school, did it affect your mind when you grew up?

Chan: The over-emphasis on the political education cannot be denied. My father was a sailor when I was young, he was a Chinese, and he was discriminated when going abroad. So he stressed that a country should come before a family, when the country became strong, people would be respected. He told me that when I was young, and even until now, that's what he experienced. I also stress that we should have the sense of nation and country. However, the world is changing every minute, basically, the distance between countries and countries is shortening, and the world will become one. There should be love and respect between two different nations, and without discrimination and ruling. I love my country as I'm a Chinese; I also hope that my country will be stronger, and people can get enough for living, and they'll be respected. Nevertheless, I teach my children how to be concerned of the country's affairs and the sense of country. Students should work hard on studies, they should love themselves and get well-prepared for themselves, they should live a good life. Life is short, a few decades pass, when you grow old and look back, you'll have a good memory if you have a good childhood experience. If you have a good time and a sufficient living in your primary school, a good academic result is not a must, only if life is sufficient, then you'll find it memorable. Materialistic life is no more important than spiritual life. Only if the spiritual life is satisfied can the time not be wasted.

Li: The attitude which you learnt from school was positive or not?

Chan: Mostly positive. But I've been regretting for something up till now.... And I always urge my children to read more, don't waste time for nothing, and to be concerned for the updated events.... Why? Because sometimes I have nightmare and wake up shockingly from it. I dreamt that I'd a test, but I didn't

prepare for it, and I was so worried. Possibly it's because I didn't try my utmost effort to learn. In fact, as a student, I think I put too much time on learning the political affairs and participating in the discussion on the country's events. Whereas I spent less time on studies, and until now, I often have nightmares and I really feel regret for it. Well I think.... My children have grown up, and if I can spare some time to return to campus, and learn what I didn't learn before, that's terrific!

Li: How does your childhood experience affect you on educating your children?

Chan: I didn't try my utmost effort on my studies, and my parents didn't really teach me a lot and take good care of me, so I won't follow their steps. I'll try my best to teach my children, because of what I missed in my campus life, I'll urge my children again and again to be active in learning and to be responsible. (telephone bell rings) Because of what I missed in my youth, I don't hope that my children will also regret for their youth when they grow up. So I'd all-sidely spend much time on bringing up my children, continuously reminding them of what they need to do. My children have grown up now, and they are so far so good, after all, I'm responsible for them.