George Bo Linn interview
Donated to Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University by Ed Chen

Interviewee: George Bo-Linn (GB)
Interviewer: Daisy Gee (DG)
Date of Interview: early 1980s
Transcribed by: Ed Chen
Audio Track Time: 45:50

Interview:
The interview dealt with George Gee’s early life, his family’s history in the US, Chinese life in Houston, religion, politics, education, and Chinese culture.

[0:00:12.2] GB: This is an interview in which Mrs. Daisy Gee is talking to George Bo-Linn.
DG: How long have you lived in Houston?
GB: Oh about 30 years
DG: Where did you live before?
GB: Buffalo New York
DG: Where were you born GB: San Francisco
DG: When did you go to Buffalo New York?
GB: When it was time to go to Eastern Schools because they were better very very good
DG: Who came with you to Houston? I was sent to by myself. Oh to Houston. I got married to a Southern girl. She liked the Southern climate, more like her home.
DG: Did you have relatives here at that time?
GB: At that time I had a brother here. DG: Do you care to give me his name? GB: His name is Wong WONG
DG: Did you have Chinese friends here at that time? GB No, No
DG: Who did you stay with when you first came to Houston?
GB: I had an Apartment. I stayed mostly by myself of course with my wife.
DG: Do you mind telling me where that apartment was located?
GB: It was on the South side of Houston
[0:01:55] DG: What was your first impressions of Houston?
GB: It seemed to be a growing city ;a very large growing city
DG: What was it like, like any other place you have been before??
GB: It was very strange. At some places there were paved streets and at others there were dirt roads. When you got out of the main areas, you were in dirt roads. It looked like there a lot of wide opened undeveloped areas.
[0:03:40.3] DG: Do you know how many Chinese lived here at that time? GB: I think there were about a couple hundred hundred Chinese at that time.
DG: Oh I forgot to ask you when you came to Houston GB: Oh about 25, 27 years ago about 1948; 47,48
DG:Do you remember any major problems because there were so few Chinese here at that time?
GB: Not very much not very much at that time; the colored, the black people did not have as much freedom as they do now.

DG: What kind of job opportunities did you find when you first arrived here?
GB: Considering myself as a Chinese American; I did not have any trouble getting an engineering position that I wanted.

DG: Were there many Chinese grocers (?) here at that time?
GB: Yes there were quite a few at that time. Most of the Chinese were in the grocery or restaurant businesses at that time. DG: Can you name some of them
GB: I do not remember some of them

DG: Are there many Chinese restaurants?
GB: I do not remember some of these restaurants?

DG: Can you name one of these restaurants?
GB: I remember one was Silver Bowl that was on Fannin, and there was a China Clipper I know where some of them were but do not recall the names.

DG: Did you know of any Chinese professionals that worked for an American company at the time?
GB: No, not too many at that time. I do know of an architect at that time, Charles Chan. I believe he is about the only one.

DG: How did you find your job here?
GB: Well I am an engineer so I went to the engineering firms and went directly to the personnel office.

DG: How did you get to and from work at that time?
GB: At that time I did not have a car so I rode with someone and paid him for the gas.

DG: You came to Houston in 1947 or 48. Can you name some families that came between the 50’s and 60’s
GB: I know the ? the Beck Gee’s, your brother, King Tung Chen, the Gees, who has since passed away they lived on Eagle street. You know them too, DG: Yes I do. That came in 60’s and 70[s
GB: 60’s and 70’s I did not pay attention

DG: How about 70’s up to now?
GB: 70 to now it seems that there are so many, it is hard to say. It would be like a directory, like for the club that I belong to, the Chinese Professional Club. They all seem to come at once.

DG: Who did you marry?
GB: I married a Southern Chinese girl in China. DG I mean the name GB Mailan. DG Last name?
GB: Ng NG

DG: Where were you married and when?
GB: I was married in Canton, China in 1946 or 47

DG: How many children do you have? GB: I have five children.

DG: Where were they born?
GB: They were born here in Houston, Texas

DG: What are their names?
GB: Their names are George, Chee lan, Chee Wan, CheeMing?, CheeWin

DG: Tell me something about their education
GB: I always stressed their education. One of them is a medical doctor, one of them is a music therapist, another one is a scientist, another one has a doctors degree in education, the other is getting a masters degree in computer science.
DG: Why did you want to stay in Houston?
GB: I married a southern girl and she wanted to stay in this climate but I also found that Houston was a very progressive.
DG: Can you tell me something about your formal education and so forth?
GB: I went to high school in Buffalo New York. I graduated from one of the oldest engineering schools in the US, Rensellear Polytechnical.
DG: You did not attend any classes in Houston?
GB: In Houston I attended some classes at the University of Houston and other professional classes.
DG: What do you remember about your school days?
GB: Well, in my high school days, there were some prejudices so I remember I had some wrestling matches. They called me Chinaman and so forth. But in College, we did not have that prejudice. There may have been some but it was not as open as elementary or high school.
DG: How do you feel about the quality of education in Texas and also in Houston (?) as comparable to where you went to school.
GB: There are differences in the systems I think that the quality is probably about the same.
[0:15:35.5] DG: Was your educational opportunities as good as your children’s?
GB: No, I think that probably the children have a better opportunity because of the possibility of scholarships and federal grants that I did not have that time..
DG: Do you think that school in Houston needs improvement?
GB: That is hard to answer. From what I find I think the education is adequate but if it needs improvement, everything needs improvement.
DG: What is your religious preference?
GB: My background is Baptist and I am still a Baptist.
DG: Does your children follow your religious reference?
GB: The children went to Baptist church with me but as far as high school and college they can form their own preference. Some go and some do not.
DG: Do you go to church regularly?
GB: Yes, every Sunday, I am an official of the church. I am a servant of the church.
DG: What church do you think most Chinese in Houston belong to?
GB: The biggest Chinese Church in Houston is the Baptist Church that’s located at 900 Brogden Road. Most of the local Chinese belong to that, but of course, the Mandarin group go to another church.
[0:18:43.3] DG: Do you think the China-born members of the Chinese Baptist church still making some previous (?) belief and customs into the religion they now belong to?
GB: Yes, like for example the tea ceremony during the wedding that is a carry over.
DG: Do you vote?
GB: Yes.
DG: Do you vote in all phases city, state and national elections Presidential elections?
GB: I vote in all of the presidential and try to vote whenever I can.
DG: Do you go to political meetings?
GB No, I am not politically orientated.
DG: How about party meetings?
GB: No, I am not politically oriented.
DG: Have you ever run for public office?
GB: No I never have.
DG: Can you tell me why not many Chinese run for public office?
GB: I believe that one of the reasons is they belong to a small minority group They do not have the population to count on like other minority groups.
[0:20:54.3] DG: Would you encourage any prominent, qualified, capable Chinese to work for some kind of public office?
GB: Yes, If I thought they had a chance to win
DG: Do you speak any other language besides English?
GB: I speak the Cantonese, which is sort of a village dialect, not the city dialect.
DG: How about your children Do they speak Chinese?
GB: Well I tried to have them speak. I sent them to the institute of Chinese Culture. But most of them are too Amercanized. It is more convenient for them to speak English. They just find it more convenient to be American and not Chinese American.
DG: Did you ever attend any schools that learned other languages?
GB: I attended a school that taught Chinese
DG: How did you learn English?
GB: Oh I went to school here in the English school system. That’s about all I know basically. English is the greatest portion.
DG: What do you do in your leisure time?
GB: I do not have much Leisure time I do a lot of reading in my profession to keep up I am involved in the church work, and also helping people with immigration and also showing people around our city. This is sort of my civic duties. I also have household chores and reading.
DG: Do you have any hobbies?
GB: Well I like to take care of the house and cars  If you consider them as hobbies.
DG: Do you socialize with your neighbors?
GB: Well we do not have much time but if the neighbors are in need, we pool our resources together but as far as just socializing, we do not have much time for just socializing.
[18:55]
DG: Do you socialize with your working associates?
GB: When the department was younger we did but as it has gotten older we do not do as much. Maybe now just technical items.
DG: Do you socialize with your relatives?
GB: That depends on your definition of socializing. I go visit them and take them out to dinner. The main criterion for those relatives of taking them out while they are still alive instead of regretting of how. Just let them know that we are thinking about them.
DG: Do you belong to any community clubs that are mostly Caucasian?
GB: Yes, the society of manufacturing engineers where I am a past president and am still active I committee work
DG: How often do you have meetings?
GB: We have a meeting twice a month.
DG: Do you belong to any Chinese club or organization?
GB: Yes, I belong to, well if you call the church an organization and also the Chinese Professional Club, Organization of Chinese Associations, Family organizations, etc.
DG: Who was instrumental in forming these clubs that you...
DG: How about the Chinese Professional Club?
GB: The Chinese Professional Club, I was a charter member. I really do not want to give credit
to just one person. It was a group of about 6 or 7 people who wanted professionals to get
together mostly for social purposes
DG: What is your current profession?
GB I am a currently a manufacturing engineer, the manager of a dept,
DG: Do you ever go to Chinatown?
GB: Yes, I've been to Chinatown quite a few times. restaurants, groceries and meetings.
DG: Do you ever go to the Chinese theater?
GB yes
DG: Are you interested in Chinese opera?
GB: I am not as interested in Chinese Opera as in European Opera. The main reason is in
European Opera there is more action and more scenery.
[0:23:45] DG: Are you interested in Chinese art?
GB: Well art, I like to think I am a patron of the art I like the Chinese watercolor I have a relative
who does this. I like to see Chinese art.
DG: Are you interested in any other Chinese culture?
GB: Well I am interested in culture. I do not know of any exactly Chinese culture. I am interested
in culture per se in general. I want my children to recognize their Chinese heritage.
DG: Do you think the Houston Chinese younger generation has lost some of their Chinese
culture?
GB: Yes I think they have. By young people you mean up to 20 years old. Most of them do not
know their Chinese background. They do not even know the meaning of their last name. There
are family organizations like the Wongs and the Lees that they are not interested in belonging
to. They are more interested in going bowling or to purely Caucasian activities. have become
Americanized. They’re almost American in character except just for their face. Everything about
them, their food, etc. that too will be lost and they will be looking more like the Caucasians if
they live here all the time. I say this because I have met some pure Chinese from Mexico, they
begin to look like the Mexicans and they even begin to eat like the Mexicans. They do not even
look Chinese.
DG: Do you think they ought to uphold some Chinese culture?
GB: Yes they should know their background, like their roots. They should know their history.
DG: Have you traveled to mainland China?
GB: No, Not since the Communist took over 27:23
DG: Did you go before to China?
GB: Yes, I was married in China.
DG: In the village?
GB: No, In Canton
DG: Do you have any plans to go to China?
GB: No not for a visit. I have been trying to get relatives out and it would be too much of a risk.
It would be like the Jews who got out of Germany during the Holocaust would want to go back.
I guess if some of the Chinese Americans who have not experienced or know about some of the
atrocities that went on there
DG: Would you like for your children to go visit Communist China in the future?
GB: Yes, maybe in the future. When the world is getting smaller. The world is getting smaller and smaller. Just like I might want them to go to other countries.
DG: Why would you want your children to go to China?
GB: It is not really just China. I myself would like to go visit Europe. Way way in the future, the world will be smaller and there will be more travel.
DG: Do you have any relatives in China?
GB: No, not close relatives.

[0:29:00.1] DG: Most people do not but do you have contact with any in China
GB: Yes I do have some letters from some people
DG: Do you read any newspapers from China?
GB: No, I do not know as much in Chinese as I do in English
DG: Do you maintain any Chinese customs?
GB: Well ancestral worship which I do not have or burning scents which I do not follow. So there are no Chinese customs I follow except for the honoring of the family. They emphasize family close nest I try to cultivate.
DG: Do you celebrate any Chinese holiday?
GB: Well we have a clan association that we have dinners every year which is Chinese New Year. I usually attend those. But I’m not very heavy on the (?) holidays.
DG: Do your children maintain any Chinese traditions or customs?
GB: No
DG: Are there any Chinese customs you have abandoned that your parents strictly observed?
GB: My parents did have ancestral worship that I now recognize as remembering.

Tape 2
DG: What Chinese customs do your Chinese friends observe that you do not?
GB: Well they observe the moon festival by having moon cakes and they observe the Chinese New Year by just having the family get together. That’s all. In general the Chinese in Houston do not observe many customs. They just get together for Chinese New Year and that lasts quite a few weeks.

[0:40:13] DG: How many Chinese would you guess live in Houston now?
GB: I would really like to know. As far as I know there has not been any real census. So I ask the question many many times of the Consulate and also of the Houston officials. So a guess would be it grows such it really is hard. A good guess would be 10 to 20 thousand are in Houston now.
DG: Do you view the Chinese as an ethnic group in Houston?
GB: Yes I still think it is an ethnic group but they are not a minority group. If they were a minority group then they would have the freedom of choice of going to any school that they wanted to. Paradox. They are a minority as far as population is concerned but they are not a minority as far. The blacks and Hispanics are minorities they have freedom of choice. The Chinese are a smaller population yet they are considered as whites and they do not have the freedom of choice the other minority groups enjoy.
DG: Do you think the Chinese are closely knit?
GB: Yes By being closely knit they can have a greater voice
**Repeat above question**
GB: They could be more closely knit.
DG: Are they more closely knit than the other minorities?
GB: That I cannot answer because I do not know how closely knit others are. But the blacks and Hispanics have more power in the county and city.
DG: Do you see any political divisions in the Houston Chinese community?
GB: No, not as American politics is concerned. The only political division I see is in those that believe the Taiwan government represents the Chinese and those that believe the Communist Peoples Republic represent the Chinese.
DG: What Chinese tradition and custom is most important to you?
GB: Well, The Chinese tradition and custom is most important to me is the unity of family. The family pulling together and helping each other.
DG: How were you disciplined when you were young?
GB: Well, the discipline I had actually came from my father discipline me in studying, My uncle wanted me to study more Chinese and I regret that I did not obey some of their wishes and study as much as I should.
DG: Have child-raising techniques changed since your parents’ time?
GB: I think they have changed quite a bit. During my parents’ time there was a strict obedience to the parents and now the children just want more freedom from everybody. They do their own thing and thinking and it kind of troubles me. The younger generation loses the wisdom of the parents. They strive for freedom. In one sense we can not blame too much because they are taught that way. To do their own thing to be independent and be independent.
DG: How did you discipline your children?
GB: I tried to teach them the value of education the value of learning lots of things.
DG: What did you do in your leisure time as a child?
GB: Well I do not remember a lot of leisure time as a child except maybe playing baseball. We were not leisure time orientated. Orientals are not leisure time orientated. We are too busy making a living and trying to make ends meet.
[0:37:59] DG: Was baseball the only game you played in your childhood?
GB: Yes. It did not cost any money like bowling.
DG: Did you play with any types of toys as a child?
GB: As a child, not that I remember. We did not have the means to buy toys. There were other things that were more important.
DG: Do you see your childhood as much different from your children’s?
GB: Yes. They have more opportunities and more leisure time. More toys their life is much better than their parents.
DG: Have you noticed any change in family size in the Chinese community?
GB: No. It has decreased. Before the larger the family the better to help in the stores. Now there is no need like the European people. Besides it costs too much money to raise the large familiew.
DG: What kind of problems do you think Chinese coming to Houston now can expect to encounter?
GB: Probably not too many problems in Houston. The young people can be assimilated and make a living but if the older ones come for example in their 50’s will have more problems
DG: What different and new problems do you think the boat people could expect to encounter?
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GB: Well the boat people were a group a different group and classification. They are refugees. They would have problems finding jobs. The problem is they see other have jobs and nice cars. They would be envious of these people.
[0:42:17.7] DG: Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?
GB: Well I’m glad that you’re getting a history together. I think that it’s important that some of these things are put down on paper and help the people to understand each other and they will contribute in many ways now and also in the future.
DG: Well I would like to ask you something about the Chinese Baptist Church. When you came to Houston in 1948, was there a Chinese Baptist Mission?
GB: Yes there was but it was not called a mission it was a Sunday School. It was at the First Baptist Church on the second or third floor. It was a Sunday School for Chinese young people. Later they started a mission and that later became the Chinese Baptist Church. DG: Do you remember when the Mission was started? I Guess about 1948 DG: No, No I do not mean that but when did they move away to a separate building to become a mission of the first Baptist church.
GB: I do not remember. DG: Well when did they become a separate church? GB: well about 15 years ago(ie 1965) DG: Who was the first pastor of the Chinese Baptist Church? GB: Oh Oh Reverend Travis Key. DG: Well how long would you say he served. Maybe about 7 years. Well who then became pastor? My member gets to be hazy we had interim pastors. DG: Rev Lok Tin Cheung is pastor now. Do you remember when he first came? He celebrated his 15th year. Well do you know when they moved to the new location? About two years ago. DG: When you first came to the Chinese Sunday School can you tell me how many people attended? Oh about 25-30, How many in 1953? About 200 or so? And now about 1000-1400 but not that many attend. Are the service in English?
Before it was bi-lingual but now we have two services.
Do you suggest any other prominent, respected Chinese in Houston we should get on tape for our oral history study?
GB: Well no I do not know of any because there are few that have been here as long as I. You have been here as long as me and can select those to interview.
DG: Thank you very much Mr. Bo-Linn I enjoyed the interview.