

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Peter Chang
Interviewers: Priscilla Li, Chelsey Wen
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Background: Dr. Peter Chang is a cardiologist based in Houston, Texas. He was born in Taipei, Taiwan but moved frequently to various countries including Peru and the Philippines due to his father's career as a diplomat. Dr. Chang completed his Bachelor's and PhD in Biochemistry at Rice University. As an undergraduate student, Dr. Chang was active in the Chinese American community, establishing a drama club and serving as editor for a Chinese American magazine. He remains actively engaged in the Chinese American community today through his involvement with the Chinese Community Center and the Hope Clinic.

Setting: The interview was conducted on June 20, 2018 in Fondren Library. The interview covered topics ranging from moving between countries when he was younger and acclimating to different cultures during his career as a cardiologist in Houston.

Key:

PC: Peter Chang
PL: Priscilla Li
CW: Chelsey Wen
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?): preceding word may not be accurate or transcribed
[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

Interview Transcript:

PL: Okay, so we're here at uh Fondren Library on June 20th at three o' clock in the afternoon interviewing Dr. Peter Chang for the Houston Asian American Archive. My name is Priscilla Li.

CW: My name is Chelsey Wen.

PL: Okay, and we'll start out um Dr. Chang um [**PC:** Mhm.] where and when were you born?

PC: Well I was born in uh Taipei, Taiwan uh which is Republic of China uh back in 1952.

PL: Okay um and can you describe what your childhood was like?

PC: Um well of course my parents of course came from the mainland China when the uh, uh when the communists took over uh back then. Um...it was tough, I think for everybody uh because uh, uh the whole country was in pretty uh poor shape, uh just starting another uh new country and another new place. So I think it was tough uh my father uh was in the— was an editor in the newspaper, so uh so it wasn't a—a uh, uh place it's very—so it's a—it's a—I think we—we—we live a reas—a reasonably fair—fair life, okay, comfortable life. Certainly not uh not uh luxurious or anything. Yeah, but I think we have a lot of good memories there. I think back then uh went to a uh elementary school I—actually in the uh—we used—in the first we definitely lived in suburban area. Actually back then it's all like farming uh in that area. So we have a lot of fun together [**PL:** Mhm.] playing, exploring the farm...or the rivers. Yeah.

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PL: Um and you have an older brother, correct? [**PC:** Yes I d—I do] And how much older is he?

PC: Couple years.

PL: A couple years, okay. Um and your parents came from Fujian? [**PC:** Yes, mhm.] Fujian? Okay, and what languages did they speak to you?

PC: Well, of course we all speak Mandarin. [**PL:** Mhm.] I think uh Fujian, they came over from the northern part of Fujian, so it's uh—it's a really different uh kind of dialect [**PL:** Mhm.] than the usual Fujian thes—they speak. I think just the Fujian province there are two hundred different dialects. You—you cross a mountain it's a different dialect. So I think only people in the region will s—will be able to speak that dialect.

PL: Okay um in—at—how long were you in Taiwan?

PC: So I was there until uh I was uh ten years of age. Then I left there.

PL: Um where—where did you move to? Um.

PC: Well after being in the uh newspaper uh, uh being a reporter and then—and then editor uh my—my dad's uh major is actually in diplomacy, so he eventually uh uh went back to be uh uh uh to be with the State Department. [**PL:** Okay] So, so, so that's his first uh assignment was in the Philippines, so we went to—to Philippines.

PL: Um and how long were you in the Philippines?

PC: So I stayed there for about five years. [**PL:** Yeah] Uh which is good thing because Philippines, of course, they do have uh a Chinese school, okay so I was able to keep up with my Chinese. And then uh after being there for five years, then his next assignment was in uh Lima, Peru [**PL:** Mhm]. So, we went over to uh Lima, Peru where I graduated from high school.

PL: Okay, um how did you feel like moving from different country to different country?

PC: Well it has its pluses and minuses. I think the uh pluses is you get to experience different cultures [**PL:** Mhm] meet different people, learn different languages. But I think the minuses is uh you know you just made a group of friends and then suddenly you have to leave them and move to a totally new place. You have to adapt to it. Totally new uh language uh new culture. So I think you have to be highly adaptable uh to uh to, to be in that kind of environment. So I think uh you just need to focus on the positives, rather than the negatives, and then you are very—you enjoy it.

PL: Um and so when you were in Peru how long did you guys stay there?

PC: We stayed there for uh three years.

PL: Okay. So you were eighteen, [**PC:** Yes] okay and then you went to Rice University?

PC: That's correct. So my brother was here at Rice, at the time. Uh so uh so that's a logical place uh for me to go. Uh-huh.

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PL: Okay. Oh and how did he know—how did he get to know about Rice?

PC: Well he actually uh...finished high school in the Philippines. Uh but he's about to graduate, so we kind of left him there to finish the last year instead of going all the way to Peru since uh it would be kinda difficult to make that transition. So he actually finished high school there, and then he applied for s—uh for college in the United States, and he got into Rice, yeah.

PL: Okay um can you describe like how life was different between the different countries?

PC: As far as which ones? [laughs]

PL: Oh I guess like [PC: I've been to too many] uh the neighborhood [laughs] Um...the ones that stood out to you um how the neighborhood was like um the foods you ate.

PC: Comparing here and?

PL: Um just yeah any countries that stood out to you.

PC: They all different, I mean uh every country I've been in and uh and we've been a lot countries over the years. No I—I think they are all different and that's what's nice about—in this world. You got to experience different things. Uh we really have no problem. We—we love to try new things. So uh so uh new cuisine uh new uh, uh special t—recipes from a particular country we l—love to do it. So it's different, but it's uh...it's uh we love the difference. [PL: Mhm.] Mhm.

PL: Um and did your parents still instill like uh Chinese traditions even though you guys were in different countries?

PC: No my parents are very different [laughs] from most parents. There's no uh tiger mom or [laughs] or uh whatever [laughter] uh no they uh they come by—by uh Chinese standard they are very liberal. [PL: Mm.] Not liberal—not in the sense of po—uh politics. Liberal in the sense—they really let us do what we wanted to do. They never will specifically say, you know, you need to go to medical school, you need—we'd love you to do that, you need to go to s—whatever. Uh they are totally up to us. They will support whatever we decide to do. [PL: Okay um.] Yeah so which is very unusual at that age. [PL: Mhm.] Yeah. Mhm.

PL: Uh so what was your mom's profession?

PC: No my mom never uh. That's the time of the war so uh so she finished high school and the war broke so he—my dad and uh my mom got married, right after she graduate from high school. And then he goes to—begins the process of re—retreating to uh to Taiwan so—so no so he just uh—she never went—she is a uh housewife and mom [PL: Mhm.] all her life, yeah.

PL: So what were some of the hobbies that you grew up enjoying to do?

PC: Um...we love to travel, uh we loved—uh I love to read. I love to write. Um and uh...[long pause] Uh and that's pretty much it. I loved to uh—I love dramatic plays, and that's why I founded the uh the uh the uh the drama club here. Uh-huh.

PL: Okay, um and you said you picked—you were able to pick up a lot of languages. Is Spanish one of them?

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PC: Yeah so basically Chinese, Spanish, and English, yeah.

PL: Okay, um and did you have a religious upbringing?

PC: Well we went to a uh Christian uh high school, so we are—we're basically uh Christian uh so...I think uh my parents do—do not have any more—more Buddhist [**PL:** Mhm.] Uh-huh so I'm probably uh considered Christian, mhm.

PL: Okay, um and you said—you did mention how your parents are very liberal um, but like I guess uh what aspect of like career-wise were you leaning towards in high school or like as you were growing up?

PC: No, they really uh never uh forced us [**PL:** Mhm.] into any particular uh profession uh or major...um actually initially I wanted to go to philosophy rather than uh—when I go to college, but uh actually I—I applied to Rice as a physic ma—physics major. But after being here for one year I uh decided physics is not for me, so I switched bi—biochemistry.

PL: Mhm. Okay. Um as you're moving from like country to country did you have any expectations before moving there?

PC: Expectations. [**PL:** Mhm.] Well of course uh you uh you—you read about it uh you have visions of what is—it will be like, but reality t—is always very different. [**PL:** Mhm.] Yeah, so I think it's different in a nice sort of way. Yeah, okay. So uh—so no I—I think uh we're never fearful moving to a new place, since we're so used to that. [**PL:** Mhm.] So we do kind of look forward as a new experience and a new challenge.

PL: Okay, uh what were some of the like nice culture shocks that you experienced like things you found um that you liked about the country? Any country that you've been to.

PC: What I liked about it?

PL: Yeah, like what surprised you and was like a positive thing?

PC: Hm... Well I think any place—of course each country has its own specific culture and scenery, but I think the bottom line is always—is people. I think people is the most priceless uh possession. So I think it's learning how other people live and how their lives are influenced by their specific culture and tradition, and we are able to interact with each other and then—and then become friends and uh and learn from each other. I think that's—that's the thing I enjoy the most.

PL: Um and you said, so your brother had gone to Rice [**PC:** Mhm.] and um you said that was the logical thing to do was to also go to Rice? Um were you like debating other colleges?

PC: You know actually back then the uh the government basically uh guaranteed the uh the children of diplomats, that you will have a space in the national university in—in Taiwan so—so actually I was accepted to uh to uh to the uh, uh National Taiwan University, which is the most prestigious university back then—as a physics major. But uh...I applied to Rice as well and then uh Rice gave me a tuition grant, so I decided just go to Rice then.

PL: Okay, um and when you were at Rice was your brother also at Rice? [**PC:** Yes.] or had he—okay [**PC:** Yeah.] um so did you go to the same residential college as him?

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PC: Yeah we actually did. We are both at Will Rice.

PL: Oh Will Rice, okay. Um and you said you were first a physics major. Uh what made you change to biochemistry?

PC: What prompted [**PL:** Yeah what prompted you to change to biochemistry?] Oh the physics just too dry for me. Yeah, mhm.

PL: Um and what was Rice like um when you were here?

PC: Um...I don't know it's uh...I liked—I loved—we—I loved the campus. It was—I think it was very nice. Uh the uh it does—it does take some uh a—some time to adapt to it, because it's uh it's the first time I really live in the America. And um and people does interacting in different ways. Okay, so—so it—it took me some time to adapt to it. Uh but so it's life, so once you adapt to it you—you—you—you you're just one—one of the uh—one of the many. Mhm.

PL: Oh so can you give us some like examples of what you had to adapt to?

PC: Um I think uh academically probably because uh there is a uh there's a...you know you d—d—you go to the previous uh s—your previous schooling, it's what it's always taking exam, passing it, grading it, that's good. But in Rice uh th—what struck me is uh you have a lot of projects. So it get you to—so it's—you're not just learning what's in the book, remembering it, doing great on the exam and getting A's. You're actually having forced you to think, to read other books other than the uh the textbook, and uh and uh and actually knowing what's going on in the world in order to accomp—get and working with others you know uh to uh to uh get a project done. So I think that's very—and I think that's what make America successful, is they allow you to really uh use your creativity and your in—to try the more innovative way of dealing with the same problem. Mm mhm.

PL: Um so what were some interesting classes that you took here...that stood out? Some interesting classes?

PC: Some interesting classes. [laughs] Actually the one I loved the most was uh was uh a psyc—psyc—psychology course. It's a psychology on abnormal behavior, why people acts uh different from what most people do. What is the underlying psychological reason or, you know, so I thought that was pretty interesting because kind of give me an insight on the behavior of uh people um which always amazes me, right, because everyone of us so unique, in our ways.

PL: So um you mentioned this brief- uh briefly before the interview but um I guess back then there wasn't as many Asian-Americans at Rice?

PC: Yeah I'll bet uh you can—most of them are actually graduate students. There are far more graduate students that's Asian-American descent, than uh than undergraduate. Undergraduate you probably can count with my two hands, back then. So, so you know when we get together it's always the undergraduate and the graduate get together. Mmhm.

PL: Um so were most of them Chinese students [**PC:** Yeah.] or? Okay.

PC: I would say back then, most of them are Chinese. [**PL:** Okay.] And—and most of them are from Taiwan.

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PL: Mhm. So um I guess which demographic of students did you tend to befriend or was it like a diverse um array of friends?

PC: Um...I think initially the—I—because uh my brother is already here, okay, and uh he is uh he gets along with all the graduate students. I think it's because we—we are opposed(?) to most undergraduate uh Chinese American students at that time. We—we still do speak Mandarin, very well. But most others, they—they may speak some or they may not. Um and most of them, you know, either were born here or they uh—they came here interc— uh high school or middle school years, so they are—they are more immersed in—in American culture, so I think the beginning we actually uh we are really uh we get along really well with the uh, many people older than us and the graduates is Chinese gra--uh—Asian-American uh graduate students. We actually eventually uh move out of the dorm uh, uh my second year I actually—we share a room, a house with uh other uh Chinese-American graduate students, so, so, so we know them very well. The undergraduate we know uh we know a lot of them are still here uh Shiso Fan(?) and Frank Liu they are all here. So we all know t—get along quite well. Yeah.

PL: Okay. Um and what kind of activities were you involved in at Rice?

PC: Let's see, what kind of activity...I don't think the school activities we are involved in any uh specific things so I mainly involved in the uh—with the Chinese uh Student Association, um uh so uh I actually am more involved in a lot of activities outside the school, at the time so uh so even the drama school it's a really—it's really not part of school, okay so uh, uh I was the editor for one of the uh Chinese uh magazines there, uh back then for the uh for—back then is when they uh there's a lot of uh student involvement uh because uh the uh I think the uh the Japanese wants to take over the uh one island close to Taiwan. Uh so uh, so a lot of student uh involvement. That's also the time I think uh the uh, the uh, the Taiwanese government was kicked out of the uh the United Nation. Uh so nationwide all the uh Chinese students kind of get together, form different organizations. In the southern United States, we have a really big organization, which basically involved all the Chinese students in the southern states. And then we uh, uh so we had regular meetings and we established a magazine [**PL:** Mhm.] which were distributed to all the uh Chinese students in this southern states. So I was editing that uh, uh that magazine, editor of that magazine back then, you know. So, so that's—that took up really, most of my time, so, so, uh so most of my involvement was really outside the uh the school at that time. So we also did establish the first uh summer camp for Chinese uh, uh students uh back then. Uh we did that—our first one in Dallas, and then we did several more years after that, yeah.

PL: Okay, and the um magazine was called “Southern Monthly”?

PC: Yes.

PL: And what kind of topics did you guys have?

PC: Well basically uh—of course you always got some uh political articles uh to uh, to uh to comment on the uh current event uh but a lot of others are articles by overseas Chinese about their experience into—into life here. Uh either—either uh while they—they were in school or after school uh, advices as to how to adapt uh to uh, to uh, uh to uh new culture and just general just uh prose, s—mini novels, you know—novellas uh th—they all included. Yeah.

PL: Okay, um and it was all in English, did you have any [**PC:** No it's all in Man—it's all in Chinese.] Oh all in Chinese [**PC:** Yeah, it's not English] Oh okay. Yeah. [**PC** laughs] Okay so it was directed towards um newly immigrated Chinese?

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PC: Absolutely, yeah.

PL: Okay. Um and it was—was it for any age of Chinese [**PC:** Mm?] people? Was it for like uh college students or?

PC: Well back then the s—students here are mostly graduate students [**PL:** Okay] So mostly it's just graduate students, everywhere, and uh yeah who—who can read Chinese still and speak Chinese. Mhm.

PL: Okay um and then we had a question about the summer camp like what was the um topic of the summer camp?

PC: I think it's just a—just really for fun [**PL:** Mhm] and to uh—for us to get to know each other. [**PL:** Mhm] Okay, I mean uh...back then of course uh the uh students from Taiwan dominated the g—the graduate uh programs here in the States just like now the uh people from uh China dominated it. Uh the uh so there are lot of students in all these universities everywhere in—even Texas all these uni—every little university actually got Chinese students, but they are so isolated, I mean the school may have only two or three, uh uh people from uh from Taiwan. So I think we—we just decided to uh to uh to g—to give everybody a chance to kind of come together and know each other, okay, and kind of get some network uh going on so in the future they can help each other out. So, I think it's a lot of things, again it will have topics uh some people uh we invite some speakers talk about certain topics, but I think mostly it's just fun games together and um yeah, just getting to know each other type of deal, about two days uh in duration I think, usually.

PL: Mhm. Okay, so like how you like organized these things to like connect Asian—Chinese-Americans, but did you find any resources here that helped you um like acclimate to the U.S. or was this the reason why you uh set these camps up, like for example.

PC: No, it's not because I have any difficulty, I think uh I'm much easier to—to adapt and acclimatize to the new culture than most people since I've been moving around the world at very young age. But I think uh this also is uh...no, yeah so it's—it's really, it's a common complaint we heard, because uh uh being in an organization we kind of going around and uh to kind of talk to people in different uh colleges about the ongoing topic and then one of the major feedback we get from them is, they feel they're so isolated, they just don't see other people from similar background and they wish there's a venue that they can—they can get—they can uh get to know others. So, I think that—that's what's kind of uh general—started the idea of the summer camp. [**PL:** Okay.] Mhm.

PL: Um and so you graduated from Rice with a um Bachelor's in biochemistry and then what prompted you to get a PhD in biochemistry?

PC: Well that's because I kinda started my research in my uh in the end of my junior year, so uh so the research is already going on for more than a year, and um so I thought it kind of a waste—wasteful to kind of let it go. So I decided just to stay and finish the research [**PL:** Okay.] and get my PhD in the meantime. Mhm.

PL: Okay. Um and then how did you uh or I guess I can ask um what was like the environment like in the lab like um did you have a mentor, were there other graduate students who you worked with?

PC: Oh yeah, yeah we have a uh...uh that's a much more relaxing uh, uh to be in the graduate school, okay you pr—pretty much do it at your own pace uh the courses are fewer and uh they really don't care

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what time you do your research. A lot of times uh several of us will just come the urge in the midnight, [laughter] and just work from midnight until uh early dawn and go for—and have breakfast together. Uh so yeah so you really make some good friends there, and uh so I think it's a very relaxing uh time for my life, and it like give me more time to do other things I love to do. Um and uh yeah so and so I think, it's it's great, you know.

PL: Okay, and while you were in—getting your PhD, was this also when you um started the drama club or was that during your undergraduate years?

PC: No, no I th—I think it started j—it's uh...I think we have that concept uh in the uh the last year of my uh undergraduate but I think really we put into—uh we put uh we uh fully uh implemented I think uh when I started graduate school.

PL: Okay, um and then you also founded the Chinese Classical Instrumental—Instrumental Music Society, um was that an offshoot of the drama club or was that a separate thing?

PC: No that's a that's a kind of uh...not—not in the plan it's uh I think somebody a—a let's say there is a uh performance group that came from Taiwan they performed, after they performed uh they decided to leave the uh instruments [**PL:** Oh wow.] and see uh, uh to—in Houston. So they asked me to—“what—what uh we should do with these instruments” I said, “so—well why don't we uh that's you know—you don't just want to leave there and rotten uh why don't we just form a club?” And uh so we started that uh and uh we uh the toughest part is really finding people to play. That's too many instruments. We find many people they'll play this and that, but some of the others, you just never find the right person to play it uh who is uh, uh play it well enough. Nowadays there's probably no problem, there's so many Ch—Chinese uh—Chinese-American uh in Houston area, but back then it's—we're kinda limited. But still we got to perform, quite a few times. And uh, uh so so you—so that was a kind of a...not—not something I purposely planned to do. Mhm.

PL: Okay um so did you play an instrument?

PC: I played the flute.

PL: Oh okay.

PC: Yeah.

PL: Um it is a Chinese flute or the... [**PC:** The Chinese flute] the Chinese flute. Okay. Um and were most of these people in the like in these programs like Chinese um like newly immigrated people or p—like people who were like first, second generation Chinese-Americans or Asian-Americans?

PC: You mean for the c—classical?

PL: Yeah for the classical or the drama club.

PC: No they are al—no drama club you have to uh it's a—it's the first Mandarin speaking [**PL:** Oh okay.] dra uh drama uh drama yeah in southern United States, so no so everybody has to know how to speak Mandarin to be in the [laughs]—to be uh—to be in the performance, in the play. So no, so I think that actually no problem, there are actually many p—several people here who actually major in drama, back in Taiwan. They may now st—here and study different uh major, okay, accounting or whatever, but of course since they major in drama in uh in college, they had been involved with that. So we actually had

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no problem finding very experienced actors and actresses for the play. [PL: Okay.] So it was uh, quite a fabulous performance, yeah. Mhm.

PL: Okay, great. Um and then you got your PhD in biochemistry and then what prompted you to go to medical school?

PC: Well once I'm in the research, I decided that research is really not what I want to do for my, for the rest of the life. Initially my plan is to be in academic uh to—to teach and to do research and be a—and uh be a professor. Um but after doing research all that time I find it uh, maybe boring is not the word, but it's uh—you spend so much of your life for a result that does not really have a major impact. Okay, and uh so you uh so I'm just, you know, just uh just you know you have to enjoy what you are doing, you know whatever the outcome is, so if I don't even enjoy what I'm doing and the outcome is not that impressive, okay. I mean back t—the research unless you're—you're just like—really back then we l—we looked at the metabolism of cholesterol, so it's really we are just...we are just uh, uh trying to figure out some steps during that whole process, so we figure out the speds—steps. I mean eventually you have an impact in making the medication for—for people with high cholesterol uh which—which it did. But at that time is purely academic it's uh you really have no i—idea how it's going to affect anybody's lives back then. So it just feel—I just don't feel satisfying doing research and doesn't feel the whatever the outcome is, so it takes three or four years, to come up with something, you publish a few papers, but you—you really don't feel like uh you accomplish very much until st—four—four years. So uh that's why I start to look around. So I think medicine is—is attractive to me because you can make a difference, right away. And that's why I'm attracted to cardiology because uh people are having heart attacks you can fix them right away and make an impact and I think that's satisfying to me. Mhm.

PL: Okay, and so you wanted to stay in Houston for your medical degree.

PC: Uh not necessarily, but uh but that would be the most logical choice. Uh you know since uh there's a medical school—a couple medical schools in Houston. Uh so and uh if I can go to one of them I don't even have to move. [All: [laughs]] for my apartment, everything will be the same, and—and I think there's also advantages to stay at uh to go to UT since uh the in state—the tuition was quite high uh for most medical schools, but Texas, even the out—the out of state tuition at that time was nine hundred dollars, which is way, way lower than yeah than uh than most other medical schools elsewhere. Mhm.

PL: So how was the environment like at medical school like how was the demographics of the students?

PC: Um, again it's really different than now. Now you know twenty to thirty percent are Asian-Americans in medical school uh we—out of the class of 120 students, there are uh five of us, that's uh Chinese-Americans. Mhm. Yeah, and four of us—four of us are still here, in Houston, yeah.

PL: So um, during your—I guess like up to this point, had you experienced any um discrimination for being Asian-American, or Asian?

PC: [long pause] Yeah I don't think I have uh experienced any overt uh discrimination. Uh but I think uh you always get a—a uh—you can sense it. Because uh you know, in a group discussion, some people just ignore you. Okay. And uh and we know they are doing that purposefully. Mhm. Uh and when a—another person, a Caucasian speaks, they will, they will, they will, they will put a—they will focus on what he says. So I think you can s—sense that uh here and there but I think uh you know but once you are good yourself, then I don't think you encounter that. People kind of respect you, they—they uh I think discrimination is less of an issue. Mhm.

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PL: Okay, uh and then you got your d—uh a Ph.D - a doctorate in public health? Is this right?

PC: No I never fully completed the uh [**PL:** Oh you didn't?] thesis. I uh while I was going through uh through uh I think that was while I was going through residency, right? [**PL:** Mmhm.] internal medicine that's after—so after medical school I feel uh you know public health is an area where you can really make a lot of impact because uh you make one change that can affect the lives of so many. Um so um so I decide to uh to uh, to do uh—actually initially I was trying to do a Master's of public health and finish that in a couple of years, but then the professor, "Oh you should go for a Ph - Doctorate of public health with your experience." So that was probably a mistake [undistinguishable two or three words]. And so I finish all the courses, start my thesis, but then I start to uh the residency really start to become crazy. You really don't have the time. So uh so I probably completed my thesis maybe two thirds of the way. But I never fully completed it and uh, and uh so it just [inaudible].

PL: Um-

PC: But it's in the knowledge [**PL:** The knowledge, yeah] you gain from the courses that are beneficial.

PL: Um and then uh from 1982—1 to '82 you had an internship? [**PC:** Mhm] Um what was that—was that in internal medicine?

PC: Uh yeah. [**PL:** It's internal] That's right, yeah. It's uh right so three years internal medicine. Yeah. Mhm.

PL: Okay. And um how did you choose internal medicine?

PC: Well that—that's because I want to go into cardiology.

PL: Oh okay.

PC: So in order to go into cardiology, which is, which is a subspecialty of internal medicine, you have to uh finish residency in internal medicine before you can go to subspecialty. [**PL:** Mhm] Whether that's cardiology, gastroenterology, whatever.

PL: Okay, um and what did your uh parents think of um as you were getting your PhD and then going on to medical school? Uh were they like supportive of you?

PC: Yeah. Yeah. They're just always asking, "How many degrees do you want to get before you practice, go out to the real world?" [laughs]

PL: Oh okay.

PC: Yeah but uh no tha—they—they—they are fully supportive. Mhm, yeah, you know.

PL: Mmhm. Okay. Um uh did you face any—were there any difficulties that you faced throughout um your education?

PC: Not really, [**PL:** Mhm] I think uh I never had any problems with uh academics, uh and so I'm very organized uh and manage my time extremely well. Uh, um so even during the—during college, I decided not to depend on my parents. So I even part time a uh I delivered newspaper uh 5'o'clock in the morning uh everyday for—for—for a year. So uh so you just uh learn to—to so it's not really to get money, but

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it's—but we—money—my—parents are fully has uh more resource than—than needed to support me, but I just want to make it on my own, yeah. So—so I think uh that you really have to manage your time well and survive on very limited sleep.

PL: Um and then after you finished your fellowship in cardiology, you went straight into private practice or?

PC: No after I finished my fellowship, I joined a uh a clinic called The Ledbetter Clinic, [**PL:** Mhm] which is the oldest group practice in Houston. Um so uh as the cardiologist. So I stay in that group for actually qui—qui—quite some time uh the uh, the uh, I eventually become the uh become the president of the group. And at that time, we'd grown to uh I think 20 some physicians in the—in that group. But eventually, a lot, a lot of them retire, got old, retire, so we just decided to split up. Mhm.

PL: So were there any other Asian American physicians in the group?

PC: There was a Korean American in the group, yeah.

PL: Okay, um and I—I'm not sure how it works, but did you apply to be a part of the group or they um sought you out?

PC: Oh no no, it's uh just like any [laughs] any uh job y—you basically apply [**PL:** Okay.] and they interview, and decided who to pick. Yeah. [**PL:** Okay] Absolutely.

PL: Um so you worked there at least 14 years, over a decade?

PC: It's longer than that—we started out the Ledbetter Clinic, [**PL:** Mhm] eventually we change our name to Summit Medical Group [**PL:** Okay]. Yeah so that's actually the same group.

PL: Okay.

PC: We just changed the name when we uh expanded uh the number of physicians in the group.

PL: Okay. Um and wh—what type of patients did you normally um see?

PC: Well I'm a cardiologist. [**PL:** Yeah.] So so I mainly see patients with heart problems.

PL: Mmhm okay, [**PC:** Yeah] and the demographics of these patients?

PC: Oh I'll say my par—patients uh...the um...I'll say probably it's uh 70% Caucasian. Uh 25% uh either Hispanic-American or Black-Americans. And uh probably less than 5% is Asian-American.

PL: And then um can you like walk us through what you did after uh leaving the group practice—I think you went into a um hospital, it says.

PC: No, no, no uh after uh—so uh so after retirement of several people, all within the same year, so we decided the uh the uh it's uh it's not viable to uh, to uh, to uh, to uh to continue the group uh so we just split up uh uh amicably, uh-huh—I don't know what time—what year it was, but it must be at least 10 or 12 years ago. But anyways, so so no I—at that time, I just went uh solo. Mmhm.

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PL: Okay, [**PC:** Yeah] um and how was that? Did you have—did you like, I don't know, solo practice versus group or is it?

PC: Oh I find out practicing—being your own boss is 10 times better. [All: [laughs]] You uh you haven't uh tried to uh to govern a group of physicians in a group. Physicians are fiercely independent. You've got 21 physicians that's fiercely independent, you try to get everybody to come to a consensus. It just crazy. Uh the uh so, so first of all the group practice uh, especially since I'm—I'm the president, so it's uh it's a lot of headaches. Uh so many administrative issues you have to —personnel issues that you have to deal with on a day to day basis. And secondly, you want to do some change, it's very difficult you need to get everybody or majority's consent before you can move forward. Once you're on your own, I can really don't do anything and do it right away. Mmhm. So if I want to increase somebody's salary I can—a nurse salary I can do that right away, I don't have to go through the whole group. Uh yeah so, so actually it's much easier instead of other things I used to want—wanted to do, and now I can implement it right away. Mhm.

PL: Mhm. Um so you enjoyed like having your own business and dealing with that aspect?

PC: Yeah, yeah.

PL: Okay.

PC: Absolutely.

PL: Uh Chelsey, did you have any questions so far?

CW: Um I wanted to ask you before, you kind of addressed this, [**PC:** Mhm] um when you moved to college, did you find it really hard to be independent to live apart from your parents?

PC: Uh of course. Uh the uh but I think it's less so for me, I think it's because my brother was here. [**CW:** Mhm] So you still do see a—you still have a famil--uh family connection. Um yeah, and—and you really and you—you—and it's probably just for the first uh month or two. I think you easily—you have so many things going on in your life, you quickly just uh immerse into your new, new life. Mhm.

CW: Um and I guess over your time in Houston, how do you think the racial dynamic has changed or if you've noticed that?

PC: The racial dynamics [laughs] [**CW:** Um yeah.] Well I can say it's uh it's—I think it's like a roller coaster. I think—I think it has been going—getting better and better, okay, in the U.S. here. But of course, in the last uh few years, I think it's getting much worse. Uh before and uh and partially uh secondary to the uh the politics. I think it's people are just so partisan, partisan nowadays. It just, which kind of boils down to the racial uh i—uh issue. Um so no but I think there's definitely a change for the better uh at least su—since the 70's. Yeah. Yeah I have a lot of Black American friends, Hispanic American friends, and you can tell the difference, they, they they likewise uh uh felt in some way. Yeah

CW: Do you want me to keep asking questions?

PL: Er did you um yeah I guess, oh I can ask one more question and then I can turn it over to you [**CW:** Okay] Um but I see how you're very involved with various committees [**PC:** Mhm]um while you're in the group practice. So what was it like being a part of those committees and like how did—how was it um yeah just like how—can you describe it?

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PC: The committees are pretty routine. I think once you practice uh, you...you know for cardiologist our practice is not just an office. A lot of it in the—in the hospital. Uh so uh so if you do that, you're bound to be involved in a lot of committees, uh touching on a lot of aspects. Okay so that's uh pretty normal for any physician. Some are just less active and some are more active. I think uh since I was head of the cardiology department at the univer—at the hospital at the time, so they ask me to be involved in a lot of committees, yeah. But I think it's more relevant is actually the uh the fact that I was uh appointed as uh I think it's the first Asian American [**PL:** Mhm. Yes.] to serve on the Harris County which is a very enjoyable. Yeah

PL: Oh uh so how did you feel when you were notified of that um?

PC: Uh it actually uh I—was a surprise. I—I didn't—I didn't seek the job out, okay. Uh although we know the commu—commiss—commiss—commissioner well, who is—who is the one who does the appointment. Uh the uh I think he just uh decided he—he's very—he goes to a lot of Asian American event. So—and he and uh and he always wanted to have a Asian-American on that because we had never been—had one before—He said 'Asian-American is a growing population in the Houston area,' so he always want to appointed one. And it just happened that year, uh that uh they—they do have a uh a uh a slot open up and so—so he must ask—ask around the community leaders as to who he should appoint and I think uh a lot of people recommend me, and then so he approached me and uh asked me to serve. So that's how it came about.

PL: Okay. Great.

CW: Um do you still have family in China or Taiwan, overseas?

PC: We do have some family in Taiwan, but they're more distant relatives, yeah.

CW: So you would say most of your family is in close touch, in states? Or?

PC: Well we have a small family [**CW:** Mhm] , so we just uh—my brother is in uh in the New York area. Uh my parents are—after they retired, they moved to Houston. Um and then my father just passed away three years ago, so my mother is still here. Mhm.

CW: Um so how did you meet your wife?

PC: Uh...that's uh we actually met each other uh you know after the Whirlwind Drama Club, which is uh the—the to—to produce the dramatic play in Mandarin, uh then uh we follow--a few years later, we decided to do a Whirlwind Choir. So uh so we have a choir group that we uh meet every week at UH uh inter uh—student center and uh practicing songs, and uh so my wife uh finish uh her graduates degree, so he [sic] came to Houston to work. And uh and he [sic] just came to join this uh uh choir group. That's how we met, yeah.

CW: And what is she—what is her profession?

PC: She was a uh petrole—uh petroleum engineer. [**CW:** Mhm] Uh but later on of course uh he [sic] uh decided to go into law school. Mmhm.

CW: Um so with both of you having demanding careers, I would say, did you find it hard to balance like work life and family life?

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PC: Well I think uh it's always tough but I think we manage, because we know our priority. We always—when there is a conflict, family always comes first. I mean the uh so uh especially when my wife when he was campaigning, there's a lot of things going on. But I think uh he always remember that family comes first. You know, the campaign come and go but family stays with you for the rest of your life, yeah.

CW: Um so we can see that you're part of a lot of organizations, um can you talk more about what you do for CCC? Or how you found that organization?

PC: Oh CCC, the Chinese Community Center, of course is really a very worthwhile organiz—nonprofit. It's uh it's the largest uh, uh social service agency catering to Asi—As—Asian Americans uh in the Southern states, so it really does a lot of good things. Uh it's uh—so like uh during the Harvey and other hurricanes, when they needed shelter, they open up the place, they serve as a shelter, for them. One of the only Asian American place that serve as a shelter. Uh so uh they give uh help people, poor people to uh to fill out their income tax forms free of charge. Uh they have uh they provide summer camps, uh they uh of course teach, have Chinese school. Uh they even have uh Chinese uh, uh they have courses at the Asia Society, teaching more practical Chinese, in business. Um, uh so um they have a child care center. So it's really ta—taking care of people from young age to uh to when you're getting old. Of course a lot of elderly program they have. Um so I think when I was serving as the chair, and uh we are just uh starting out our newest project, which is a—we call it New Horizons, which is building a new senior center that will allow us to handle many more people in a much better uh facility. Uh so uh so I think it took about \$6 million to build that center. So we were able to raise the money, in a record amount of time, yeah. So the center is now under construction, it will expected to be open either uh at the end of this year or the first—uh uh the first uh of uh next year. Yeah.

CW: And what do you think motivated you to become active in organizations like this?

PC: Oh I think it's a piece of cake. I think uh it—first of all, I—helping—I think making a difference is always one of my mottos. So, so when I go into any board and I kind of restrict myself to no more than three boards uh at any time so I don't overextend myself. Uh I don't, I don't just go to the board, just be part of a board and just sit in there doing nothing. When I--my purpose is to go in, make a difference. Once I make a difference, I leave the board and c—and go to another place. So, so that's always my—the way I approach things so—so it's very easy. Uh and so I only—so if somebody is doing a—something that's really a benefit, then I want to try to help them to do it better, um and uh but I think the other factor is uh you know, you—you feel blessed with what you have. So I think we're very lucky that we are—we've got a great family, we are reasonably well—financially well off and I think when you are feeling blessed, you need to think about others who are much less blessed than you are. And it's your—I think it's your—our responsibility to kind of help those, that's—that's less blessed not—not because of themselves, just because of circumstances. Circumstances that's totally out of their control. Yeah.

CW: Mhm. Um do you think that there are any specific issues in the community that you're particularly passionate about?

PC: Yeah I'm really more interested in helping the weak, the needy, those who cannot help themselves unless somebody gives them the support they need. [**CW:** Mhm] So I know we are involved in Houston Grand Opera and all that, but there's not really my top goal. I instead of uh I will feel far better you know contribute \$10,000 to Houston Grand Opera, which is peanuts, compared to, to total I'm saying, I want to make the money make an impact. I would rather contribute to a small charity that's making a difference

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and—and you will make a far greater difference by doing that. So yeah so, so uh unfortunately you are—you have to be involved in some of the—the better known charitable organizations, but I think my major interest is in the smaller nonprofits who are silently making a difference uh in our, in our community.

CW: Okay um so what would you say you spend your free time doing when you're not working or helping people like this?

PC: [chuckles] Well like I say uh I love to read and write, okay, uh I used to publish a lot of uh articles in the Chinese newspaper in uh Taiwan, which is we send to overseas. And eventually, my father collect all those articles and publish a book uh several years ago. Um so uh, the uh no but I think if I—a lot of other things in life, that I would envision uh myself uh doing uh...it the...I love to uh take photos, so I think I would love to perfect my technique, and just go around the world, uh some uh get some uh uh catching some beautiful photos. Uh I also think uh cooking is such an art, so if I have the chance, I will probably go to cooking school and learn—I—learn that when I retire. Yeah so I think uh a lot of things, unfortunately my time is kind of c—constr—ki—kind of limited right now. Uh with uh with the work and all the community activities, so uh it's tough to consistently have a block of time for doing something. Mhm. [**CW:** Mm] But uh I think eventually that time will come. Mm.

CW: Mm so what are your goals for the future?

PC: [laughs] For the future?

CW: Mmhm.

PC: The uh well continue to do—well you know I always think that you know the uh it's not how long you live, that uh makes a life, uh it's what you pack into a life that counts. And uh and we are all unique, so what we want to pack into our lives are all different. So the key thing is you want to make sure you are packing into that life things you love to do, things that are meaningful to you rather than something that just happened to you or something that's a wish of somebody else and not your own self. So I think uh you have to be t—be true to your heart to really do something you love to do. So I—I love to do what I'm doing now. I enjoy every day of my life and so you talk about future goal, my future goal is to continue to do what I've been doing now and uh and uh you know and I don't think getting old has anything to do with that. If you want to make a difference, you can do it any time, any age.

CW: Okay, um so as someone who has lived in many different places, um and as someone who has lived in Houston for so long, how do you think you would identify yourself? As uh American, Chinese American, Taiwanese American?

PC: Oh I always identify myself, I—I say uh both American and Chinese, mhm. [**CW:** Mhm] So I feel I'm American because I—I live in this place longer than any place [**CW:** Mhm] uh in the world. Uh and uh my roots are basically here, most of my friends are here, my family are all here. The uh but deep down, I—I think I'm always a Chinese and any issues that's related to uh that will help the Chinese Americans or even Chinese elsewhere, is, is, is dear to my heart. Mhm.

CW: Do you have any advice for young Asian Americans?

PC: I think that's pretty much what I just mentioned is uh you really—I think uh the problem with uh a lot of people is uh—they—they are, they are extremely talented uh they, they have excellent academic records. But a lot of them I see nowadays is they still do not have a firm idea of what they want to do, what they want to accomplish out of life. And uh which is okay, I mean you—as you go along life,

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eventually you will find your passion. Uh but I think uh I especially among Chinese American uh, uh youngsters, I think commonly I see is a lot of them are being—they are not really doing what they want to do, they are really doing what their parents want them to do. Which is very unfortunate, you know we uh I talk to several of them, they are pretty depressed. Uh they are doing really well, they uh but they feel like they are living to please their parents rather than doing what they want to do. So that's, that's I think that's the wrong way, they are packing the wrong things in their lives. Okay. You uh you really want to do—it's your life, it's not your parents' life, so I think just find out what you're really passionate about, don't even worry about the financially whether it's okay or not, first of all find your passion okay then if that passion d—will not generate enough financial reward, to allow you to, to survive then you find a job that you can survive, and then focus all your spare time on your passion, so you will never just let go your passion. Uh I think it's your passion. It's what gives meaning to your life, it's what going to make you—each, each of your day meaningful and—and uh full of surprises and possibilities.

CW: Mhm. Um I think that's a great note to end on. [to Priscilla] Do you have more questions?

PL: Um yeah actually some follow up questions [**PC:** Sure] on what you had mentioned before, but um you said your father had published a book of the articles you wrote um for a Taiwanese journal, um or magazine, but what was the book—name of the book?

PC: It's a Chinese [**PL:** Is it a Chinese book-] name [laughs]

PL: Okay.

PC: Yeah uh.

PL: Do you—would you—would you like to share? You can write it down, it doesn't have—you don't have to share it. It's up to you.

PC: Oh I can, I can scan it and send it to you by email if you want. [**PL:** Okay great.] Yeah.

PL: Okay. Um-

PC: It's in Chinese, yeah.

PL: Okay and had—um up until like now, had you gone back to Taiwane—Taiwan to visit or?

PC: Um we, we haven't been back to China almost for—we've been trying to back to China actually two—tr—uh. Well we've been to China several times. I think if you're talking about back to Taiwan where we, we uh—we grew up. Um I just been there uh a couple times. I think one is uh 20 probably 20—20 years ago. [**PL:** Mhm] 20 years ago my wife was recognized as one of the ten most outstanding overseas Chinese. Uh so I went back there with her to receive the reward, and uh and Jackie Chan was one of the ten that year to receive the reward. [All: [laughs]] That was a hard year. Every--all the newspapers reporter—news reporters follow you along. Uh the then—a couple years ago I think my wife got a uh—we both got a prize uh a award for the uh the global women's uh business organization, so they got a big gala in Taiwan, they handed out the awards, so we went back there. So that was nice. Uh Taiwan has changed so much and China of course is just uh amazing. Uh-huh. Yeah.

PL: So um how do you feel whenever you get these um uh prizes and like rewards for doing basically what you're passionate about? Um.

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PC: It's just another reward to us. We really not doing it for the award. All these awards [**PL:** Yeah.] are just totally surprise uh for us uh and I don't think impact us in any, in any significant way. We are glad to get it. I mean it's not but uh I don't think uh it changes how we uh, how we look at things.

PL: Okay um and I have one last question on family, uh you have two sons, [**PC:** Mhm] I believe, okay. And you raised them with the same mindset of um very liberal of like parenting style?

PC: That's true.

PL: Yeah, okay. Um and did you instill any traditions like Chinese traditions in or just let them like I guess grow up in America?

PC: For—we're f—we're really blessed. Uh yeah I think uh both of them are—I think they just see us examples, we don't have to instill anything into them. But both of them are, are you know well behaved, uh have their own uh—we really can't ask for more. I think both of them are just uh superb. Uh the uh you know we don't force them to—we don't have to [inaudible] hard, you don't have to be number one, just learn what you have to study. But they all graduate at the top of their class. Uh my youngest son is actually ri—ri—at Rice right now. Uh the uh so no, so it—we, we we don't purposely, you know, talk about anything, I think just in your day to day conversation, uh you kind of touch on certain topics. But I think it's more they see how we conduct ourselves, and they kind of see that's the way they want to follow.

PL: Um and one last question is uh—oh I can't remember what it was—oh sorry, um what were—what would you say are your greatest achievements so far—accomplishments so far?

[pause]

PC: Um raising two good kids, um...uh have a great family and a wife. And uh and making at least some difference uh in the community I live. Uh and able to uh kind of uh at least open some doors for Asian uh Americans in the political arena, you know by serving on the Harris County uh Hospital District, as well as the Texas Medical Board. Uh which I was--also was the first Asian-American. And after that, they almost have an Asian American almost every single year. So, so that kind of force them to start to look at diversity on such boards, which is good. Um so I think uh yeah so, that will be what I'll be proud of. Mhm.

PL: Um and is there anything that you would like to talk about that we haven't asked you about so far in the interview?

PC: Uh not really [laughs]. Uh...no I don't have any specific uh [**PL:** Mhm] things to talk about, no.

PL: Okay. [to Chelsey] Did you have any last questions?

CW: No.

PL: No. [**PC:** Alright] Okay, thank you so much Dr. Chang [**PC:** Oh thank you so much.] for letting us interview you.