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Interview by Leung Ka Yee

Ka Yee LEUNG

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GEN 3040 Comparative Cultures

Talking Tales Oral History Project Hong Kong Childhood

Interview Transcript

Name of interviewer: Leung Ka Yee (1003906)

Name of interviewee: Leung Yat Sang

Date of interview: 25.4.1999

Symbol: Ka Yee- Leung Ka Yee (interviewer)

Father-Mr Leung Yat Sang (interviewee)

Ka Yee: Daddy, I'm working on an oral history project, may I ask you some questions about your childhood?

Father: OK.

Ka Yee; Can you telling me something about your family background?

Father: Sure, I was born at Hong Kong 1946, in a poor family, as my father, your grandfather, was dead while I was a baby and my mother, your grandmother had to work in order to support the living of the family. She was a cleaning worker in a Hotel and she had to stay at working place whole day, seven day a week. When I was young, I lived with my elder sister and grandmother, a blind woman.

Ka Yee: A blind woman? Did you and your sister take care with her?

Father: Yes, we have to take care of her, my sister prepared the food after school, and me responsible for washing and others.

Ka Yee: On the whole, what do you think about your childhood?

Father: Well, actually, my childhood was totally different from you. For example, the level of living standard was much lower and less of opportunity in obtaining the education for the poor children.

Ka Yee: Can you tell me more about it?

Father: When I was a child, I lived in Hunghom, some where near by the present Kowloon Railway terminal Station, The flat with about 800 square feet was occupied by eight families. We occupied two beds , I shared a single bed with my elder sister. About the chance of education ,in 60's, there was no nine years free education plan provided by the Hong Kong Government, we needed to pay

for the Secondary school at \$45 per month, and at that time, my mother could earn only \$120 per month. It was very expensive for receiving education.

Ka Yee: Did you live in that house in the whole of your childhood?

Father: No, it didn't. When I admitted the Secondary School, I moved out and lived alone by renting a single bed at Wanchai.

Ka Yee: Why you moved to Wanchai? Why not other places?

Father: It was because the Secondary School I studied located near the Central. It was convenient by living in Wanchai.

Ka Yee: How much did you pay for the bed renting?

Father: There were three classes of single bed, the first class was the lowest bound with the floor, the second class was the middle bound and the third class was the highest bound which just under the ceiling. I paid \$15 to rent the middle class of single bed.

Ka Yee: Were you received money from your grandmother or your sister for living expenses?

Father: My mother, your grandmother supported me all the expenses.

Ka Yee: Were you do everything at the bed?

Father: Yes. I had all my living on the bed, including cooking, studying and sleeping. But due to the constraints of the environment, I normally did my homework at the school library or at the park after school.

Ka Yee: How would you go to school? By what kind of transportation? Bus?

Father: As mentioned before, I lived at Wanchai, and my school is some where at Central. I went to school normally by feet as bus fare was too expensive to me.

Ka Yee: How much should you pay if you used the public transportation?

Father: \$0.1 per trip by bus or tram.

Ka Yee: Other than walking, did you go with bicycle?

Father: Bicycle! Bicycle was very expensive in the past. I normally go everywhere by foot at that period. For example, I did climb thought a mountain from Hunghom to reach Mongkok in order to save 10 cents.

Ka Yee: Oh! It might be very hard to do this, wasn't it?

Father: We use to .It was the normal of living for the same group of people in the past.

Ka Yee: Apart from that, I remember that you had told me about the food you enjoyed in the past was also different from me, wasn't it?

Father: Yes, it was. For example, in that period, rice was very expensive, we have to eat the broken rice, which classified as a the third class of rice at that time, normally for the poor, and such kind of rice is for feeding chicken nowadays.

Ka Yee: Really?

Father: For the purpose of saving money, we also ate the edge of bread which we brought from the restaurant at a very low price, about 10 cents for a big bag which contained two to three pounds. We boiled the edge of bread with sugar water to substitute the lunch or the dinner.

Ka Yee: It seems to be good taste, I really want to taste it, it like a congee, isn't it?

Father: Yes, just similar.

Ka Yee: More examples?

Father: Sure, we normally ate vegetables without meats.

Ka Yee: Why?

Father: Why? Meats were expensive, not the same as nowadays, many families can eat chicken easily when they want to. But in the past, I can taste chicken not more than three times per year. I only have a chance to taste meats or chicken at a very few important festivals or at my birthday. Beside, we took rice with some kinds of soy sauce, beancurd or vegetables only, it was because we were lack of money to buy any other food.

Ka Yee: Would you want to take more chicken or meats in order to compensate?

Father: No.

Ka Yee: Why?

Father: Vegetables are more suitable for aged person.

Ka Yee: Wah! I am luckier. Although I like vegetables, I also like meats and chicken.

Father: I always tell you that you are lucky of born at this age. You have many kind of food to eat, don't need to worry about your life, and having kinds of entertainment.....

Ka Yee: Ah! What entertainment did you have in the past?

Father: Entertainment? There was not much entertainment when I was young, nobody had money for entertainment.

Ka Yee: Then, how did you entertain yourself? Or did you have any games, which you often played with?

Father: Quite a lot! First of all, when I was a Primary School student, I always played with my friends, sometime, before we go to school, we used a wooden fork and a small stone to shoot birds in the vegetable field where nearby our school. After that, we use some salt to season those birds and then we burnt those birds and ate them after school, very delicious!

Ka Yee: Really? I want to try! Any more?

Father: Sure, we made toy gun by using bamboo and used beans to shoot our classmates. Moreover, we played marbles in the football grounds and grumbling with those marbles. I remembered that I did lose my school bag with all textbooks while I was over-concentrated in playing marbles.

Ka Yee: Ah! You had told me before, and grandma blamed you strictly, wasn't it?

Father: Ha ha!,

Ka Yee: Any more?

Father: We always fight with other student of nearby schools due to minor matters.

Ka Yee: Why? What kind of minor matter?

Father: Minor matter? Just the losing of playing game.

Ka Yee: Ha! Was this happened frequently?

Father: Quite, as I told you before, I lived with eight families and there were a lot of children, more then 15 children in the house. As I was older than other children, I became a informal leader and lead those children to fight with the children who lived in the other houses or other streets.

Ka Yee: Then, did you hurt any one?

Father: Certainly not! We just played and the fight I was told normally by month, so we never hurt anyone.

Ka Yee: I see, any other games?

Father: Yes, I had an experience, which I won't forget, as I played toy gun with gunpowder. One day, I put some gunpowder in my pocket and then ran and ran. During running, a fire broke out from the gunpowder in my pocket and that gunpowder made a scar on my leg with the size of 3-inches time 4-inches.

Ka Yee: Wah! It might be very painful.

Father: Of course, so I can't forget that accident in my life.

Ka Yee: Any other interesting event?

Father: Yes, as you should remember that you got your children identity card when you were 11 years old.

Ka Yee: Sure, were you also got your children ID card at 11 years old?

Father: Ha Ha! The answer is "no". In the past, the required age for getting children ID card was 12.

Ka Yee: Then you must get your ID card when you were 12, wasn't it?

Father: Certainly not!

Ka Yee: Why? Told me why.

Father: When I was 9 years old, as my mother needed to stay at the working space. While she heard the neighbourhood brought their son to take the Hong Kong Children ID Cards, my mother asked the neighbourhood to bring me too. So I got my ID card at 9. But the ID Card showed 12 of my age

Ka Yee: But why you can get the ID card? You didn't match the age requirement!

Father: Although I didn't match the age requirement, I could get my ID card because there was no evident to prove my age.

Ka Yee: No evident? Why no evident? You should have a certificate of birth, it was the evident, isn't it?

Father: I haven't got my certificate of birth.

Ka Yee: Why? You were born in Hong Kong, right? Why you haven't got your certificate of birth?

Father: Although I was born in Hong Kong, as your grandparents didn't being educated, and because in that period, the Japan Army has just got out from Hong Kong, the society was not stable, people concentrated in working. So, many people just like me, didn't get our children ID card.

Ka Yee: But you can get your ID card without any evident?

Father: Sure, as my appearance quite mature, and hence I told the officer "I was 12", then I got my ID card.

Ka Yee: Wait! You said you got your children ID card at 9 years old, is that mean, your actual age is 3 years smaller than that showed on the ID card.

Father: Yes.

Ka Yee: When did you go to work?

Father: I admitted to Hong Kong Telephone Company for being an unskilled workman at 1963 after finished my Form 2 study.

Ka Yee: Why gave up your study when you were finished only Form 2?

Father: It was because if I continue the study, I must repeat Form 2, and as you know, the tutorial fee was expensive, so I gave up my study. As I started working, my living standard has a little improvement.

Ka Yee: What are your feelings of the period of your childhood?

Father: It was unforgettable! Although the living standard was poor and the lack of matter, it stills full of fun and interesting in the whole period.

Ka Yee: After listen your story, I really want to have such experience. Especially the BBQ with birds and the food I have never ate.

Father: Let's ask your mum to cook for you.

Ka Yee: Ha Ha! That's a good idea. And would like to listen to your other stories next time, OK?

Father: Sure!

Ka Yee: Thanks! Daddy!

Father: You are welcome.