

1977

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CHANG YAU-WEN
LAM YING
ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

CHINA EXPERIENCES: family background; education; conversion to
Christianity and reactions to conversion; memories of
Rev. Wu Ming-chieh; response to missionary work on the Mainland;
personal work for and description of Lutheran Church in Hong Kong.

INTERVIEWER: Jane Baker Koons

TRANSLATOR: Karl Cheung Hin-yau

DATE: 8-15-77

PLACE: Yuen Long, Hong Kong

NUMBER OF PAGES: 40

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Mr. Chang Yau Web. The interpreter is Mr. Chang's grandson--Cheung Hiu-yau. The interview was taped in Hong Kong in August of 1977.

Would you please tell us where and when you were born?

CHANG: I was born in Fukien Province in the year 1905, the month of February on the 8th.

I: Mr. Chang, could you please give us a little something about your family background?

CHANG: My parents were farmers. Most of our brothers and sisters were working outside overseas or working in business. Eventually, our family situation got better and better. I have three elder brothers, two elder sisters and one small sister and three younger brothers. I am the third in the row. Including me, three of us went overseas. One of us went to Taiwan and the other two stayed in Taiwan. We organized an import and export firm to do business with Mainland China. Including me, only two became Christians. The other brother died in Taiwan, but his whole family became Christians, also.

I: Would you please tell us what your educational background is?

CHANG: I studied in a private tutorial school. There was one teacher for 10 or 20 students. We studied the Four Classics and the 300 Tang poems. There were no P.E. lessons or any social subjects. There was no kindergarten or primary school. As compared with a western-styled primary school, my standard is around fourth grade. I studied up to the age of 14.

I: What did you do when you finished this traditional schooling?

CHANG: I was an apprentice in a Chinese-operated business firm. I did that after this study. This was in Hong Kong. Three years later I went back to Fukien. Then I worked as an apprentice in a Chinese herbalist company.

I: What contacts did members of your family have with Christianity?

CHANG: Nothing.

I: Did you have any negative responses to Christianity or did you see negative signs in the community or in the province?

CHANG: My family knew something about Christianity, but we didn't have any contact with them at first. We didn't have actually any idea about Christianity.

I: So you didn't make any judgments to whether it was good or bad--you just knew something about it?

CHANG: Yes, we didn't have any real judgment of Christianity at the time.

I: How did you become a Christian?

CHANG: My first contact with Christianity came directly from my wife. After our marriage, my wife was admitted to the hospital frequently. It happened that she went into mostly Christian-run hospitals (the Fukien Chai Ching Hospital). At the time we met some of the Christian doctors and also some other staff discussed with us so we had contact with Christianity in that way. Some of the workers in the hospital and also friends of our children, they might go to our house. So then we knew more and more about Christianity.

I: How did you and your wife meet and what were the circumstances?

CHANG: The marriage system at that time was rather wrong in the way that we never met before we were married. At the age of 10, I was engaged to my wife when she was eight. The engagement was decided by the parents, so we actually married when my wife was 14. I was not yet 18.

I: So your wife became a Christian first after her contact with the Christians in the hospital. What did she say to you to try to convince you, also?

CHANG: She always brought me to church. After going to church for many times she discovered--she realized that Jesus Christ was her Savior. She was baptized at the age of 45. I was also baptized at the same time. We were baptized at the Life Lutheran Church in Yuen Long by Rev. Wu Ming-Chieh.

I: Why were you willing to go to church with your wife?

CHANG: I did not object to going to church. Every Sunday my wife took me to church. I thought it was good to be with her and learn more about new things, especially Christian thoughts.

I: How did your family and friends and community respond when you became Christians?

CHANG: The family itself was happy that we became Christians. And also the village--all the friends did not object.

I: Why was the family happy?

CHANG: The family elders, though very old-fashioned, did not force or object to any members of the family believing in any religion. Since we were baptized in Hong Kong, we wrote back to Fukien to tell the news.

I: When you were learning about Christianity, did you find things that were more meaningful or most appealing than others?

CHANG: There was nothing particular that attracted me because at that time, I was going to church with my wife constantly, trying to understand what it was all about. We studied the Bible, and we didn't find anything particularly easy to understand--we maintain the idea that faith is the most important point.

I: When did you come to Hong Kong?

CHANG: I came to Hong Kong in 1928 as part of the business apprenticeship. It was not family business. I learned to deal with import and export food stuffs into Mainland China.

I: When you joined the church, were the pastors Chinese or missionaries?

CHANG: I didn't attend one church specifically, but different ones. According to my memory, most of the pastors were Chinese. A lot of people were attending church on Sundays at that time.

I: Did you feel that Christianity could do anything to meet the needs of a modernizing China?

CHANG: When we believed, we didn't actually think about this problem about whether Christianity could do anything to the Chinese, at that time.

I: You were just accepting Christianity in and of itself, then?

CHANG: Yes. Christianity is not believing that it can help you materially or that it can help China materially. It is a matter of faith. We believe in God and faith, not in material things.

I: Before 1949, did you have much contact with western missionaries?

CHANG: No.

I: So it was solely through Chinese pastors and Chinese Christians, then, that your belief was established?

CHANG: Yes.

I: From 1925 on, particularly on the China Mainland, the growing Nationalist movement was developing and younger people were hoping that China could stand up among the nations once again. What did you think about this movement?

CHANG: The years around the '20s and '30s, the Nationalistic movement was high, but mainly the students were the leaders. And also, they were university students. The traditional Chinese regarded businessmen as low in status, because we were not intellectuals. So we didn't have much chance to participate in that kind of movement, but we were attracted to it.

I: In the '30s and '40s, did you remain in Hong Kong with the business, or did you go back and forth to the Mainland?

CHANG: At the time, I was busily helping with the business, so I had to go back and forth from Hong Kong to Fukien to places in Kwangtung. I was moving around.

I: After you and your wife became Christian, did other members of the family become Christians?

CHANG: Only us, not our parents. But all our sons and daughters believed. Although, only two of them were baptized, the others showed great interest in religion.

I: Did your parents worry, for example, that you would not show proper respect for them after their deaths because you had become a Christian?

CHANG: No, they didn't think so. They seemed to believe in the freedom of religion.

I: What happened to you during the time of the Japanese occupation?

CHANG: During the time I was busily traveling around or I stayed in Hong Kong.

I: Karl, please tell your grandmother that at any time she would like to make comments, she should feel free to do so.

LAM: I was the first one to believe, there was no opposition from the family. And so I led my husband. He followed me in God's grace.

I: Was that the normal pattern for the mother to be converted first and she would lead the way for the rest of the family?

LAM: Usually, the case was the mother, then the father, then the whole family.

I: Why was this usually the case?

LAM: This might be due to the belief that women are weak-minded. They had more time in contacting family members. The husbands usually went out to work and in many cases I know, the women were converted first. Although this was not only the case, it has been a general tendency as far as my friends are concerned.

I: How did you decide to become baptized?

CHANG: It seemed at that time we were inspired to confirm our belief. We went to church often and we understood many biblical interpretations. After constant praying and discussion, we finally decided to be baptized.

I: Once you had become members of the church, how active were you?

CHANG: Before, many areas of China were occupied by the Japanese or by the Communist government. We had not settled in a church, and my wife did not know how to write or read. She didn't have much formal education. But in 1952, we settled here near Yuen Long. At that time Life Lutheran Church was established by Rev. Wu Ming-chieh. So we regularly went to the church there and then finally in 1955, we were baptized. That was the formal thing.

I: Were your children baptized at that time or had they been baptized before?

CHANG: One son (Karl's father) was baptized in the school in Fukien, which was a Christian school, during his secondary education, a little bit earlier than us.

I: Were you living in Hong Kong when the children went to school in Fukien?

CHANG: During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, one son was studying at Fukien. After that he traveled sometimes in Hong Kong to continue his studies and sometimes went back to Fukien to study.

I: Would you ask Grandma what her family background is so that we could have that also on the tape?

LAM: My parents were farmers, also. When I was young, my mother died so my father brought me up that way. I had only one brother, but he died at the age of six.

I: Were you a religious family?

LAM: My family's faith, for a while, was Buddhist.

I: Can you recall anything specifically that Christianity gave you that Buddhism did not?

LAM: During some of the times during our marriage, I was weak and sick and going to the hospital frequently. A

pastor's daughter I met at the hospital was a missionary. My sickness became better and better. And my family was fascinated by this change and we decided to believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior. The Buddhists could not give me anything. We had tried; we had prayed with the Buddhists.

There is also an example of God's grace during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. Of course, we had to move around to avoid Japanese troops. I believe that Christ was with me on that day that the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. My husband went to Macao on the day before. Usually I did not have any money because he would take care of everything. That day, my husband went to the house on a Sunday and gave me \$2,000. That was the day when he had to go to Macao. He told me to keep the money to buy rice and other necessities. Then on that day, he went to Macao and the next day the Japanese came to Hong Kong. And the Chinese were trying to leave Hong Kong. I went to stay at a doctor's house. At that time, all of our friends escaped and did not inform me. It was a miracle. I stayed there safe and sound! I also had money to spend. The doctor was also a Christian.

I: After the war, what did you think would happen to China as a whole? What were your hopes and feelings for the future of China?

CHANG: We didn't have time to think. We were too happy about peace.

I: What did you know about the Chinese Communists, as you were traveling in and out of China?

CHANG: We stayed in Hong Kong for twenty-some years and only traveled back during business. We didn't know too much about that political climate in China, at that time.

I: When you became involved in Life Lutheran with Pastor Wu Ming-chieh, how was it that you joined a Lutheran church?

LAM: When we moved to Yuen Long, to Ping Shan, we wanted to find a church of some sort. So I asked a friend who was living in Yuen Long. I would have to walk to attend church. The friend learned that Wu Ming-chieh was starting a church and she introduced him to our family. Wu Ming-chieh came to visit us at our house and preached there every Saturday. He came and preached there for almost one-half year, so we knew about and became involved in the Lutheran church.

I: Did you invite a lot of other people to come when Pastor Wu came?

CHANG: Actually, he came to the house, which consisted of three families. So he came every Saturday. Neighbors from far away also swarmed.

I: In the first few years, was the church a temporary thing since everyone was looking forward to returning to the Mainland?

CHANG: Most of the church members felt they would go back to the Mainland someday.

I: Did you wait a while, then, until you actually built a church and decided to get established?

CHANG: At first we rented a small flat, and then we moved three times before we built on the site where we are now.

I: In the beginning years of the new regime, what did you hear what was happening to religion in China?

CHANG: We didn't go back to the Mainland, so we didn't have any information about that.

I: Do you have any information now, for example, about the underground church in China?

CHANG: We get reports like that--like, they don't have any Bibles on the Mainland.

I: How do you get these kinds of reports?

CHANG: Some friends we know went back to Mainland China and then they came back with information.

I: Do you know if they're able to teach the young within the homes so in the new generation there will be knowledge of Christianity?

CHANG: Some Christians were able to teach in the home.

I: What were some of the difficulties in getting the Lutheran church established in Hong Kong, particularly in Life Lutheran?

CHANG: The developing process is okay.

I: After 1952, did you have any contact with the missionaries?

CHANG: With Miss Aagoth Fasmark.

I: What do you think about the role of missionaries now?

CHANG: Although we are having more trained pastors, the field is wide and much more has to be done. We are having a very strong motivation to further develop in many aspects of church growth, especially more support to send Chinese missions overseas and also giving different perspectives in church missions--the re-opening of China's door and the promoting Christianity in Asian countries.

I: How long have you been working at the Yuen Long Lutheran Middle School?

CHANG: Eight years.

I: You retired from business and are doing this as a service for the school?

CHANG: Yes.

I: What do you see as the purpose of church-related schools in Hong Kong now?

CHANG: In comparing between the Yuen Long Lutheran and the Lutheran School in Kowloon, the Yuen Long school is doing much better than the other one. That is to say, a church-related school must be well-organized and be able to project the kindness of Jesus Christ. Therefore, every thing in a church-related school should be fair! I feel it is good to have a school like this to give the student a chance to develop.

I: When you consider Christianity and China, what are things that should have been done differently?

CHANG: It's too big a question, it's difficult to answer. It is a question that's very important to church growth. Should we discuss only about church schools? To provide meaningful education to our younger generation and to give them a better chance to survive in society is also an important task for the church, which we cannot ignore.

I: Did you feel that the church is too westernized?

CHANG: Some people said that the missionaries came with a falseness or something like that. But to me, they have a very high aim. They came aiming at helping people to understand the real meaning of life and to share the love of Christ.

I: Sometimes in talking to the missionaries, they feel bad about their lifestyle, that they lived far above the standard of the people that they were working with. Did you have a sense of that?

CHANG: Even in the Bible, we learn that we are rated according to our job. So it's rather difficult to say that Christians should really get the same pay as the Chinese counterparts, since the missionaries came from different countries and had a different style of living.

I: One thing I'm interested in from both of you, which Christians have had the most impact on you?

LAM: The only thing I feel is memorable is the day when Rev. Wu Ming-chieh baptized me.

CHANG: Rev. Wu Ming-chieh is the greatest Christian grace God has given to the Chinese in Hong Kong.

I: Besides going to church on Sunday, how do you nourish your faith?

CHANG: Every day we pray and I read the Bible. We try to be helpful to others. Since my wife doesn't read, she gets everything orally.

I: In the morning you go to Life Lutheran, but in the afternoon you go to a Fukinese-speaking church. How large is this congregation?

CHANG: In the Fukinese congregation in Hong Kong, there are three churches. One is independent and does not belong to the other two. The other two are a group of approximately 200 or so members. The membership is made up of those who came up from Mainland China. Now more and more Fukinese come out. Most of them, who came out from Mainland China, have some ideas about Christianity. Some of them were able to listen to radios.

I: What hopes do you have for your children and grandchildren as far as Christianity is concerned?

CHANG: We hope that every one of the grandchildren or children will be a Christian.

I: Do you have any desires to see one of them become a pastor?

CHANG: It depends on their own free choice. God will inspire them.

I: Do you have anything else you'd like to add to the record at this time?

CHANG: We hope that our son will come back to Hong Kong so we can have a reunion and that God will help us. We believe that God has his own plan and will return our son.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add?

CHANG: No, nothing.

I: Thank you for your time and your willingness to participate.

CHANG: Thank you.

(ED: For the story of the son, refer to the narrative of Cheung Hin-yau.)

