

Ethnic Group: Chinese
Interview number: 3
Date: June 28, 1991 and July 5, 1991
Place: Toronto

Demographic Information

Gender: male
Age: 48
Place of Birth: China (Heilongjiang Province)
Religion: occasional church attender
Marital Status: married (wife and daughter in China)
Education: M.Sci. student
Occupation: graduate student in science, former researcher in China
Children: daughter, age 10
Date of migration to Canada: 1989

Interviewer's Comments:

On June 24, 1991, I posted an announcement to the UTCHINESE news network to look for subjects. The content of the announcement is as follows:

Mon Jun 24 19:28:49 1991
Subject: Subjects are needed
To: utchinese@csri.toronto.edu
Date: Mon, 24 Jun 91 19:28:49 EDT

SUBJECTS ARE NEEDED FOR A STUDY OF FAMILY STRUCTURE AND ETHNICITY

I am looking for VOLUNTEERS (no stipend) to be interviewed about their family structures and their views about their lives in Canada. Volunteers must be of Chinese origin since this study is focusing on ethnic groups in Toronto.
If you are interested in participating in this study, Please send a message to name@address, or please call (Name) at ###-####. Leave your name and phone number and I will contact you to set up a time and location for the interview(s).

This research project of family structure and ethnicity, coordinated by Prof. Nancy Howell and sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC), has been approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the University of Toronto.

I received the first e-mail response from Mr. YCH. He replied:

From name@address
Tue Jun 25 09:36:01 1991

Yes, I would like to participate. But it is not clear to me whether the whole family ought to be in Canada?
(Name)

After having received his response, I immediately sent a message back to him:

Tue Jun 25 12:45:28 1991
Subject: Thanks for your response
To: (Name)
Date: Tue, 25 Jun 91 12:45:28 EDT

Hi, (Name). Your reply (and help) has been gratefully received. May I have your phone number? Thus we can talk in more detail on the phone. Or you may call me back at ###-####. All the best.
-- (Name)

Then, I received his second message the next day:

Wed Jun 26 18:53:06 1991

Hi, (Name),

My phone number is 978-####(O), ###-####(H).

Now I am a graduate student in [science department] at U of T.

After I got his phone number on June 27, I called his office and his home for several times but failed to reach him. Finally, I left a message to his roommate who shares his apartment with Mr. YCH. He is a Chinese graduate student at U of T as well. The occupant rents a room of the apartment to Mr. YCH because his wife is studying at another city.

I received a call from Mr. YCH at 10:15pm on 28 June 1991. I simply explained the purpose of the project to him and attended to make an appointment with him. He told me that he was not very busy at the moment because he had completed all the required course works and projects for his master degree. He also told me that he has been 48 years old. (COMMENT: It sounds that he feels a little ashamed for his late completion of his master degree.) I expressed that I preferred to visit him at his home a week later.

He thought that the interview at his home would be inconvenient because his roommate would be in. I told him that I was interested in looking at his home. He then immediately invited me to go to his home to have a look because his roommate was out of town to join his wife. I agreed to go immediately. He told me that his intercom number did not work well and he would like to greet me at the main door of the apartment building.

When we met at front of his building, he suggested to buy some drinks. We entered a 24-hour-open store nearby. He told me that he did not know what kind of drinks he would better buy. He has never bought any canned soft drinks before. At last, he bought a case of 24-can Seven-up at a special price. Then we left the store.

INTERVIEW (28 June 1991. Effective time: 10:30-11:00)

[I just planned to stay at his home for a while to have a look. But I finally had to stay there until the midnight. He showed such a great interest in talking with me that I could not find a proper opportunity to leave. I had not prepared what and how to talk with him. Although he spoke a lot, most of the content was not relevant to this project. His talk provided me a good understanding of him. This is also necessary for me to establish a good relationship with him. I recall our talk related to the study as follows.]

Interviewer (I): When did you come to Canada?

Respondent (R): July 23, 1989. I arrived at Vancouver at first in order to attend a meeting. After the meeting, I chose to stay in Canada because of the political consideration.

I: What is it?

R: I was once jailed for a year because I participated in the "April 5th Movement" in 1976. [A political demonstration at the Tiananmen square on 5 April 1976 against the 'Gang of Four' headed by Mao's widow, Jiang Qing.] Although my case has been redressed, the authorities still keep some records in my personnel file. I am no longer trusted by them. This time, I was actively involved in the democratic movement in the spring of 1989 once more. I am sure I would get into trouble if I went back to China.

I: Where is your family? In Canada or still in China?

R: My wife and my daughter are still in China.

I: What are they doing there?

R: My wife is an accountant. My daughter is studying in her fourth year at a primary school.

I: What did you do in China?

R: I am a researcher in the Institute of [_____].

I: Why haven't they come to join you?

R: No way. They can't get passports.

I: Do you often contact your relatives in China?

R: Not very often. I am afraid that the communication would bring trouble to them. For example, my sister is also working in the Institute. She told me not to write to her if it is not necessary.

[When he left for bathroom, I took the opportunity to look around the living room. That is an one-bedroom apartment. Mr. YCH occupies the living room and his roommate lives in the bedroom. Furniture in the living room include two mattresses over a box, a dinner table, a desk, three chairs, and a rack. There are no electronic facilities such as TV and VCR.]

I: Your room is so simply furnished. Why don't you buy a TV set for fun or for learning English?

R: I have no enough time to watch TV. Actually, I always think that I just temporarily stay here. I think most of Chinese have the similar feeling to mine. I have already bought a colour TV and other stuffs from the West Germany for my family.

INTERVIEW (5 July 1991. 9:00pm-11:00pm)

I interviewed Mr. YCh at my home.

Interviewer (I): When and Why did you come to Toronto from Vancouver?

Respondent (R): September 15, 1991. I came to Toronto in order to attend a school.

I: Did you know any person in Toronto when you decided to come?

R: Yes. I have known a professor in the York University. We worked together in an experimental group in the West Germany. That was an international collaborative program about high energy particles. He wrote a recommendation letter for me.

I: So you began your M.Sci. program in September immediately after arriving in Toronto, didn't you?

R: No. I formally registered in the School in January of 1990.

I: What did you live by before the registration?

R: I borrowed some money from the local Chinese I have known. I also worked as a cleaner. I got pay \$8 per hour and I worked 24 hours each week. Seven hundred dollars a month was enough for my basic expenses of living and eating.

I: What do you wish to do here?

R: I don't think that I can find a research position in a university, holding a master degree only. Positions in universities require PhD degree. Besides, the financial budget in [my field] is small in Canada. I think I'd better find a technical job in industry, such as the Toronto Hydro.

I: How do you look for jobs? Is there any person from whom you may get help?

R: I have sent out several CVs but I haven't been interviewed. I collect information by reading classifications in newspapers, by consulting the career center, and by having a chat with others. A friend in the Hydro has recommended me to the company. It is not a good timing of looking for jobs because of the situation of the national economy. In addition, many Chinese are looking for jobs. It is relatively hard for Chinese to find a job. If I were a Canadian employer, I would prefer Canadian employees, concerning English. Many Chinese can't speak English well. As well, my customs are quite different from the westerners'. I find that many Chinese cannot be assimilated into the society. Canadian people have impression with people from various countries. I perceive that their impression about Chinese may not be so good. For example, after the 'June 4th', U of T particularly had a meeting to discuss the problems of Chinese TAs and concluded that Chinese TAs were irresponsible. The meeting itself has showed negative attitude toward Chinese. The damage of the international image of the state results in the decline of social position of overseas Chinese.

I: What is your hardship?

R: I am worried about job. It is not difficult to live here. But it is not easy to find a satisfactory job. Before graduation, my life, I should say, is good because it is stable. I wish my family can come soon. Frankly, I never think about the hardship. If I do so, I can't stay here.

I: Have you been accustomed to the life here?

R: It is hard to say yes or no. The criteria vary. It depends on your sensitivity. If you are sensitive to the environment, you may feel that you have not been accustomed even though you may have been accustomed.

I: Is there any change about your social position?

R: It is obvious. I am a student here but I supervised graduate students in China. I think I will not be definitely worse than Canadian people in future. Many Chinese live here very well.

I: So you have confidence to live here, haven't you?

R: Sure.

I: What is your goal?

R: It depends on the opportunity. It is hard for human beings themselves to master their own fates.

I: Are you a member of any organization?

R: I am a member of the Chinese Association of Students and Scholars. I participate in all seminars, meetings, symposiums, and presentations about China. I write and publish articles (in Chinese) and express my opinions in public. I don't care about the attitude of the Chinese government and the western governments. Sometimes I go to church. Church is a component of this society. I at least need to understand it.

I: Whom do you often communicate with?

R: Ninety percent of them are Chinese. I know a lot of people in the political circle. But I have not entered the circle of the local Chinese.

I: How do you think about the ethnic relations here?

R: I don't understand why Quebec wants to be independent from the Federation.

I: I mean the ethnic relations concerning Chinese.

R: As long as ethnic differences exist, ethnic discrimination is not avoided. I do not think that Chinese's attitude toward black people is much better than whites'. The relations to Chinese are not very important here, I think.

I: Do you find any change about your values and norms?

R: For persons similar to my age, it is impossible to have big change in values and norms.

I: When and why did you apply for PR [permanent residency]?

R: I applied for PR in Vancouver on 31 July 1989. I did not know the application for PR until I arrived at the local Canadian immigration center to extend my visa. I planned to study.

Therefore I had to change my visiting visa to student visa. I was told the better way was to apply for PR.

I: Did you consider the separation of your family when you applied for PR?

R: Yes, I did. But if I had gone back to China, the situation of my family would have had become even worse because I might be arrested. I cannot bear the martial law. I would not stay at Canada without the "June 4th". I might be more promising in profession in China. I have to restart everything in Canada.

I: Will you want to obtain the Canadian citizenship in future?

R: I think I will if I stay here for a long time, say, more than 10 years. But I have not yet begun to think about it. At first, I need to find a basically satisfactory job.

I: Do you think you will return to China finally?

R: I think I will if conditions are allowed there. I am a Chinese.

I: But you just now told me you will apply for the citizenship here...

R: It is not contradictory. In Canada, no matter how much I will achieve scholarly, I am ultimately a small potato. But in China, I would be a person of figure.

I: Could you please tell me something about your family? When were you married?

R: April 1, 1980.

I: How did you meet your wife?

R: We were introduced by the third party.

I: How long had you known each other before the marriage?

R: Less than one year.

I: How many children do you prefer?

R: One family is only allowed to have one child. I think one child is enough to us even if more children are allowed.

I: What about sex preference?

R: No particular preference.

I: Is it better to have no child?

R: We'd better have one. No idea. When we got married, we were not very young. We would not have child all our life if we did not want one at that time. We like children.

I: What for, do you think, to have a child? Support you when you become aged?

R: I don't think so. Children cannot be depended on. I think it is due to the emotional need. On the other hand, the species of human being would become extinct without reproduction.

I: You have your own home in China, don't you?

R: Yes. But my wife keeps close tie with her parents. When I were in the West Germany from February of 1985 to February of 1986, she moved to her parents' home to live. Her mother who had retired looked after my daughter.

I: What are or were your responsibilities for your family?

R: I sent my daughter to school in the morning and then received her from the school in the afternoon. I also helped her to review her homework. I do not expect her to become a famous person in future because of her poor health. But it doesn't work either if just let her be. Because the place where I worked is close to my home, I took care of most of housework. I expect the reunion of my family. But it is better for them to come here after I find a job.

I: After they join you in Toronto, what will be your plan?

R: The kid must go to school. I think she'd better to learn English for one year first and then formally attends a school. My wife would better go to school to learn English and some professional courses at first and then looks for a job.

I: How do you feel the absence of your family here?

R: The influence is great. One single person does feel lonely. A individual's life is not separate from the whole family. My work efficiency was low in China when my wife and daughter went to my parents-in-law's home.

I: How do you communicate with your family?

R: I often communicate with them by letters. About one letter each week or two weeks.

I: Do you send any remittance to them?

R: Yes. Once per season. Last year, I sent back a total of \$600-700.

I: Do they really need your remittance? Or do you just want to comfort them?

R: They really need it. My wife earns about 150 yuan (about CA\$35) each month. The expenses for food cost 60-70 yuan/mo for one person in Beijing. The food expenses for a prisoner has been raised up to 35 yuan/mo now. They do need the money.

I: Who is the decision-maker in your family?

R: I think if one makes a decision firmly, another one will follow. For example, I sent a refrigerator to my sister after I went back to China from the West Germany. My wife agreed. Because her three children are studying at universities, my sister's family needs money. She is the only existing person in my family [meaning the extended family] and gave me a lot of help in the past. My brother-in-law is also working in the same institute.

I: How do you think about connection with Canadian people?

R: That's okay. It is more difficult to get along with Chinese than with Canadian here. Chinese people have various complicated backgrounds, especially the political background. They are also subtle.

I: Any conflict in your family?

R: No severe conflict.

I: How many close friends do you have?

R: One, I think. He is my roommate, aged to 30-35. He is working on his PhD degree in chemistry. Because we live together, we talk to each other a lot and understand each other well.

I: What do you mean the close friend?

R: The close friends share the common idea and trust each other very much. They can even tell their privacy to one another. However, persons who may help you or can be trusted may not necessarily be close to you. The friends whom one makes at one's childhood are one's close friends. You will feel a distance between you and persons whom you met when you are an adult. The distance can also be felt in spousal relationship.

I: How many ordinary friends do you have?

R: I treat all people I know here as friends. Definitely they are diverse. The more friends, the better. People need to exchange ideas and need help. People fear lonely.

I: What do you usually do with your friends?

R: Discuss issues about China or go sight-seeing.

I: Are all your friends Chinese?

R: Yes.

I: Could you please let me know the dates of birth of your family members?

R: I was born in Heilongjiang province on January 3, 1943. My wife was born in Xi'an in 1949. My daughter was born in December of 1980. I can not exactly remember their dates of birth.

I: What about your university education in China?

R: I attended Qinghua University in 1960, majoring in radioelectronics.

I: Finally, what about your history of employment?

R: I started to work as a technician in a factory in 1968. I became a researcher later. After I came to Canada, I have worked as a cleaner, a TA [teaching assistant] and a RA [research assistant].

I: All right. Thank you so much for your participation in this study.

R: That's okay.