

## Telling our Stories, Finding our Roots: Exeter's Multi-coloured History Interview Transcript

Name of interviewee: Mr. **Pang**  
Name of interviewers: Gordon Chan with Sasiporn Phongploenpis  
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Location of interview: Global Centre, Exeter Community Centre  
Transcription by: Adam Merrison

[Interview begins in Chinese]

*Okay, so shall we start now? Okay, today is the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, 2013. So here we are in the Global Centre with Mr Pang, Sasi a volunteer, and Gordon, and we are going to conduct an interview today about Mr Pang's history, and about his family and his life in Exeter. We'll start with your birth, or anything you want to talk about?*

I think we'd better start from Exeter. Well, we came to Exeter in 1968, August, to start a business in Heavitree, we bought a shop, re-furbished it, (when it was all done?) opened a fish and chips takeaway, and the business did quite well first of all, we opened until- retired in 1995, fifteen years ago.

*Q. But you told me you were born in Britain?*

Yes, I was born in Swindon, 1932, in August. My dad had a laundry. Then we went back to China in 1934, then I grew up in China, in Canton in the small village, so that's about 7 houses.

*Q. 7 houses? (laughs) Really?*

Yes, very small village. Then mostly, I grew up in the village, I didn't have much schooling, because when I was old enough the Japanese started the war, in 1938. I was ill most of the time when I was young, when you wonder why I come over to England in 1947, I was still very ill, mostly I'd go see a doctor every week.

*Q. So you went back to Britain in 1947, and then started your business in-*

No, I was working for my father, he had the laundry in Weston-Super-Mare, it's near Bristol, it's a sea-side town. I worked there for my dad, I got about 5 shillings a week, 5 shillings a week, in today's money, only 25 pence, a week. Then in 1956 I got married to my wife, 1957 we had a son, and then 1959 my Uncle opened a restaurant next door to the laundry, and I worked there in between the waiting, the waiter and between the delivery laundry.

*Q. Yes, the restaurants at that time were a bit like a restaurant rather than a take-away store.*

Yes, mostly a restaurant.

*Q. Ordinary restaurant?*

Yes, in those days mostly Chinese laundry, not many restaurants, and no Chinese takeaways in England. So in 1960, my uncle says, 'Oh, we're going to expand', so we are

looking for a place, we went to Taunton, started a business in Taunton, open a restaurant in Taunton with my cousin too and we were working there until 1968, and then in 1968 we came to Exeter.

*Q. Okay, so you actually arrived in Exeter in 1968?*

1968, yes. And then I started a take-away in Exeter, and then working day and night.

*Q. For twenty years?*

No, thirty something years, forty years more.

*Q. At least over thirty years.*

Yes, over thirty years.

*Q. So where was the restaurant?*

Not the restaurant, the takeaway. Heavitree, Exeter, Fore Street, next to the post office. So that's how we started.

*Q. And raised your family.*

Yes, raised my family.

*Q. So could you tell us what life was about, what they loved in 1960s in Exeter?*

Well, in Exeter, there's no Chinese takeaway, or- very few Chinese people in Exeter, two Chinese restaurants in Exeter, one is called 'The Rice Bowl' and one's called 'The Chopstick'.

*Q. [Chinese]*

Yeah.

*Q. So did they belong to the same owner?*

No, all different. In those days most people, what they'd do is, all the people would get into partnership, say you buy £500, £200, then you become a partner to open a restaurant.

*Q. What do you mean by becoming a partnership?*

So you're working there, you put £200 toward buying the business and you Sasi pay £200 so you become a partner in the restaurant.

*Q. So you guys grouped together to share-*

Not me, not me, but most of them, in those days.

*Sasi: Can I say that your takeaway is the first takeaway in Exeter?*

Yes, the first one.

*Q. So I know Mr and Mrs Wong, Sam Wong, so did they own the first restaurant or you owned the first restaurant?*

I was the first one.

*Takeaway one?*

Yes, the first takeaway. But 'The Ricebowl' and 'The Chopstick' were already in Exeter before me.

*Q. Okay, so there were two restaurants, but you were the first takeaway store.*

Takeaway store, yes. So, then Mr Wong opened about two years later, and there's another one, I was the first one, the Canton is the second one, then Mr Wong, called 'The Slow Boat'.

*Q. The first- the third takeaway stores?*

No, I was the first one.

*Q. You're the first one, then the Canton, then the Slow Boat, becoming the third. So there were five Chinese restaurants or takeaway stores?*

Yes, then another one a year later, and is '**Kings Garden(?)**' that's another Mr Wong.

*Q. I see, so passed generation to generation, explains all that. So why did you choose to open a takeaway store instead of a traditional restaurant?*

Well because the takeaway is easy to manage, because you get the staff problem, it's difficult to get the staff to do all the cooking and all that, but the takeaway is easier, you just cook it and takeaway, you don't have to have waiters and a manager.

*Q. So what actually did you sell? In the takeaway?*

Well mostly curry, chicken, fried rice or noodles, stuff like that. And fish and chips of course.

*Q. Fish and Chips?*

Yes.

*Q. So, because for your customer, well I was confused, a fish and chips store was combined with a takeaway store?*

Yes.

*Q. So you sold fish and chips and all this Chinese traditional food?*

Yes, yes. Well not Chinese traditional, not traditional.

*Q. Not traditional?*

It's for European tastes.

*Q. So it's British style Chinese food?*

Yes, yes. Not authentic Chinese.

*Sasi: Which is the best seller? Which food is the best seller?*

Well, when we started the fish and chips was the best seller.

*Sasi: In British style or in Chinese style?*

Well, both.

*Q. So did you sell similar stuff with the Chinese restaurants?*

No, not the same, no.

*Q. What's the difference?*

It's simplified Chinese tastes, because they're more tasteful than European tastes.

*Sasi: So most of your customer's were British, or Chinese?*

Yes, well there's not many Chinese in Exeter in those days, not like now.

*Q. You mean maybe less than a hundred?*

Yes, maybe 50 I think, less than fifty. There's not many Chinese, not many Pakistan or Indian, not many ethnic group people in Exeter in those days.

*Q. Well, I've checked the records from the Devon Record Office, and we found an interesting finding, about a Chinese restaurant owned by a Western. In Exeter.*

By Western?

*Q. Yeah, interesting.*

No, because what it is was, we had the fish and chips shop first of all, we had one in Bridgewater, my Uncle had that, called 'The Orient', then we had one in Taunton, with my Cousin, I was partnered with him in the restaurant, and then he started a fish and chips shop in Taunton, it's called 'The Orient', and then I opened the one in Exeter, called 'The Orient', and then my brother in Weston, opened a fish and chip shop called 'The Orient'.

*Q. So it's a franchise?*

Yes, it's in the family.

*Q. Family franchise?*

Yes.

*Q. Well basically, I've worked in the Chinese takeaway stores here, and in St Thomas for maybe two weeks, just to take a look at the feel of this. Well basically, it lasts for maybe 12, or 15 hours a day.*

Yes, because we start at 9 o'clock, do all the preparing, all of that, and we do the cooking until we're finished at about 2 o'clock, and then come back again at about 4 o'clock, start serving until about 11 o'clock.

*Q. Not including the cleaning?*

Yeah, well including cleaning we finish at about 12 o'clock at night.

*Q. Okay, so you actually close your store at 11?*

At 11, yes.

*Q. It's really tough.*

Well, it's long hours.

*Sasi: You cook by yourself?*

Well I do the fish and chips.

*Q. So who was the chef?*

I employ a Chinese gentleman from Hong Kong to do the Chinese cooking.

*Q. So you're the boss?*

Yes.

*Q. There's no need for you to do the hands-on stuff?*

I still will do the work, the preparing, of the potatoes; you have to peel the potatoes, and chip the potatoes, and all that. Cut the fish.

*Q. Well basically, in 1960s, so did you peel the potatoes?*

Not by hand, with a machine.

*Q. Oh okay, so you had a machine. I was told you peeled-*

No you still had to pick the eyes out. Because if you do about 10 bags of potatoes, you can't do it by hand.

*Q. How big is a pack?*

About 25kgs of potatoes.

*Sasi: A day? Per day?*

Yes.

*Q. He peeled 10 packs, no, 10 bags a day.*

10 bags.

*Sasi: With the machine?*

With the machine. Afterwards you still have to, you know the ones which haven't peeled off, you have to pick out and clean it, and sometimes you've got some bad ones as well. It's long hours, very long hours to work in a takeaway. Not nowadays, nowadays a lot of takeaways, they only open in the evening, they come in at say half past 3 to prepare, then open 5 o'clock, then close at 11 or 10.

*Q. So why did it take so long for you to prepare your food?*

Well say you've got to do the potatoes, and then you've got to cut the fish, you know the fish comes in about that size-

*Q. And cold?*

Oh yes it's cold, it comes in from Grimsby, in those days we'd get fresh fish from Grimsby.

*Q. Really?*

Yeah. Most of the fish now is frozen. So we'd have to bone the fish, you have to pick the bones out from the fish.

*Q. Ah, I've tried this before, picking single-*  
*Sasi: You need a very sharp knife.*

No not a sharp knife, you use pliers to take them out.

*Q. One by one. I've tried this before, okay, for ten days, (laughter) for two weeks, and it's horrible.*

It's cold as well, the fish has come in ice to cool, it's not warm, it's freezing.

*Sasi: It's not like when we are in our country.*

*Q. It's amazing, it's just amazing.*

And that's why it takes so long, it takes a few hours to prepare it, to cut the fish up, then you do the cooking.

*Q. So, was there any competition between different restaurants or different take away stores? Do you compete with each other?*

Not really, because they do their own business, they're all in different areas.

*Q. So you guys scatter around the town, to share the market?*

Yes.

*Sasi: Do you provide a delivery service?*

No, we don't do delivery.

*Q. Just pick-up?*

Well in those days, because people- when we were starting, there's not many cars around, I mean there's no traffic lights down the road, there were not many cars around, people would usually come in, not like now, more cars than people.

*Q. So vehicles were rare at the time, in 1960s?*

1968, yeah.

*Q. How much did a car cost? In 1960?*

Oh, depends which one, I think if you bought a Mercedes in 1960, £1,500.

*Q. Well it's not cheap in 1960, and you've got £1,500.*

No, and in those days, how much did a fish and chips cost ... about 80 pence.

*Q. 80 pence per person? Per package of fish and chips?*

Yes

*Q. So how much did, say, ordinary Chinese fried rice cost?*

Oh, it's about 20 pence.

*Q. You know, they're still using all this in units of shillings, but they are not in a scale of 10, they're in a scale of 12. So it's really confusing, all this units.*

Yes, it used to be that £1 was 240 pence, £1.

*Q. Yes, in the past they don't use the metric unit, they use a British unit, in a scale not according to 10.*

It all changed in 1971, into metric, it used to be all Imperial measures, and now it's metric.

*Q. They used the scale from a King. You know, the King measured his foot, and then this was a foot. The length of his foot, and the length of his arm (inaudible), an arm, and a stone. So was there anything interesting in the take-away store at that time?*

Not really, just work work work.

*Sasi: In terms of Chinese food, which Chinese food do you think is the best for your customer, or gets ordered very very often?*

Well we sell quite a lot of fried rice, chicken fried rice or special fried rice, which includes some pork, and prawns, onions and bean and peas.

*Sasi: So was it easy to find ingredients, to cook Chinese fried rice?*

Yes, it is easier than now, because when, in 1978, a pound of prawns cost about 40 pence a pound.

*Q. Is this a frozen pound? In a big brick size?*

Yeah, it's come from China as well, now the prawns come from India or Thailand.

*Sasi: Did you use local ingredients or Chinese ingredients?*

Chinese ingredients.

*Sasi: Imported from China?*

*Q. So where did you find all your ingredients, from the super market or Europe, or Chinese stalls, traders?*

There was a Chinese trader in Birmingham and Cardiff.

*Sasi: Quite far.*

Yes, a representative came in every two weeks, he'll do your order and deliver it.

*Q. So having considered all these long hours of work, every day, how did you manage to communicate with your kids, how did they survive on their own?*

Well, they just survived.

*Q. Did they help in the stores?*

Well not when they're young, but my younger daughter, born in 1968.

*Q. In the same year as the restaurant?*

Yes, because she was born in January, we came down about 8 months on, so we tried to find somebody to look after her, it's difficult to find somebody to look after her, so we just put her upstairs in the shop, with the... and my wife just came down to work.

*Q. Okay, and you know, kind of visit her, maybe once a...*

And we got a son about, well he's, because we came down to Exeter, my eldest son he was born 1957, so we put him in a boarding school in Taunton.

*Q. So how come it's Taunton, not Exeter?*

Because before we came down to Exeter, we were still in Taunton, at that time he was about 11 years old and a half. So we got him into a private school in Taunton before we came down here, we already booked him into a private school, because we said 'Oh, we can't look after him when we're in Exeter, so we put him in the boarding school, he hated it.



*Sasi: So, it's difficult for him to speak Cantonese?*

Well, more Mandarin, doesn't speak Cantonese (laughs)

*Q. (laughing) I don't think they do.*

*Sasi: You speak English with them?*

Yes, well when they're here we speak Cantonese with them, but now when they go to school they forget it.

*Sasi: Oh, it reminds me when I was young. My family speak Cantonese in the house, but once we go out to school we speak Thai, so...*

Yeah you forget it, when you speak English, when they go mix with the English people, you know, you forget about the Chinese. They understand it, when you talk to them they understand it, but they can't speak to you in Chinese.

*Q. It's like my grandmum...*

*Sasi: What a shame, it's a beautiful language, Cantonese.*

That is what you call 'occupation hazard' (laughs)

*Q. So, where was your daughter?*

The youngest one?

*Q. Well how many ... it depends.*

I've got five, we've got five children. We've got one who's fifty ... fifty-six this year. The youngest one, well next will be ... no, this week, this weekend she'll be forty-five, the youngest one, so she in Hong Kong.

*Q. So, do they travel back to Hong Kong frequently, or?*

No.

*Q. Just for a visit?*

No, she has been in Hong Kong for 18 years now, she's working in Hong Kong. She's got two boys, she married- all my children married European.

*Q. Oh wow, okay. Sounds logical to me.*

*Sasi: Are you still having a family in China?*

No, no we haven't got a family, only very distant cousins.

*Sasi: No relatives?*

No, no. All our family are in England, my uncle- we've got two uncles in England, and the cousins, lots of cousins in Weston

*Sasi: Can I say you are UK people?*

Yes, more or less.

*Q. well he, he was born in Britain.*

*Sasi: I know, but by Nationality or by Race. Some people think they have their own identity, like you might think...*

*Q. Well, I've got an observation about a word, in America we use the word 'Chinese-American', to represent an American originally from China. But here in Britain, we've got a word called British-Chinese, so how do you comment on that? Instead of Chinese-British.*

I don't know.

*Sasi: Does it make any sense to you?*

No, it doesn't make any sense.

*Q. So do you consider yourself as a Chinese or as a British or as-*

Well I consider myself Chinese because I was born- well, I was born in England but I mostly grew up in China, well when I was young, until I came to England in '47, but I still think of us as Chinese, well for myself anyway.

*Q. And then your kids would probably consider themselves as British.*

Yeah, British.

*Q. Yeah, they're British.*

*Sasi: Because China, it's a big country, and there are many many languages, for example, you speak Cantonese-*

A different dialect.

*Sasi: So do you think you are Chinese or you're Cantonese, I just-*

Well, well Chinese covers a big area, but I suppose I'd call Cantonese because I was brought up in Canton, well Guangdong,

*it's like a Scottish-English in Britain, they are British but they divide in their different, you know*

*Sasi: Because I'm just thinking, Chinese people in Thailand, they are Cantonese, Teochew, and many many groups, and they have their own community, so I'm just wondering if they think they are Chinese, or they are Cantonese, or Teochew, or.*

Yeah, well it's kind of complicated, of all these differences in spoken and written language.

*Sasi: But all in all, they are Chinese, and you are Chinese, speak Cantonese.*

Yes, speak Cantonese, not Mandarin.

*Q. So do you- well basically, we met in a Chinese community group in St Sidwell Centre, maybe once a week, so do you, well basically, do you hang out with Chinese friends most, or do you actually have any friends, any local friends?*

Not really, I don't. Well we don't usually- when we're working we don't have time to socialise. Mostly we've got really distant relations, my brother, cousins, really.

*Sasi: Do you celebrate Chinese New Year?*

Not really.

*Q. Not anymore? Really?*

*Sasi: Not anymore? Because I have heard from my Grandparents that Chinese New Year is the good time to pay respect to our ancestors, and the angel.*

*Q. Chinese New Year is the good time to ask for pocketmoney. (laughter)*

*Sasi: In the past, did you celebrate Chinese New Year in Exeter?*

No, no- well, we usually celebrate with my Brother in Weston, because he's got a bigger place, you know, he's got a takeaway.

*Sasi: What did you do during the celebration?*

Yeah, we just eat and have lots ...

*Sasi: So you prepare food?*

No, we cook it. My brother and his wife and his daughter in law does all the cooking, so we just go there.

*Sasi: What are the foods that you had during Chinese New Year, the festival?*

We had chicken, ducks, pork, prawns, and vegetables.

*Q. All by yourself?*

(Laughing) All together.

*Sasi: Cooked by oneself?*

Yes.

*Q. I've got a question about all this barbeque pork, so how do you manage to make char siu here in Britain, or you know, seal your five, five, all this barbeque pork, all this stuff.*

Well they put a lot of sugar, some spice, some salt and pepper, and they put curry in it.

*Q. Because I, in my, I believe it should be cooked in a furnace, to burn and seal in real fire.*

No, you do it in the oven.

*Q. Well it will be a grilled pork, instead of a barbeque pork, according to my understanding of barbeques means using charcoals and fires and with all the charcoal flavour.*

*Sasi: I remember that during the Chinese New Year we also have noodles, fried noodles-*

No, we don't have noodles.

*Sasi: Because they're difficult to cook, or?*

No, no, it's not difficult to cook, because we've got so many, about eight dishes.

*Sasi: Too much food already.*

*Q. Chinese from the North, they prefer noodles. Chinese from the South prefer rice. So do you guys play Mah-jong for entertainment?*

Yeah, my wife doesn't play much though.

*Q. Who with? Who with? You need at least four people, how do you manage to find four people to play Mah-jong with you?*

Usually, we play Mah-jong with, my wife's got sisters, brothers, so they usually come round and play, not so many now because they've all split off- [talking Chinese]. There are different types of ways to play Mah-Jong.

*Sasi: Like this? (laughter) I saw from the movie.*

Can you play Mah-Jong?

*Sasi: I can't, I know what they do, they have a stack of cubics.*

*Q. So, besides Mah-Jong, what types of entertainment do you play mostly?*

*Sasi: Um excuse me, could you buy a Mah-Jong kit in Exeter, at that time?*

Not in those days, no.

*Sasi: You had to bring it from China?*

No, you could get it from London, the supermarket in London.

*Q. Or play in Card. Mah-Jong card.*

*Sasi: It's not traditional,*

No, no.

I think you can get it in Exeter, some supermarkets.

*Q. But not in 1960?*

No, there's no Chinese supermarket in Exeter. There's only two supermarkets in those days, or about two supermarkets.

*Q. Chinese supermarkets?*

Yeah.

*Q. So in 1960s there are two Chinese supermarkets?*

Yes, one in Cardiff and one in Birmingham.

*Q. Oh, but not in Exeter?*

No, no.

*Q. So when did the first Chinese supermarket arrive.*

About 12, 13 years ago. Only one that (inaudible) and then now, they've got about five, six is it?

*Q. Six? I reckon there's three of them, in the town centre.*

Three? No... one (inaudible)

*Q. There are two over there, and one in- down the bridge.*

No, there were- that's a small one. And there's one in, you know where Shanghai Nights is?

*Q. Yeah one near Shanghai Nights.*

One in Hamlin street, yeah behind the St Sidwell

*Q. Yeah, there are two of them next to the St Sidwell centre, and one in, down the bridge*

Yes, and there's two in Summerland.

*Q. No I've never been to Summerland*

*Sasi: And St Thomas*

*Q. I've no idea.*

*Q. So the supermarkets kind of opened probably 12 years ago.*

About 13, or something.

*Q. Well so in this case what type of entertainment do you get? You know, in 1960s.*

Well in those days I think that people playing the video.

*Q. Cassette?*

Yeah.

*Q. VHS?*

VHS, you watch it, people bring it and you let, they let you have it for £2 a week, and next week they bring in- (inaudible)

Q. *You rent videos and watch videos?*  
Sasi: *Is it Hong-Kong movies?*

Yeah, yeah. Mostly it's a series.

Q. *So there were stores who rent Chinese movies in 1960s in Exeter?*

Yeah, yeah. Not in Exeter, but you know, people when they order stuff from the people, you know, [inaudible] and deliver to you, and they-

Q. *Okay, so you order the VHS from the trader? Together with the prawn?*

Yes.

Q. *Oh that's interesting.*  
Sasi: *By phone?*

Yeah.

Q. *They ordered VHS from the same dealers, from the people who delivered the ingredients, well that is interesting.*  
Sasi: *One-stop service.*

Well not much entertainment really, in those days. Even now there's not much entertainment, you go to watch a movie probably.

Sasi: *So that makes you feel at home?*

Yes, mostly

*You can watch TV*

Yes, after a week's work you can be so tired

OK, *so what could you get in 1960s?*

Not very much. Well we used to close on Sunday. We usually take the kids out, you know, for a daytrip out, to a seaside place, every Sunday we take them out if it's a nice day.

*Where, to Sidmouth, or?*

Yes, Sidmouth – all over the place. Or some town, go and see cousins and my brothers

*But sometimes the weather was not very good*

No, never very good in England the weather.

*Well, I guess we're used to all this wet environment because we're born in, well at least we've lived in China, tropical Asian weather like Thailand*

Yes. Not much entertainment. Well, we haven't got time to socialise really. Because always the Chinese people working, when we close on a Sunday, the other people working. You can't go socialise with them

*So how come you close your store on Sunday? Supposed to be the most, the busy day. All these stores open on Sunday*

Because the relatives were Bible-thinkers. Only the children got the day off. So we like to socialise with them and take them out,

*They, all these stores now close on Tuesdays, Monday or Tuesdays, instead of Sunday now*

Yes, yes

*But the kids has to go to school*

Yes, they go to school

*So you gave up all this income on Sunday in return of a day together with your family. So you really treasure your family*

Of course

*So, by the way do you have any religion?*

No, no, no religion

*Not any – not believe in fate, nothing*

I don't believe in any of that

*Do you have one ceremony during March Sheng Meng – we used to remember our ancestors*

Yeah my father died in Weston do I go to pay my respects to him

*At the cemetery?*

Yes

*So you do still carry on some kind of festival, Chinese festival*

Not so much

*The way you pay respects to you father is the same way you do in China, or ?*

No, not the same as in China, you know. When you pay your respects you've got to buy a chicken or roast a cake

*Fruit [Chinese] firework*

Last year before I went to China I paid respect to my father, got the roast cake and firecrackers

*Incense stick*

*So you went there the same period as the other Chinese do?*

No, no because we went not in the [Chinese] but just normal day, pay respects to my mother, my mother died..

*Once a year?*

No, no

*More often*

Not so often, no

*When he gets time to go*

*So there's basically no [Chinese] not a single...*

*I remember that my family has to go to a kind of temple before the cemetery and pay respects [Chinese]*

*You know according to... it's a kind of mystery.. when we buy a new house we burn some incense sticks*

*So do you think you will remain customs or pass these to your children?*

No they don't believe in them. They're more westernised – they don't believe in things like that.

*But you are quite flexible*

Yes, yes

*Good, Cause I was told by my family that I have to stick with the custom and pass these to my children*

*So you adapt a lot when you stay here in Exeter*

Yes

*New year celebration [Chinese] Do you find it difficult to stop doing these things?*

I'm an easy person, so...

*That's nice*

*Anything you want to talk ... we're happy to hear...*

*Marriage style of your children? Chinese style, Western style?*

Western style



*We still perform these Chinese traditions in Hong Kong*

*Gordon talks about a book that shows Chinese traditions, the size of a dictionary, updated every year*

*The rest of the interview is in Chinese*

**End of interview**