

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Ms Tina Chau Wah Lee* <http://youtu.be/vDb9Jo9Z4q8>

I was born in a 'Wai' (walled) village in New Territories of Hong Kong where the fields were barren and hard to earn a living. When I was aged 17, a matchmaker asked my mother and me whether I would like to marry to the UK. She explained that the high remittance rate of sterling pounds could support my younger brother's study and reduce the burden of my family. We agreed and one day after school, I saw one lot of betrothal gift at home and my mother told me that I was going to marry with a Chinese gentleman who lived in the UK.

Two months later, after registration at the Marriage Registry in Hong Kong and handling procedures, I was married to my husband and flew to the UK. I still remembered it was a cold, dull and snowy winter day in 1968, when I first arrived in London. My husband's employer drove us to a Chinese restaurant in Nottingham where he was working there as a kitchen labourer. The next day, I join the workforce at the same restaurant as a waitress. The working hour was very long and extensive. We went to the restaurant at 8:30am and I did the cleaning work and it was opened at 11:30am for lunch hours. It was closed at 2:00pm and reopened at 5:00pm till midnight. We have a day off every week.



*Interviewing with Tina Lee*

Before granting the 'Working Permit' and becoming a kitchen labourer in the UK, my husband was originally working at a carpet factory in Hong Kong and did not have any experience of working in a kitchen. My husband's work was hard which involved planting beansprouts, potato peeling, cooking, food preparing and others. The restaurant manager and the kitchen labourer were always ready and responsible for fighting against those customers who were unwilling to pay after the meal.



*Tina Lee and her family in Hong Kong (Early 1960s)*

Later I was pregnant and my daughter was born one year later, in 1969. The boss told us the baby was not allowed to stay in the accommodation, as she would affect others sleeping at night. We tried to move out the quarter but the local people refused to rent a room to us because we have a young baby and we did not know we are eligible and how to apply for the council house. Furthermore, the weekly salary of my husband was £15.00 and it was not enough for our living. So we made a decision that I regretted for my whole life – we paid the flight ticket for a student nurse who was consigned to take my 2 months old daughter back to the home of my mother-in-law in Hong Kong who looked after her. I resumed my work to maintain family's income and stayed in the quarter straightway.

Later in the same year, the restaurant manager asked us whether we would like to work in partnership to open a Chinese takeaway shop in Nottingham and we decided to go ahead. At that time, the term 'Chinese takeaway' was quite unfamiliar to most of us and it was the first Chinese takeaway shop opened in the Nottingham area.

Two years later, I was pregnant again. We quit the business and returned to Hong Kong after the birth of my son. We flight back to the UK again 3 months after and owned a new Chinese Takeaway shop in 1972. I remembered that I went to the Town Hall and met a Health Inspector by luck. I used my limited English saying that I would like to set up a Chinese Takeaway shop in Nottingham and he explained and guided me in details and the license was granted months afterwards. It was about £1,200 for the application and planning fees.



*Tina Lee and her family in UK (1980s)*

In 1974, my two children and mother-in-law came to the UK. Our family was reunited and my daughter began her study here. The younger daughter was born years later. It was so regrettable that their childhoods seemed to be neglected. We concentrated in our business downstairs and seldom talked to them after their school. They remained upstairs doing

their homework, studying and communicating in English between them. That's why the youngest daughter could not speak and understand Chinese at all. My daughter helped the business as a part-time counter at aged 12. She stood on a stool so that she could see the customers and take orders. She said the customers always asked how could she be growing so fast.

In our mind we are fear and full of thinking about how to dealing with Health Inspector and those hooligans at night. In those years, pubs mainly served with beers and drinks. During late hours, drunken customers rushed in from all directions after closure of pubs and it was really messy. We have no confidence in the police because they could not do anything after we reported the incidents. However, the shop was close to our families, timesaving and more secure, so we kept on working in the Takeaway shop as kitchen labourer.

We terminated our business and I studied in College and obtained the Social Care Diploma when I was at aged 45. I then worked in a care home and volunteering at Chinese Community Centre as interpreters and looking after Chinese elders. I like to assist Chinese elders who have low capacity of understanding English because I understand their difficulties.

My husband was not the first one I knew working in the UK as a Chinese kitchen labourer. I heard my uncle was a laundry worker landing in Liverpool after several months of travelling on the sea. He later changed to work as a kitchen labourer in a Chinese restaurant in Liverpool. He did not understand English but he married with an English girl later, while his first wife was still living in Hong Kong. He sent money back every month. He divorced with his English wife 15 years later. He then returned his village in Hong Kong and met my auntie again. The picture was still in my brain because I was a young girl at the scene in the village.

Though I lived in this country over 44 years, all past events and matters on me just like happened to me yesterday i.e. writing letters to pen pals during first several years of arriving, affectionate hug with my ex-classmates and friends at the airport when the first time returned to Hong Kong. I like to live in this country for my life and I can say living in Hong Kong is for those people rich enough.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**Mr Chang**      <http://youtu.be/dbAT-GvW0XQ>

I was born at Lok Ma Chau Tsuen in Hong Kong in 1951. I did not realize what time my father went to the United Kingdom but I remembered that the first time I met my father I was six year's old. He tried to earn a living by rearing pigs but did not succeed. He returned to work as a kitchen labourer in relatives' restaurant in London again two years afterwards.

I heard my father has been working as farmer and village private bus driver before. However, such earning is difficult to support the family. By that time, many of his uncles had left the village and moved to earn their life in Chinese restaurants in the UK. Under their encouragement, he decided to work alongside them to overcome the hard life. My father told me it was not difficult to become a kitchen labourer in London if you hold a written certified letter from your relatives in the UK during that period. He went to UK by ship for his first two journeys, which took him about 40 days each time.



*Interviewing with Mr. Chang*

In 1967, I moved to live in the UK by plane when I was 16. The journey took me 26 hours after stopping at Bangkok and Bombay and it was really exciting for me. The first 6 months after arriving, I tried to study but could not catch up. I then began to work in the catering industry and became a 'Chop Suey Lo' under my father's advice. At the beginning, I was working as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant and the weekly basic salary was £10, with additional shared service charge on the top. I soon changed to work inside the kitchen where the weekly salary was steady, with about £15. I then realized that the profit of running a restaurant was quite high at that time, where a set lunch was 3½ Shillings and a soup for one Shilling.

It was absolutely different as compared with kitchen labourer of Cantonese Cuisine restaurants in Hong Kong because you can become a 'Chop Suey Lo' master in the UK after several months of practicing in a Chinese kitchen and there were only limited choices of dishes offered. I heard 'Chop Suey' is a mixture of beansprouts, meat and other vegetables altogether. To me, to produce a good quality crispy deep frying Chinese food is one of the most difficult skills for one to learn and control.



*Mr. Chang narrating his stories at his home*

There are great contrasts when working in a UK Chinese kitchen in the pastime. You need to plant beansprout, shred beef, chicks and meat, prepare pancake for pancake rolls and other sauces on your own and it was really a long day for every Chinese kitchen labourer. The senior staff members told me it was not uncommon for during those days for Chinese restaurant waiters to get into fistfights due to high rate of customers refusing to pay after they finished their meals. I observed that there were bicycle chains wrapped by towels places round the corner of the storeroom when first working as a waiter in my early days. They were mean of defence when fighting broke out afterwards.

Though I was a UK kitchen labourer, I was proud of my wife, my children and my family. It seemed to be the only job that fit me due to little knowledge of the English language and I maintain the same occupation till retirement. Since there was little competition from McDonald, pizza and pubs, running a Chinese kitchen was very busy, time consuming and exhausted and the rush hours were about 10:30pm, after closure of pubs. My children helped a lot in this family industry when they were young. During weekend, they still drove back to help when studying university in Manchester and London. After graduation, they engage in other fields unrelated to any kitchen working post.

I like listening and singing Cantonese Opera. Though I lived in the UK over 50 years, I would like to stay and live in Hong Kong where I can feel a better sense of belonging and enjoy similar language and culture.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Mrs Chang*      <http://youtu.be/eHs513qnS50>

I arrived in the UK as a student in my early 20s. I met my husband in a Chinese restaurant. I heard most of the Chinese kitchens were operated on clan basis, or with kitchen labourer from the same village in Hong Kong. Most of them were single and they lived in quarters provided by their employers. It was very cold and there wasn't any central heating in the accommodation. My husband always told me that the quilt brought from Hong Kong was the basic inventory for every kitchen labourer in early days. They just picked up the quilt to leave or move to work in a new kitchen. Unlike the modern workers, the old school Chinese kitchen labourer had higher loyalty, better responsibility and human touch as they gave a two-weeks transitional period before departure.

I did not know cooking before working alongside my husband as a kitchen labourer in 1978. There were Indian and Chinese agents delivering raw materials to our kitchen in early days. I just learned preparing and cooking Chinese food through trial and error in the kitchen. Quite often, we used to have Chinese tea and dim sum at Chinese restaurants in London China town on Tuesday – the day when our shop is closed. It was really struggling for me to allocate time between running kitchen business and looking after my children during that period. I like to stay in this country because Hong Kong is too crowded and the air quality is not better than here.



*Video recording on interviews*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Mrs Ng*

<http://youtu.be/BZ-hlCi7Yo0>

In 1969, my brother-in-law was the first person in my family who was granted the UK Working Permit, worked and lived in a Chinese restaurant in Scunthorpe. His wife came after him one year later. In 1971, his boss applied another Working Permit for my husband working in the same restaurant due to shortage of workforce. My children and I flew to the UK and reunited with my husband on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1973. The flight ticket was about HK\$1600 per head. My daughter, aged 9 and my son, aged 8, paid about HK\$800 each. It was a long flight. We stopped at several cities and travelled over 24 hours before reaching the UK.

My husband and I were born in China. We got married in 1963. He graduated from a Chinese university and was a registered Chinese Herbalist. He told me the language used during his study in China was Russian and Japanese, not English. He changed to work as a manager in a knitwear factory after migrating to Hong Kong in the 60s, because degrees obtained in China universities were not recognised by the Hong Kong Government during that period.



*Marriage Photos of Mr. & Mrs Ng (1963)*

I heard that the weekly salary for my husband was about £14 to £15. I worked for the same Chinese restaurant initially without any pay reward because the employer allowed my children to stay with us in the quarter free of charge. It was not difficult for anyone who lacked working experience in a kitchen to learn cooking Chinese food in this country though it was almost different to those traditional foods in Hong Kong. Cooking was familiar to me as I always helped in the kitchen when I was young. I knew that the initial salary was lower for a new apprentice, only several Sterling Pounds a week at that time.

We used our savings from Hong Kong to buy an old house in Scunthorpe and started to run our own Chinese takeaway shop in Sheffield in 1976. I was working inside the kitchen and my husband was responsible for the counter and materials purchasing as he held a driving license from Hong Kong.



*Mrs Ng and her children in UK*

My husband went to learn English during his weekday afternoon break and soon adapted to local living and culture. After my arrival, I attended an English school in Doncaster, which was run by volunteers. I feel English people was very kind and friendly to us and other new immigrants. I remembered an English potato deliveryman told me that Chinese people were hard working and seldom applied for local benefits.

The working hours were about 15 hours a day for me as a casual worker in the kitchen - First session 9:00am to 6:00pm; second session 9:00pm to 3:00am next morning. My duties involved peeling potatoes, washing dishes, frying chips, meat shredding and cleaning etc. My weekly salary was about £23 in 1975. The working hours even extended to 18 hours after I owned my takeaway shop.

My house was not far from my takeaway shop. There was no time for us to look after our children. They learned to cook and looked after themselves even though I understood it was against the law. However, earning a living was our top priority at that moment. We did not have heating set up at home and it was a thrifty life. It was so hard and too busy that I carried my 3 months old daughter on my back when planting beansprout and frying chips inside the kitchen. Customers always wondered what stuff was carrying on my back all the time. Sometimes I just placed her below the stairs at the corner of the kitchen and she never cried.

My youngest son was brought up by his brother and sisters. In summer time, there were two to three Sunday family hours for us to enjoy where we would go swimming, or spend time in open spaces in parks. All the children offered to help in the kitchen business till they finished their studies. All of them are professionals and will never engage in kitchen work anymore.



*Patricia and her God Mother – Mrs Ng*

'Chop Suey' was the main Chinese dish in early days and others like 'Green pepper and Black Beans' was introduced in late 70s. Hooligans around Manor Top frequently caused us trouble at the takeaway shop and we called the police almost every night. They said nothing they could do but asked us to close the shop before 10:00pm. It seemed nonsense and ridiculously to us because all knew that the rush hours began after 10:30pm every night, after the pubs closed.

Similar to other UK Chinese kitchen labourers, we seldom consult GP for illness or sick symptoms. In 1979, I was so ill that I felt unconsciously on bed. My daughter called doctors and ambulance and I was stayed at Sheffield Hallamshire Hospital for 2 weeks. I resumed working in the kitchen right after leaving hospital because we need to pay rent and utility bills. I can say it is our time and toil exchanging for our money and achievements.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**Mr Alex Chung**     <http://youtu.be/xQ00GwJhAhU>

I was planning to work as a policeman after finishing my Form six studies in Hong Kong. I passed the recruitment examination and was preparing to begin my job at the Police Training School in Wong Chuk Hang. More or less the same period, my sister who lived in the UK wrote a letter to me asking me to come over to help her run her Chinese Takeaway in Newcastle due to shortage of workforce. I decided to give up working in the police force and begin to work as a kitchen apprentice in my friend's restaurant in Sai Kung, New Territories of Hong Kong for one year. I thought such experiences would ease and speed up my chance of granting the UK working permit. Later I changed to work in another Chinese restaurant in Kowloon Tong to broaden my cooking skills. The life of apprenticeship was very tough.



*Patricia and her Cousin – Mr Alex Chung*

In 1977, I took a flight to London and then took a transit flight to Newcastle. At the time there was only £5 in my pocket. The immigration officers in London Airport fined me £12 for luggage overweight. I told them I only have £5 and they finally took all my assets off me.

The life was very lackluster here during the 70s. Sometimes I played golf with local people on the day off. Later I worked in another Chinese restaurant in Edinburgh, where the owner was Mr. Liu Kam Tong, the father of the famous artist - Miss Yung Mei Ling. Five years later, under the advice of my sister, I opened the first Chinese restaurant in Newcastle where the present China Town locates. At that time (1982), there was only one Chinese Grocery – Wing Hong Supermarket on the same rugged surface. Most people did not look good on my new business and they thought that the restaurant would close down within several months but I was full of confidence though I was 22. I strived strenuously and kept my business for another ten years.

Nuisances from local hooligans were more frequent and severe when running the Chinese restaurant as compared to a Chinese takeaway. I heard that not far from my restaurant was Waterloo Street where heroin dealer used to stay. In late 1982, there came the 'Gang of Bald' that referred to a group of shaven head people wearing black clothes, trousers, with fasten metal chain and heavy balls.

I heard that the term 'Chop Suey' was given to the dish with a mixture of beansprouts, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, green pepper and water chestnuts – which implies a dish with cooked miscellaneous vegetables.

It was a hard life working as a kitchen labourer before the 1980s because of long working hours, poor working environment, lack of workforce and bargaining power. However, they are 'Kings of the kitchen' nowadays, due to labour shortfall as most UK Chinese descendants refuse to work as Chinese kitchen labourer like their parents.

Because of higher income and more stable life as compared to farming in the New Territories of Hong Kong during 1960s, most young village people desired to work in the UK. At that time, it seemed that you have a higher prestige among villagers if there was a family member working in the UK.

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**Mr Martin Ng** <http://youtu.be/xfl172Fp0e4>

My father came to this country in 1961. He was one of passengers on board of the first Chartered plane from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom. He told me the complete journey was over 2 days, via the Netherlands.

He was a woodcutter living in a remote village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong and it was a really hard life. My father heard my uncle and relatives of the same village who left Hong Kong during the 1950s had a better life and earning in the UK, so he decided to join them afterwards.

My mother was a farmer and pregnant during his departure in 1961. I was born two months later. He sent letters and photos back home regularly during the first several years of leaving, as it was the basic mean of communication and connection between us. The first time I saw my father was at my aged six. Due to barren farm fields, my mother started to work as an ore-transporting worker in the mine nearby. My mother became the backbone of the family and it was really bitter life.

Kitchen labourer was my father's first and the only occupation since his arrival in London and it was not uncommon for many villagers during that era. He told me his initial weekly salary was only about £1.50 and playing 'Mahjong' is the most common leisure habit of Chinese kitchen workers after work. He then stayed and worked in London for over 30 years.

My father's life started to settle as he opened his Chinese Take away shop after a decade of working in relatives' kitchen. My family was reunited in London as we migrated to the UK when I was thirteen. I continued my study during daytime and helped family's kitchen business in the evening rush hours, till I left London six years later. I worked at the counter at first but changed to work inside the kitchen as we were told that it was too young for me to work as counter staff. It was unpaid work and it inevitably caused certain impact upon my studying.

Kitchen labourers were hard working, as it required long working hours and needed to prepare materials, ingredients on their own due to shortage supplies. Apart from getting partial materials from Indian delivery shops, we used to purchase perishable goods like vegetables directly from the nearby market.

In early days, where over 99% customers were local people, communication and language barriers had a great impact on Chinese kitchen labourers. Bullying from some local customers, who refuse to pay, was not uncommon to them during that period. Disputes would use to be settled under force and fist fighting seemed to be a weekly rehearsal matter.

I heard that 'Chop Suey' was originated in North America, where a chef mixed up and cooked varieties of vegetables and meat remnant together, to serve an officer from China in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and it was later circulated back to Southern China and brought into this country by Chinese. The phrase 'Chop Suey Lo' refers to the early UK Chinese Kitchen labourers who cook 'Chop Suey' dishes inside kitchens, which implies meaning of derogatory correlates with illiteracy and lower class group.

Early customers used to stick to one or two favourite dishes, which mostly consists of beansprout, mushroom or 'Chop Suey'. They seldom changed their custom dishes and were reluctant to try new dishes. Perhaps it is one of the reasons that a farmer or a bus driver in Hong Kong is not difficult to become a 'Chop Suey Lo' or a cook in the early UK Chinese



kitchen. Recently, the new generation understands that the original Chinese food is not the same as those in early Chinese restaurants, so there is a great demand for new taste which leads to the rise of great varieties of modern Chinese restaurant cooking Cantonese, Peking, Szechuan style food.

One unpleasant memory about my kitchen life is related to my eldest brother who was convicted of 'Common Assault' and put under probation when he was aged 16. It is so deep in my mind. He poured a ladle of hot oil against a group of gangsters, trying to protect and rescue my father from being attacked and hurt by them. However, it seemed unfair to us that the police charged my eldest brother without listening to us what has happened and what were the causes and the facts occurred. He returned to Hong Kong 2 years later and never set foot on this country anymore.

My mother always worried we get into trouble if we stayed in London. In the early 1980s, under the assistance of my brother-in-law and the urge of my mother, my elder brother and I moved to Doncaster and opened our first Chinese takeaway shop there.

I never thought of working in the catering services when I was young. At the beginning, I was just a helper for the family business. However, after years of hardship and practice, I really fell in love with the local Chinese kitchen and catering industry. I can say without such experiences, I won't have today's success. I like to explore, study and elaborate on how to provide best quality food and services while many others are too conservative. So I designed and opened the first takeaway shop with an open kitchen in Doncaster where customers can watch how food was cooked and know what's happening inside the kitchen. Later, my shop was awarded by the Council as the best takeaway of the area.

Most early stage Chinese kitchen and catering industry staff are family businesses. Labour was not a problem at that time and it was not difficulty to apply for the working permit. Nowadays, I feel there is a shortage of successor in this industry as posterity of first generation of Chinese kitchen labourer and new immigrants are well educated and most of them are engaged in professional jobs.



*Interviewing with Mr. Martin Ng*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Ms Fong Gui Lee*

<http://youtu.be/peLNNfnh7Xk>

I lived in a large village in the New Territories of Hong Kong, about 200 households. I was married in 1947. In 1954, my husband immigrated to the UK and worked as a kitchen labourer in Newcastle, due to poor living conditions and a lack of farmland in his village. I took my three young kids, who were aged 3, 5 and 9 to the UK, to be reunited with him in 1958. There was no civil flight connection between Hong Kong and the UK in those years. We got on board of a large ship in Kowloon Tong area and arrived in this country after 30 days.

It was really frighten and boring during the travel. The only view was of the sky and sea for a long period of time. I rather walked back to Hong Kong but there was no way. I was one of the very few Chinese female lived in Newcastle at that time and it was an unhappy memory for me. I bore six more kids afterwards and my husband was the main breadwinner of the family.

Due to social instability of Hong Kong during late 60s, it was not until 1971 that I first returned to Hong Kong. This time we travelled on planes but it was a transit flight. We continued to live in this country because all my children like to stay here.



*Patricia with Ms Fong Gui Lee*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Mrs Sau Ying Law* <http://youtu.be/uFMG1krwPso>

I heard that my uncle arrived in Liverpool by ship and became one of the earliest Chinese kitchen labourer in my family. My husband and I run a metal engineering shop in Hong Kong. The main reason to migrate here was seeking better education for our children. There was no other job fitting me except working in the Chinese kitchen, as I did not know English well.

My friend introduced me to wash dishes and cutlery in a Chinese restaurant and it was my first post in a UK Chinese kitchen. I was just a housewife in Hong Kong and did not know how to make food for the public. Later I worked as a female handyman in a Chinese takeaway shop and began to learn cooking Chinese food in a local takeaway. I did not know how to make fried rice when I started working as a kitchen labourer. My colleagues always teased and blamed me and it made me so upset in the beginning. Such bullies stopped till I became the proprietor of my own Chinese takeaway shop.

There was no master teaching me and I just learnt by watching what and how other people did. Running and working in a takeaway shop in this country is not much difficult than what I was doing in Hong Kong, but the time is too lengthy here indeed.



*Interviewing with Mrs. Sau Ying Law*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**Mr. Sing Por Law**     [http://youtu.be/wD\\_rUOXQG\\_8](http://youtu.be/wD_rUOXQG_8)

I have feeling of being racially discriminated here such as have eggs thrown at me, or having my car damaged, windows of the takeaway shop smashed etc. I feared every night when darkness was approaching.

My first job in the UK was working as a handyman in the kitchen of my brother-in-law in Derby. Though my English is no good, I changed to work at the counter because it was too crowded inside the kitchen.

My brain was empty and I lost myself during first few months of working after arriving. There is no sense of belonging here and I was always thinking of returning to Hong Kong, perhaps after my retirement. To me, English people are more polite, especially when driving their vehicles on the road and not all are no good here.



*Mr. Sing Por Law*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

*Uncle Kuen*      <http://youtu.be/5OnfaO44TJc>

After my first marriage, I came to start my kitchen working life in the UK in 1966 because my three brothers-in-law were working as head chef in Chinese restaurants here and the living condition was very harsh in my village in Hong Kong at that time. After my arrival, I was working as a kitchen casual worker at their Chinese restaurant in Durham and my daily job was washing dishes, peeling potatoes and cleaning. My weekly salary was £5 and it was extremely busy during those years. After learning how to cook, I changed to work as the main chef in another Chinese restaurant in Middleborough. Later I bought that restaurant and became the owner.



*Interviewing with Uncle Kuen*



*Old Photos of Uncle Kuen*

The long working hours was hard but there was no other alternative job fitting me due to my poor English language. In the early days, the main ingredients such as bamboo shoots, water chestnut and meat were obtained by delivery through a wholesaler in Birmingham. It was later replaced by the first Chinese grocery opened in Newcastle in mid 1970s. However, I did learn and plant beansprout on my own. It involved complicated procedures – mung bean germinating, put them in sacks, daily watering, away from grease, light and working area etc. because there was no supplier till the early 1980s.



*Photos of Uncle Kuen's Chinese restaurant (mid 1970s)*



*Uncle Kuen and his family*

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**Mr. Wong** <http://youtu.be/qwSBhRscqas> [http://youtu.be/-uJHd0UqF\\_c](http://youtu.be/-uJHd0UqF_c)

I arrived at London in 1977 after completion of secondary education in Hong Kong, with five to six friends of similar age. Four years later, only I remained in the UK after finishing my studies and I worked as a fancy jewelry salesman in Oxford Street. During my study, I also worked as a part time kitchen labourer at night in a Chinese takeaway shop in London. I was looking after the frying pot and sometimes working as a counter staff.

I opened my takeaway shop after I married. During the 1970s, there were limited numbers of Chinese takeaways as well as choice of dishes. 'Chop Suey' was the most dominate Chinese dish, where beansprout is the main ingredient at that time. I heard the story about water-planting beansprout from early Chinese kitchen labourer but I did not have any experience.

It was not uncommon that groups of hooligans and gangsters called us 'Chin Chin' and broke the glass window by throwing stones in early days. Even we caught them and reported to the police, we never got any compensation at all. There was no solution for such non-stop harassment till we moved to run another new takeaway shop in another county.

Most of the early Chinese restaurants and takeaways were owned by Chinese immigrants, who used to be farmers in Hong Kong. Upon retirement, their shops are later sold to Malaysian Chinese, Vietnamese Chinese and recently the Mainland Chinese.

I would stay in the UK rather than return to live in Hong Kong because I have my family with two children born and studying here. Long working hours in Chinese kitchen hinders us to engage in normal social life though I like to learn and integrate with local customs.



*Interviewing with  
Mr. Wong*