

Interview Part Two, June 17, 2012

Interviewer: John Price

Interviewee: Kileasa Wong

John Price: This is a interview with Kileasa Wong at the Chinese Public School on Wednesday, June 27. Alright, so Kileasa I wanted to ask you about your role in the Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association.

Kileasa Wong: I am the secretary of the association.

John Price: What does that mean in terms of your responsibilities?

Kileasa Wong: I will prepare for the meeting, the Monday meetings and do the minutes and I will receive the letters, like for the CCBA. And respond to letters...

John Price: Uh-huh.

Kileasa Wong: And I... let's see, from the beginning of the year, I will organize the celebration of the Chinese New Year, the Chinatown parade, the gala dinner for the CCBA for Chinese New Year, and then ...which is the end of March, beginning of April. Organize the Qingming festival.

John Price: This is the cleaning of the graves?

Kileasa Wong: Yes, yes for the cemetery.

John Price: For the cemetery.

Kileasa Wong: And then coming up, that's in May, Victoria Day parade. I will organize that and then in June we have the CCBA picnic. Which is I'm responsible for that, I organize that. And then... got lots. Ok and then in Ju... July and August, CCBA's annual meeting, I will prepare the things like for September beginning. Again and then for the meeting. And CCBA, like every two years there's election, then I will prepare all the... send letters to the associations and prepare for the election. At the end... and daily like... I communicate with the associations, if they have anything wanted to bring up to the CCBA, they will let me know and I put it into agenda.

John Price: So could you explain a little bit how the CCBA is structured? You mentioned the associations. Who are the associations?

Kileasa Wong: So I know the CCBA, there are 29 associations. Each association will send 3 representative to CCBA as a director.

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: So the member of CCBA are the associations.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: So that means we have 29... 29 members for the CCBA. And then 87 I think... like if... 29 times 3. I think 87 directors.

John Price: Directors. I see.

Kileasa Wong: And then we have...

John Price: So each association has 3...

Kileasa Wong: 3.

John Price: ...directors. I see.

Kileasa Wong: 3 directors. Yes. And we have 26 executive directors.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, which are the president, vice president, advisors.

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: And then all different departments.

John Price: I see. And is the exec--... Are the executive directors drawn from the directors at large?

Kileasa Wong: Yes.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. Like when the election every two years...

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: And election... And then we elect president, vice president and then the president, vice president and the... the like previous executive directors like will have discussion and then... to form this... the new 26 executive directors.

John Price: I see. I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: And so... And then the... Is there also like a... officers or a committee, a steering committee or anything like that? An executive? Or is it just the executive directors?

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, we have different like said... the publishing department which I am the publisher. Yeah so... So I am the chair of the publishing. And then property department, so then we have the chair of properties. Yeah. And then we have the women's department. So we... there are different departments.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: So the different departments , their representatives or their chairs are with the president and secretary...

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: They're the main committee?

Kileasa Wong: Yes.

John Price: I see. And how often does the main committee meet? Once a week or once a month or...?

Kileasa Wong: Now the committee at large meet once a month, every second Sunday. And then the executives... if... most of the time it's just meet before the big meeting.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: I see. So basically once a month?

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, once a month. Yes.

John Price: And so you described... And who is the president today?

Kileasa Wong: President today, Joseph Leung.

John Price: Joseph Leung?

Kileasa Wong: Mhm

John Price: Ok and do you spell that L-E-U-N-G?

Kileasa Wong: L-E-U-N-G. Yes.

John Price: Ok and who is the president before him?

Kileasa Wong: Now each president, they allowed to have 2 terms. So this one... Joseph Leung is the first term. Before him, Kit Wong.

John Price: Kit Wong was the president before? I see. And how long have you been secretary?

Kileasa Wong: Think since 1996...?

John Price: 1996?

Kileasa Wong: Or before... 1995?

John Price: So that's a long time, 16 or 17 years?

Kileasa Wong: Yes, yes.

John Price: Wow. So you can have more than one term?

Kileasa Wong: Right.

John Price: I see. I get it. So you're actually pretty important for continuity in the CCBA.

Kileasa Wong: No, I'm the servant in this association.

John Price: I understand what you're saying. And how about... Is there... is there... of all the presidents or officers of the CCBA, are there particular people who stand out historically, that played an important role? Like when you think of past presidents of CCBA.

Kileasa Wong: Oh, I see. Actually, Joseph Leung's been a few terms of president.

John Price: Uh-huh.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, I would think he's the one that, like... the recent 20 years, he's... he's the one that had most terms...

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: ... longer terms for... Not longer terms but most terms for the... for the president.

John Price: I see, I see. How about earlier days? Any famous people?

Kileasa Wong: Early days... Hm...

John Price: Was Alan Lowe ever president of CCBA?

Kileasa Wong: No.

John Price: No, eh?

Kileasa Wong: No, no. We have Peter Lou-Poy...

John Price: Peter Lou-Poy, yup.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, and then we have, who else... John Yuen.

John Price: John Yuen.

Kileasa Wong: Yes. Gee, can't remember.

John Price: Yeah. What about during the war time? Was... Did the CCBA play an important role?

Kileasa Wong: Yes. During the war time, yeah... CCBA like... do all these fund raisings...

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: ...and help like when... when Dr. Sun Yat-Sen came to fundraise for... against Japan.

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, help fundraising.

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, mhm.

John Price: The CCBA help to fundraise during the...

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, mhm.

John Price: Ok and what... And so it helped to fundraise in the war against Japan. And what other things, you know, did it do? What role did it play historically, in terms of with the government or for the vote or things like that? Do you recall? Are there things you know about that past that you can share?

Kileasa Wong: I know when Dr. Sun Yat-Sen came for the fundraising and Freemason, they help a lot too.

John Price: Mhm. I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And... and also something like the CCBA, yeah, ask everybody donate a dollar or something to help... help that too... Yeah.

John Price: I see. And how about the various associations... Like, you... I think you mentioned there's 29 associations now. Are they mainly family associations or are there regional associations or what types of associations are members of CCBA now?

Kileasa Wong: We have like, family like Lee's, Wong's, yeah. And then we have like... regional like the Long Kong and then like Hoysan...

John Price: ...Hoysan, yeah.

Kileasa Wong: Hoyping.

John Price: Hoyping.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And Guangzhou, like... they're like by their... where they from, like...

John Price: Where they're... yeah. Where they... Hometown.

Kileasa Wong: Hometown. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

John Price: Yeah.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And then we have church.

John Price: Right.

Kileasa Wong: Chinese church.

John Price: Chinese church.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And then we have...

John Price: So when you say church, do you mean the temple?

Kileasa Wong: No, the church.

John Price: Which church?

Kileasa Wong: Christian church.

John Price: The Christian church?

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, Christian church.

John Price: I see. So is it the Presbyterian church? Or the...

Kileasa Wong: Presbyteri... That one, the Presbyterian church was one time, was the member and then they don't have... They can't send anyone come to meeting.

John Price: Yeah.

Kileasa Wong: So they had to quit.

John Price: They withdrew.

Kileasa Wong: There's another one. What's it... I can find out.

John Price: United church? Or... it's ok.

Kileasa Wong: I find out right now...

John Price: After we can look at it... That's fine.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, ok. And then we have like... Let me see... The Kung fu club.

John Price: Kung fu club, yeah.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, yeah. Yeah and like the... the lion's club, lioness club. Yeah all this...

John Price: I see. I see. Ok, well thanks very much. So in terms of the CCBA's role, what has its relationship been with the government? Victoria government or the provincial government. Does it lobby, does it meet with the government? Or what does it... does it have specific issues?

Kileasa Wong: Yes, we have good relationships with the government. And like City Hall, if there's something going on, like said they do the lights, Christmas lights for Chinatown. They ask us and then the association each put in some money to help that. And for the Chinese New Year, they help us put all the lanterns up and all this. And then if there's someone come from China...

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: ...to visit the City Hall, visit the mayor.

John Price: Yup.

Kileasa Wong: Usually they let us know and then we bring... send like couple representative to meet them, to join them.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And for... for provincial government, like... Ida Chong's there and... does that work?

John Price: Yup. I think it's still working. I think if you speak a little closer.

Kileasa Wong: Oh, sorry, sorry.

John Price: No, no, no. It's ok. That's better.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And like say provincial, Ida Chong's there.

John Price: Yeah.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, if anything's like relate to the Chinese government or Chinese people then she usually let us know. And then...

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: ...we send someone there to communicate with them.

John Price: Right. So what about in terms of the CCBA's vision for Chinatown? In terms of discussion with the city about the development of Chinatown. Are there big issues coming up?

Kileasa Wong: So if there's any suggestion about ... to make the Chinatown look better or anything, that we usually communicate with the city and let them know.

John Price: Mhm. But what about building for instance, new buildings in Chinatown. How's that handled? For instance, if a developer wants to build a apartment, does it have to conform to a certain plan for Chinatown?

Kileasa Wong: If that... That happened before, like some of the developer will, when they apply their permit from city, they also... City would suggest them to come to CCBA and come to the meeting, explain what's going on, what they going to do.

John Price: Mhm.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah. And we... usually we're pretty cooperative. Like if it's something like not going to do any bad for the Chinatown then we usually are pretty cooperative.

John Price: Is there a development plan for Chinatown?

Kileasa Wong: Not as I know of.

John Price: Uh-huh. And how about for instance, other people like... For instance, was David Lai part of CCBA in the past?

Kileasa Wong: Yes, he's still the advisor of CCBA.

John Price: He's an advisor to CCBA.

Kileasa Wong: Mhm.

John Price: I see. And are there other advisors?

Kileasa Wong: Yes, we have legal advisors.

John Price: Mhm. I see. And how about the role of women in CCBA? In the old days, I don't think there were many women in CCBA.

Kileasa Wong: Right. You are right. Yeah, when I first came to CCBA, join the CCBA, I think it was in 19... like the 80's, early 80's. And then there was only one lady there and I was the second one.

John Price: The second?

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: So who was there in the 1980's?

Kileasa Wong: Mrs. Kong.

John Price: Mrs. Kong?

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: I see. And what was her role?

Kileasa Wong: Is the... the women department.

John Price: The women's department...

Kileasa Wong: She's the chair.

John Price: She was the chair of the women's department?



Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah, so usually for... like say for... for women that old days is usually... women just nothing. They just... yeah... You can't do anything and you not doing any important position.

John Price: Uh-huh.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: Yeah. So do you think there'll ever be a woman president of CCBA?

Kileasa Wong: I think yeah.

John Price: You think...

Kileasa Wong: I think actually a lot of people encourage me to run for president. But no, not until I retire.

John Price: I see. Too much work already.

Kileasa Wong: Too much work already, yeah. Yeah, so yeah I was the first principal for CCBA, I mean the school and the... I'm not sure, I think I was the first woman secretary too also.

John Price: I see.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah.

John Price: Well good for you for taking on those historic roles right? You're a pathbreaker. Are there anything... Is there anything else that people should know about the CCBA? When they look at our... the Chinatown website, they will go to the CCBA and they'll, you know, click and you know... What should they know, what should we tell them on the website?

Kileasa Wong: Gee, I don't know. I don't know what to say.

John Price: Yeah.

Kileasa Wong: I don't know. Well, I don't know what to tell... We are here, like to, for the community like for... to make the Chinatown better and hope that to bring the business in Chinatown better. Hope to bring more tourists, yeah.

John Price: Tourists, yeah.

Kileasa Wong: Yeah and to help the new comers, the Chinese newcomers can settle better.

John Price: Uh-huh.

Kileasa Wong: Easier.

John Price: Ok, I think that's it. Thank you.