

## **Interview with the Yue Shan Society**

Place: Office of the Yue Shan Society (553 ½ Fisgard Street)

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Interviewer: Zhongping Chen; Charles Yang

Interviewee: Tim Choo (周贵刚). Chairperson of the Yue Shan Society

[During the interview, Mr. Choo answered questions in Cantonese, and Charles Yang served as the interpreter, and translated the transcription]

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Zhongping Chen: Which part of China did your family come from?

Tim Choo: From Guangzhou.

Zhongping Chen: Which county?

Tim Choo: Panyu.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, Panyu. Who was the earliest of your family to come to Canada?

Tim Choo: Father, my father.

Zhongping Chen: What is his name?

Tim Choo: Zhou Yang (周扬)

Zhongping Chen: When did he come? Do you remember when? Roughly?

Tim Choo: I'm not too sure on that. I don't remember.

Zhongping Chen: Did he pay head tax?

Tim Choo: I'm not too sure about that either.

Zhongping Chen: Why did he come here? Not to other places, like United States or other cities in Canada.

Tim Choo: When he came, he came to build the railroads.

Zhongping Chen: Oh the railroads, that was like the 1880s...

Tim Choo: He borrowed money to come here. Borrowed money to buy a ship ticket.

Charles Yang: So he came here legally?

Tim Choo: Yeah, he came as a legal laborer. He took the ship for over a month to come here from China.

Zhongping Chen: So he came to build the railway, after that what kind of job did he do?

Tim Choo: After that he was always at a sawmill. Cutting wood, BC Forest.

Zhongping Chen: So he always worked in the sawmill or did he also change job later?

Tim Choo: No, no, always...

Zhongping Chen: In the sawmill.

Tim Choo: Till to retire.

Zhongping Chen: So when did you come here?

Tim Choo: 1958.

Zhongping Chen: In China, did you receive any education?

Tim Choo: I studied at a normal school.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, normal school, that was higher...

Tim Choo: There aren't any normal schools now, just normal university.

Zhongping Chen: A teacher school, so you were ready to be a teacher.

Tim Choo: Guangzhou normal school.

Zhongping Chen: Guangzhou normal school. So when you came, what kind of job did you do here?

Tim Choo: I also worked at sawmill.

Charles Yang: With your father?

Tim Choo: No, not the same sawmill, I worked at Duncan.

Zhongping Chen: So where was your father's sawmill? Where was that?

Tim Choo: He was in BC Forest in Victoria. I was in Duncan.

Zhongping Chen: So yourself also worked in Duncan. How many years did you work in the sawmill in Duncan?

Tim Choo: In Duncan, worked for three years. Afterwards, I came out here to Victoria and did carpentry related work. But it was making doors, moulding, wood floors.

Charles Yang: Like Home Depot.

Tim Choo: Ya, that's right. Casings and cornices.

Zhongping Chen: Did you work for somebody else or just your own?

Tim Choo: Ya, just work for somebody.

Zhongping Chen: So did you change your job later on?

Tim Choo: No, not until the factory closed down.

Zhongping Chen: So you retired at that time?

Tim Choo: 1983... Then I couldn't find any work to do.

Charles Yang: So you retired?

Tim Choo: Not retired, couldn't find a job to do. Not the age to retire yet.

Zhongping Chen: So when you were in Duncan, were there many Chinese? How many Chinese in Duncan at that time?

Tim Choo: Oh ya, in Duncan, the camp had about 80 Chinese workers.

Zhongping Chen: 80 Chinese. All of them work in sawmill?

Tim Choo: Ya. Chinese camp.

Zhongping Chen: So after you retired, what kind of activities do you do? Usually how do you spend time?

Tim Choo: Not much, come here to play some mahjong.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of other activities do you do?

Tim Choo: Mostly come here to play mahjong. We rarely go fish, but mostly, after 1996 usually go back to China for vacation every year.

Zhongping Chen: Go where? Usually just go Canton?

Tim Choo: Everywhere. The Silk Road and right now except Tibet... I've been to most parts.

Zhongping Chen: So like this association, when was it established?

Tim Choo: If you trace its origin, then it's a very long time ago. But this is a branch. There should be information you can find.

Zhongping Chen: It was established in 1961?

Tim Choo: In 1961, this was newly re-established. The one before no longer exists. 1961 it was re-established.

Zhongping Chen: But you can't remember when the older one was established?

Tim Choo: I don't know.

Charles Yang: So this is just a branch? Originally you had a headquarters?

Tim Choo: Headquarters is in Vancouver.

Charles Yang: In Vancouver, so it was originally in Vancouver first and then here?

Tim Choo: No, when Canada was first developing and had Chinese coming, they first came to Victoria. Afterwards they formed the headquarters over there.

Charles Yang: So it was here first and then Vancouver.

Tim Choo: Yes we established first and then over there. They bought a lot of estate, and they had money.

Charles Yang: They were bigger and so became headquarters?

Tim Choo: Bigger and then they came back here and discussed with us fellow county people and re-established this branch, because first development [of the association] started in Victoria, Vancouver Island. That time Vancouver hadn't developed yet.

Charles Yang: Vancouver became headquarters because they—

Tim Choo: Had more people.

Charles Yang: They had more people and were wealthy. So they came back here in 1961 to re-establish this branch?

Tim Choo: 1961 they gathered us fellow county people and re-established the branch.

Charles Yang: But you don't know when Vancouver branch was established? You don't know about over there and about the original one here? You just know that in 1961 your branch was re-established.

Zhongping Chen: Why this association was reestablished in 1960's?

Tim Choo: At that time there were still a lot of fellow county people... they originally... Whenever that side has memorials, annual celebrations they would invite us over to celebrate. So we discussed over there why don't you guys... because in the 60's, 50's there were a lot of fellow men.. so why not re-establish this society?

Charles Yang: So since you had a lot of people here and they had a lot of money and could help you guys establish here.

Tim Choo: Ya and re-establish this society. In the 50's, 60's a lot of people came. In the past, before 49 there were few people here and Vancouver itself originally had a lot of people. But Vancouver and the fellow men here had communication with each other. When they had memorials, they would also invite us to join. So while we're at it, and fellow men increased in numbers, and so we re-established the society.

Zhongping Chen: So from then to today, what kind of activities does this organization organize?

Tim Choo: Not much really, just that every year we organize an annual celebration at Spring Festival, worshipping ancestors, hikes, those kinds of activities.

Zhongping Chen: Do you have a schedule for every week?

Tim Choo: No, no scheduled activities.

Zhongping Chen: But it's open everyday?

Tim Choo: Ya. this is for Panyu... There are a lot of associations in Victoria. There's twenty-nine of them. But after the Yue Shan Society was established, the activities... everyday it is open for—

Charles Yang: Mahjong?

Tim Choo: For the Chinese to come up and partake in activities. The others are usually closed.

Charles Yang: So other associations don't allow people in except for yours?

Tim Choo: No, except that this place publicly welcomes people to partake in activities.

Charles Yang: Publicly open to people to come in. Other associations usually...

Tim Choo: The others usually just partake in activities amongst their own members.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, this opens to all different kind of people?

Tim Choo: Any fellow men, Taishan, Kaiping, Zhongshan and others.

Charles Yang: So mostly Chinese people.

Tim Choo: Chinese people are welcome to come here. But others like Lung Kung or Taishan, only their own fellow men can go to their association. Zhongshan people go back to the Zhongshan association.



Zhongping Chen: How many members in this association?

Tim Choo: Right now there's very few. Right now it's usually... the full fledged members now are around 25 or so. Some got old, some went back to China, some passed away and there are no new members joining. The young ones like my children don't come and the grandchildren definitely don't come.

Charles Yang: So there are no new members. It's usually just the original members.

Tim Choo: Ya, just the originals. There's no new ones.

Zhongping Chen: Do they need to apply for membership when they join the association?

Tim Choo: There really isn't anything, there was before but no one joins nowadays anyway.

Charles Yang: Did you have to pay? A membership fee?

Tim Choo: Before there was, there was a membership before. There isn't now.

Charles Yang: What was the membership fee then? Do you know how much it was?

Tim Choo: I don't know how much it was. That I don't remember.

Charles Yang: So there was a membership fee before but now there isn't since there's been no new members?

Tim Choo: Ya.

Zhongping Chen: How long no new members has not joined?

Tim Choo: That I think has been about 20 years.

Zhongping Chen: So like usually how many people would join activities here? Like these daily activities and annual events.

Tim Choo: At first there were a lot, but right now there's very few.

Charles Yang: So like right now, 10 or so people?

Tim Choo: One or two tables. At first there were a lot of people though.

Zhongping Chen: Apart from mahjong, do they play other stuff here?

Tim Choo: There's chess, Shiyuhu (十五湖, 15 Lakes).

Zhongping Chen: For the association, what is the relation between this association and the Sam Yap Association? When was Sam Yap Association established?

Tim Choo: You know Sam Yap is Panyu, Shunde and Nanhai. Because these three counties, they're about the same... Because only a lot of people from Panyu came here, not a lot from Shunde and Nanhai, but sometimes they're more closely related so they joined here too.

Charles Yang: So originally was it Sam Yap Society first or your branch first?

Tim Choo: It's together, that I'm not too sure. But in terms of establishment, it was Panyu first.

Charles Yang: So your branch came first then...?

Tim Choo: Later on, their folks joined here too, I mean, that's how I think anyway.

Charles Yang: So originally it was mostly people from Panyu, so your Yue Shan Society had a lot of people. But later on, there were other Sam Yap people, so they established the Sam Yap Society?

Tim Choo: They joined with us and established the Sam Yap Society. San Francisco is bigger though.

Charles Yang: So San Francisco had their own Sam Yap Society?

Tim Choo: There's also a Sam Yap Society. They also have a lot of assets. Because we came from San Francisco, United States. We were originally in America gold panning, there was nothing left and so we came to Victoria.

So the roots are all in San Francisco. They came to Victoria from San Francisco. They already had this society in San Francisco.

Zhongping Chen: When was the Sam Yap Society formed here?

Tim Choo: There wasn't really an establishment. They just joined in, there wasn't much separation. It's altogether, no establishment or anything.

Zhongping Chen: Do they contribute money to this association? The Sam Yap...

Tim Choo: No. We just have activities together.

Zhongping Chen: Does the members come here, join the activities here? Like annual activities and...

Tim Choo: Ya, that's correct. It's all the same.

Zhongping Chen: This association right now, what's relation between this association and the PanYu Society in Vancouver and other cities in Canada?

Tim Choo: We're basically just under the headquarters.

Charles Yang: Do you have branches in other cities or just here and Vancouver?

Tim Choo: Toronto has a Pan Yu Society.

Zhongping Chen: So they have a national meeting or something?

Tim Choo: Ya. North America has one. North America's Pan Yu Society meeting.

Zhongping Chen: Where is the North America Pan Yu Society? In San Francisco?

Tim Choo: Ya, the San Francisco in America. There's Los Angeles, New York.

Zhongping Chen: Do they have a global organization... meeting or something? Meeting in the whole world for Pan Yu...?

Tim Choo: Those [are held] back at Pan Yu. Before it was... every four years. All the Pan Yu people in the world go back to Pan Yu to visit families.

Charles Yang: Anything else or?

Tim Choo: The last time was 2007.

Zhongping Chen: Back in China? Oh... every four years? In Canada, how often does the Pan Yu Society headquarters hold the meetings?

Tim Choo: What kind of meetings?

Zhongping Chen: Like national meetings for Pan Yu people in Canada.

Tim Choo: It's mostly North America, every four years. Whenever there's a meeting, it's for North America.

Charles Yang: So whenever there's a meeting you go to San Francisco?

Tim Choo: No, it just includes [Pan Yu people of North America]. Sometimes it is in San Francisco, sometimes it's in Toronto. Last year it was in Toronto. We here in Victoria have no money, and we're small, so we're incapable of holding one.

Charles Yang: So usually it's in Toronto or San Francisco.

Tim Choo: Mostly San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver.

Charles Yang: So it's not only the ones in Canada but all of North America?

Tim Choo: Ya. The ones in New York and Los Angeles have the money but no people. So they don't hold meetings.

Zhongping Chen: So what is relation between this one and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association?

Tim Choo: No real relationship.

Charles Yang: You are simply just under them?

Tim Choo: Ya.

Zhongping Chen: Do you send representatives to the meetings or elections?

Tim Choo: Yes there are. Three of them. Every association has three.

Zhongping Chen: So does this association have any relation with other community organizations here? Chinese and non-Chinese.

Tim Choo: Just how it is now, there isn't any special relationship.

Zhongping Chen: This is a question about Chinatown. How often do you visit Chinatown? By the way, which part of the city your family is living right now?

Tim Choo: I live in Gordon Head, around the UVic area. During the week I mostly come down Friday and Saturday to play mahjong.

Zhongping Chen: Do you do shopping here?

Tim Choo: Yes, mostly on Sunday, once a week.

Zhongping Chen: So two times a week for you to visit Chinatown. So compare the Chinatown when you came, that was 1950's, 58, and the Chinatown today, what kind of changes do you see in our Chinatown?

Tim Choo: There was a fairly major change because when I came there were three casinos.

Zhongping Chen: When did they disappear?

Tim Choo: That I don't know. You can ask Joe Leung, he might know. So back in the day, like us who work in the sawmill in Duncan, after working... maybe after getting off work, for a week, Saturdays and Sundays are days off, they would come back out and lose all their money in the casinos. So for example, in Duncan those who work in the mill, there's a lot of Chinese people and so on Friday and Saturday—

Charles Yang: After work they would come here.

Tim Choo: They would come out and have a good time.

Zhongping Chen: So they were living in Victoria but working in Duncan and...?

Tim Choo: No, no, live there too. They would live in the low end hotels for a night [when here], and then Sunday go back to the camp, in the 70's, 80's.

Zhongping Chen: Was gambling legal at that time?

Tim Choo: Ok, there was Pai Gow, Fan Tan, Zi Hua. Ya, it was legal gambling, all three were legal. But later on, because there was... at that time it was like this, the church, the Christians' wives, their husbands kept gambling and lost all their money. So they complained to the pastor or minister and the church went to the parliament building and complained and in the end had them close down.

Charles Yang: So they all got closed down, but you don't know when they closed down?

Tim Choo: That's how the story goes. So it's not to say that the church is bad. The church can be good because there was no way to close down the casinos before.

Zhongping Chen: So how many people, like Chinese people, joined the Christianity here?

Tim Choo: I'm not too sure since I'm not a Christian. I'm not too sure.

Zhongping Chen: So like do you see any other changes? Like the changes...

Tim Choo: Changes... There was a time when Chinese food was very popular, busy restaurants. Back then once it hit midnight, after the pubs closed. They'd come to these restaurants. They would always be full.

Charles Yang: Chinese people? Were there Caucasians?

Tim Choo: They had very good business but it's all changed now. There's now pizza shops...

Charles Yang: Stealing all the business.

Tim Choo: Now at 10pm there's like nobody around. That has been a great change. Nowadays at 10 pm, the restaurants are closed.

Charles Yang: Just Fountain is open late for food. Others aren't.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of changes did you see in buildings, in the people living in Chinatown?

Tim Choo: There aren't a lot of people living in Chinatown now. As for buildings, nothing has changed. In the past, one room like this one would be split into six rooms and house six people.

Charles Yang: So one person per room.

Tim Choo: Ya, each person lives in one room and with public kitchen and public washroom.

Charles Yang: But now would it still...

Tim Choo: Right now there aren't those anymore. If there were, it would still be better to live outside [Chinatown].

Charles Yang: So living outside Chinatown would be better, so not a lot of people aren't living in Chinatown?

Tim Choo: There are, but there are very few. They moved to apartments. There are some in the small apartments. Like above the Chinese Canadian Friendship Association has a few. Like behind the floor above Fisgard Market also are.

Zhongping Chen: Did you see the changes in the store owners? Like did you see non-Chinese owners?

Tim Choo: Not really.

Charles Yang: So mostly still Chinese people?

Tim Choo: Ya, Mostly Chinese except for Don Mees was sold to a Caucasian. The rest are still Chinese.

Zhongping Chen: Today can you see some major problems in our Chinatown? What are the major problems? Currently.

Tim Choo: What kind of problems do you mean?

Charles Yang: Like what do you personally think is a problem. Like drunk people, or a lot of beggars, or a lot of vandalism, like graffiti, etc.

Tim Choo: Chinatown is still acceptable. Not really any big problems.

Zhongping Chen: So do you think the Canadian government can do... in which way the Canadian government can help the Chinese here and make Chinatown better?

Tim Choo: It's very hard to say. But let's say beside the Chinese Canadian Friendship Association, right now Sun Yat-sen's older or younger brother's granddaughter invested in developing there.

Zhongping Chen: When was that?

Tim Choo: This year in March I think, she had already drawn out the pictures. They're very beautiful. She went to each place and introduced her pictures which were very well done. She had drawn out a design.

Zhongping Chen: So that was Sun Yat-sen's granddaughter...?

Charles Yang: Sun Yat-sen's brother's granddaughter.

Zhongping Chen: The brother's daughter. Do you know her name?

Tim Choo: You ask Joe, Joe knows her. Joe is a realtor.

Zhongping Chen: By the way, how do you think the University of Victoria can do anything for the Chinese community here, help the Chinese community?



Tim Choo: The University of Victoria? I can't really think of much.

Zhongping Chen: Thank you, so by the way, we actually, apart from interview, we also want to collect historical documents, any documents of association. Does your association have any documents you want to share with us?

Tim Choo: Well later on... I will remember this for now but later on when I know what is what I will contact you then.

Charles Yang: So mostly it's like when the building was built, certifications and those kinds of documents.