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### Interview by Lam Ka Man

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# **Hong Kong Childhood**

by

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Prepared for Dr. Rozanna Lilley

28th March, 2000

## **Translation**

K-Kamen (Interviewer)

T-Tommy (Interviewee)

K: It is 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2000 today. Now, it is 11:22pm. I'm now doing an interview of Hong Kong Childhood in Tommy home. Hi, Tommy! Would you mind to tell me where did you born in?

T: I was born in a little city of Mainland China. (Fu Zhou Si)

K: When did you born?

T: I was born in 1977.

K: So, how old are you?

T: 22 years old.

K: How was your family condition when you were in Mainland China? E.g., what was your parents' job? And how many could they earn per month?

T: My father was a car factory owner. He had about 5 cars, and he would apply some drivers to help him. My mother was a housewife. She did not need to work.

K: What was your mother's job before she got marriage?

T: I don't know! Because I did not born in that time!

K: OK! How much would your father earn per month?

T: about \$2000-\$3000.

K: um... how much was a normal people's monthly salary in that time?

T: \$200-\$300.

K: Oh! That means your family was very rich, right?

T: It can say we were in middle to upper class. At least, we were not poor.

K: On the other hand, can you describe your living condition that in Mainland China to me? Did you have your own house?

T: We bought an area to build a house by ourselves. The house was quite big. And we also had a servant, she is my relative, but is not very close. We gave her salary, and she helped us to do the housework.

K: How big was your house?

T: The house and the garden totally had more than 3000 feet, the house had 3 floors.

K: How was your room?

T: I lived in the third floor, I mean the whole floor. There were also some rooms for the guess, but no one lived in these rooms. And my parent lived in the second floor.

K: Were there any facilities in the third floor?

T: There were 3 rooms; one for me, and 2 for the guesses. There were also table-tennis table, Mahjong table and Snooker table.

K: I forget to ask if you have brothers and sisters?

T: no.

K: OK, and how about your garden?

The garden had a car park, a doghouse and an area that to feed hens and ducks. Also,

there was a place for 4 people to play Badminton.

K: In that time, would your parents very busy in working? Did they have time to take care you?

T: My mother was so free, she always went out to Chinese Restaurant. And she liked to go to dance with her friends. And my father was quite busy, I couldn't meet him for many times every week. Because when he came back, I was sleeping. And when I waked up, he was sleeping. He always need to have social intercourse with other businessman, He came back very late and waked up at afternoon. He did not need to work very hard, but he need to have much social intercourse.

K: How about the relationship between your parents and you?

T: In fact, I didn't know clearly about my father in that time, but he always gave me money, he could satisfy me. The relationship between my mother and me was better. I went to Chinese restaurant with her everyday.

K: Did you always talk with your parents?

T: I always talked with my mother but not my father. Anyway, I seldom argued with them.

K: How much was your pocket money?

T: \$5 per day?

K: Was it enough?

T: yes. I had more than \$100 per month. It was equal to people's monthly salary!

K: How was your studying condition and the relationship with your classmates?

T: I didn't like to study in that time. But when I went to school, most of classmates talked and played with me "respectfully". I was quite popular. They liked to play with me and treated me good as I had money.

K: Did you happy in school?

T: yes, I was happy.

K: Can you tell me about your personality before you came to Hong Kong?

T: I was very lovely and active. I liked to play but not study. I was always happy. Sometimes, I liked to help people too.

K: What were your hobbies?

T: Play! I liked to swimming, riding bicycle, eating, playing roller and badminton. Also, I liked to go to other city with my father.

K: Did you always go to other city with your parents?

T: No! not with my mother. I just went to other city with my father. As my father sometimes need to go to other city e.g. Shanghai to work. So I went with him.

K: How about with my mother? Did you go out with her except going to restaurant?

T: no, because my mother always went to dance with her friends. But, I prefer to play with my own friends. Sometimes, they went to my house and slept here overnight.

K: As I know, when you were being older, your family immigrated to Hong Kong with you, right?

T: Yes. My father came to Hong Kong first. And then, my mother also came. Lastly, I was me!

g but not you, who took care you?

K: After your parents came to Hong Kong

nd took care me when my parents were in

T: My grandparents lived in my house and Hong Kong.

ward to coming Hong Kong?

K: In that moment, were you looking for

hat Hong Kong was a good place. They said h. Also, Hong Kong has many cars. So, I was

T: Yes, sure. Because every people said that the building of Hong Kong was very high looking forward to coming here.

K: When did you immigrate to Hong Kong?

T: In 1993.

K: How old were you?

T: When I came here, I was 15 years old.

K: After you were in Hong Kong, was there any change of your family condition? For example, what was your father's job in Hong Kong, and how much would he earn?

T: dear! My father would only earn \$6000 and my mother would earn \$4000-5000 per month.

K: Your mother did not need to work in Mainland China. But, she needs to work in Hong Kong?

T: yes

K: What was your father 's job in Hong Kong? And did he find a job first before he came to Hong Kong?

T: no! He found job after he came here. And he was a worker-just a Coolie.

K: What? He changed to a Coolie from a factory owner?

T: Yes!

K: So, why did your family come to Hong Kong? It would change to a lower level class family from an upper class.

T: I had also always asked my father the same question. Before, our family condition was very good. But, after coming, we had no place to sleep, the flat was so small! And my father answered me that in the beginning, he did not think so much. He just thought that he was young, he wanted to go out to see more things. And he thought Hong Kong might give him many opportunities. He took about 40,000 to 50,000 to Hong Kong. But in fact, in Hong Kong, it was only a very small amount! E.g., this amount couldn't afford us to buy a flat.

K: Did he know clearly about Hong Kong before immigrate to here? He just knew about Hong Kong from his friends, right?

T: He didn't know the price of every thing in Hong Kong was so expensive. For example, if we want to buy an apple in Hong Kong, it may cost about \$10, but if in Mainland China, it just cost \$0.5-1, the price is 10 times!!!

K: Sorry, what was your mother's job?

T: She worked in a Garment factory.

K: How much was her salary?

T: about \$4000-5000.

K: So, in Hong Kong, your family totally can earn \$12,000-13,000 per month, right?

T: I think exactly, it was only \$10,000.

K: Did your living condition change very much? E.g., you were quite rich in Mainland China, but, now....

T: Yes!! I couldn't adopt Hong Kong life, especially for our living condition. I can remember that in the first day that I came to Hong Kong, when I saw the room where I lived, I was shock!

K: How was it?

T: The "flat" in Hong Kong was smaller than my "room" in Mainland China! I mean my room was larger than the whole area (which includes living room, sleeping rooms, kitchen and toilet) of the flat in Hong Kong.

K: Where was the flat?

T: in Kwuen Tong. It was an old building, was a slum. There was no lift. We need to walk for 10 floors. And we just lived in a cottage in terrace (is illegal now but not in that time).

K: Can you describe the inside of that flat to me?

T: There were 2 rooms, but my family just lived together in one-it was about 80 feet, it was very crowded! And, we need to share the living room, kitchen, and toilet with another family.

K: Oh, dear! 3000 feet changed to 80 feet? Were you very unhappy? What was your feeling?

T: Yes, I was very unhappy. In the first few months, I couldn't sleep well because the bed was so small. It was a bunk bed. I would hurt my hand everyday when I waked up. I couldn't adopt this life.

K: And, everyday, you need to walk for 10 floors to go to school, did you feel very hard?

T: Yes. You know, In Hong Kong, the textbooks are so thick. My school bag was very heavy. I thought 1 Chinese Book in Hong Kong was equal to 1 Chinese Book +1 English Book + 1 Mathematics Book in Mainland China. I mean, 3 book in China per 1 book in Hong Kong. Everyday, after I walked for 10 floors with my schoolbag, I wanted to die! So, when I went home, I prefer to take a rest more than go out to play.

K: Hey, what language did you speak when you came to Hong Kong?

T: Mandarin! I can only speak mandarin. I couldn't speak any Cantonese before I came to Hong Kong. After then, I learned it from television.

K: Did your parents teach you?

T: No, their Cantonese were poorer than mine.

K: So, how could you talk with your classmate in the beginning?

T: In fact, I couldn't speak. So I used Mandarin to speak with them. If they couldn't understand, I will use body language and writing Chinese in the paper.

K: Did you feel hard?

T: Yes. I was like as a deaf and a dumb person.

K: Apart from watching television, how could you learn Cantonese?

T: A teacher treated me very good. After school, she taught me Cantonese, and I taught her Mandarin.

K: In school, did you have any discrimination problem?

T: I remember that in the first day of school, I was a wretch. When my classmate talked with me, I didn't understand. And I spoke Mandarin with them, they didn't know what I say too. But, they liked to come and talk with me even they didn't understand, they may feel interested and funny to me.

K: Didn't you think that someone discriminate you?

T: In fact, I didn't know whether they had discriminate me or not, because I didn't understand their language. But most of them looked like very kind. Oh yes! I

member that some classmates laughed me. In the first day of school, a classmate laughed me and touched me, so I felt very angry and fight with him. Then, a triad member of my classmate played with me. He asked me also to be a trail member. In that moment, I thought that being a trail member could protect myself. At least, no one would laugh me. So, after a few weeks of school, I joined the trial group.

In fact, did you know what is TRAIL MEMBER? Why did you join the trial group?

I know. In Mainland China, there was also trial group. I thought that if I became a trail member, no one would laugh me and defy me. I wanted to protect myself, so I joined it.

Did your personality change after you immigrate to Hong Kong? You said before, you were lovely, active and also like to playing and talking.

Yes. In the beginning, I couldn't adopt my life. I did not willing to talk with everyone. And I became a quite child.

Why didn't you talk with your classmate? Was the reason that you were unhappy?

T: The reason was that I couldn't speak Cantonese. And also, I was unhappy, I thought I was lonely and bored. I had no friends.

K: Had you gone out to play?

T: Yes, I would go out by myself, as I felt interested with new things of Hong Kong. I thought the building of Hong Kong was very tall. Also, there were many cars. But, I remember that in one time, I went to market with my mother, a policeman came to ask me to show him my Hong Kong identification card. He said to me loudly that: "hey, guy! You came from Mainland China, right? You were so dirty, and untidy. How long have you come to Hong Kong?" He defied me. So, I was very unhappy. He also said that when he looked at me, he could know that I came from China at once.

K: After then, was there any effect to you?

T: Yes! Since that time, I hope I can study hard, as I think if I could earn more money, no one would defy me. And also, as I didn't want that case happened again, it made me embarrassing, so I didn't go out everyday after school, I just stayed at home. I was afraid to go out.

K: Was any change of the relationship between your parents and you? Did you blame your father that he chooses to immigrate to Hong Kong?

T: Yes, I always lose my temper at home. And I always asked why we needed to live in such small area.

K: How's the change of the relationship with your parents and you?

T: The relationship between my mother and me became poor. Before, we would talk. But, after we immigrated to Hong Kong, I just watched television, had my dinner and slept at home but not talk with her. I didn't like my parents.

K: Until now, what's your feeling?

T: Now, I feel better now, as I become older. I understand I can't blame them.

K: Now, did you go out with them?

T: very seldom. Because until now, my parents still speak Mandarin. They like to use Mandarin to talk with me in public area. So people may know that I came from Mainland China if they hear that. Therefore, even I go out with them, I will not sit near them in the bus. If they use Mandarin to talk with me, I will not answer them. In fact, I dress like as a Hong Kong people, I don't want people know that I came from Mainland China.

K: Did you want people know where did you born?

T: No!

K: Then, do you think Hong Kong people discriminate People who come from Mainland China very much?

T: not so serious. But, in my first time that I came to Hong Kong, when I arrived Hong Kong, I need to fill a form. As I didn't know how to write my English name, I transform my English name from Chinese. An inspector said to me loudly: do you come from China? If you don't know English, please don't write it down! When I heard that, I felt sad.

But, in fact, I think most of Hong Kong People do not discriminate us but just the staff of Government department.

K: As I know, in these 7 years, you don't want to talk about this. Do you think that it's good for you to immigrate to Hong Kong?

At least, I need not to work here, I never do anything. E.g.

from the people who born in our adult life?

have more knowledge than me. I'll not willing to work, I will just think about my future, and I'm now to be

Tong, where did you live?

If I can choose, I prefer not to come to Hong Kong. I need not to work so hard. And you know, before I came to Hong Kong, I was cleaning the floor.

K: Lastly, I want to ask if you think you are different from people born in Hong Kong? And what's effect of your childhood to you now?

T: Firstly, I think the people who born in Hong Kong are different from people born in Mainland China. And secondly, I think if I still in Mainland China, I will ask my parents for money. But, now, I will think about how to be a more useful people.

K: sorry, I forget to ask you. After you lived in Kwun Tong, where did you live?

T: Firstly, I moved to Ma On Shan. I lived in a squatter area. The living condition was poorer than Kwuen Tong. The house has two floors, but the total size was just 80 feet, there was no window, it was very hot in summer. Then, I moved to here - Tseung Kwan O, it is a public housing. It is about 500 feet, although it is not very big, I am happy.

K: OK! Thanks for doing the interview. I think I must stop here. Now, it is 11:58 p.m., the interview is finished.