Interview Transcript:

Key:
WC: Wei-Gwo Chen
WX: Willie Xu
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?): preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

WX: What we definitely like to find out about is your experience coming to the United States. So first I’d like to talk a little about what were you like before the United States—your pre-immigration experiences. Now, from the information you filled out, I see that you moved around a lot in China, and you grew up in a time in China that—I imagine—my parents tell me that there were—it was kind of a chaotic era. Would that be a good way to describe the time?

WC: Well, any person to pay some attention, and especially my generation was the Chinese and even including your generation and you know—ever since the 1840—the Opium Wars, China being subject to lots of chaotic mishappens. And both my parents—they were in the—in the—I say in the early 19th century, yes, they were studying in Beijing, and indirectly involved with the revolution, and just about every Chinese have that experience.

WX: You’re talking about the Qinghai revolution [realizes he got the name wrong]—or the Xinhai revolution?

WC: After that.

WX: After that?

WC: Yes. Between the Xinhai—that’s 1911—and to 1949, that’s quite a few years there. That few years, China was really chaotic.

WX: Right.
WC: There’s no government, per se. Nobody really ruled the whole thing. So in additional to the Japanese, and so on, you know, so —

WX: What was it like in 1935, when you grew up in Beijing?

WC: 1935—I was born in Beijing, and that was, as I said, a revolution time, and both my parents involved. But pretty soon the 九一八 [‘September 18th, i.e. the Mukden Incident of 1931’], you know, the Japanese, take the Northeast. We were northeast. So they have to give up and go back, because no money, no financial support anymore. And, so we went back—I stayed only in Beijing two years, and later on my father went to Heilongjiang—now is Heilongjiang—the Shuangcheng—about 50 kilometers from Harbin. And he was by training, and in agriculture, and so he could become a teacher in a agricultural—it’s a provincial—it’s a vocational school, you know, it’s equivalent to high school.

WX: Ok. And what year was this in?

WC: That was—that should be—should be—should be somewhere in the late 30’s—you know, in the late 30’s. But anyways, but—ever since the Japanese started the war on China, I actually encouraged the Chinese to really have a deep thinking, you know. And we should stop our own fight, and united to against the foreigners, and rather than keep killing ourselves, and therefore—you know at that time of course, 2 centers, one in Yan’an, one in Chongqing, huh?

WX: Yes, and then—and Jiang Jieshi was—he just did not want to cooperate with —

WC: Well, whoever was, I mean, all the other areas—you know, we were literally in the Japanese occupied area. And anybody with some sense—with some responsibility or awareness, and then they trying to noncooperative to begin with, and then trying to—either you can go to Chongqing, or you can go to Yan’an. But that’s roughly speaking, and so my father’s school—literally, from I think from ’35, ’36, ’37 to ’40—to 1940, about 3, 4 years—literally depleted. You know? The people, the students, teachers, and just—run away—you know? Run away from the Manzhouguo —

WX: Oh, from the Japanese—that was the puppet state.

WC: Right.

WX: Manzhouguo.

WC: So, my father went away first. I remember every night, and you know, under the—the 那个大被子 [‘that large bedsheets ‘]—listen to the radio, you know, broadcasting from Chongqing or anywhere, or Yan’an, or what.

WX: Oh, so you covered yourself so that no one else could hear what you were listening to.
WC: Right. Because, hey, the Japanese, they don’t want you to do that. [chuckles] You know? But anyway, so their school stopped. The people disappeared. Running, and so—my dad went too. So. But anyway, he went to Shanghai, and before all of us, and he was staying there and waiting for us to meet him and then decided where to go.

WX: Why didn’t you go with your father?

WC: You cannot. You know? That’s the Japanese controlled. You not allowed to —

WX: So it was your mother and you?

WC: Oh yes, yes.

WX: Did you have your other siblings there at the time?

WC: Yes. We have four. But anyways, 1940, finally he was in Shanghai, and then we decided we are going too.

WX: To Shanghai.

WC: To Shanghai, yes. And it took a long time. You kind of getting out of the country, you know? You need permit and this and that, and—very difficult.

WX: Getting out of Manzhouguo?

WC: Manzhouguo, yes.

WX: Really? I’m surprised that they allowed people to actually move out of the country, since they were fighting, weren’t they?

WC: Manzhouguo is Northeast—only 东北 [‘Northeast’: referring to that region of China], you know? Only that part. And that part, of course, they controlled. And yet —

WX: Oh—the Japanese stilled controlled Shanghai at the time.

WC: Later—they controlled the Shanghai. But in reality, the Japanese never really totally controlled China.

WX: Right, of course. They only controlled up to, you know, Beijing, and then got —

WC: No, a few points, a few spots.

WX: Well, they controlled the cities, right?

WC: Right—a few cities —
WX: But the countryside was very —

WC: Right. Even the city, they are not really totally controlled. And why I say that is because—so we are—1940 we went to—went to, from Shuangcheng and went to Dalian, at Dalian to—boarding a liner—an ocean liner, and then we already departed, you know, then 5 minutes later come back again.

WX: Oh?

WC: Because the Pearl Harbor —

WX: Oh!

WC: So this is 1941—this is on —

WX: Pearl Harbor happened. The Japanese invading the—you know, so they declared a war, so the World War II started. And so we have to go back, you know, deboarding again, and you know, and then find other ways—it’s difficult, that was kind of like a refugee, and —

WC: You got to—you moved to Shanghai eventually,

WX: So this time it was your mother and you and your siblings who —

WC: We all together. And then in Shanghai, and then, ok—you cannot move anymore, you know? Too many people, and difficult. You cannot go to the—that time the—the Communists actually is the 新四军，在苏北 ['the New Fourth Army, in Northern Jiangsu Province'], You know?

WX: The New Fourth Army?

[0:10:00]

WC: 所以新四军—那是一个 —

一个基地，和这个福建这边啊，这是另外又是一个基地。所以说，这个，这个 ['Therefore the New Fourth Army—that was a base of operations, and Fujian province over here, that was another base of operations. So, this, this ']—The communists’ side actually have—area-wise, is much bigger, but the city-wise—you know, not in the city. But anyways, because of the—my father’s teaching in that school, and the students all come out—so in a way, we in Shanghai—our family becomes a center, a reception center for all those students.

WX: Oh, really? Ok.

WC: And those students—boy, I vividly remember all this, and quite a few of them coming.

WX: Do you remember what the school was called?
WC: 双城 高级。它叫做双城高级职业学校。[Not sure about some of the characters. ‘The Shuangcheng ‘Something’ Advanced Agricultural School’]

WX: Oh, so it was like an agriculture school.

WC: 我在那里——我在1984年，是的。我去看了看，因为我很清楚他们很小，是的。但是无论如何，那是——然后我们在上海。在上海，我们非常穷，生活非常艰难，但仍然有很多学生来，而且——

WX: What did you do in Shanghai? Were you —

WC: Studying.

WX: You still went to school at that time?

WC: Still went to school, you know? That's elementary school.

WX: Then what did your parents do in Shanghai?

WC: All kinds of odd jobs. But anyway, we survived, and relatively speaking, because the—lots of 那个苏北的难民—好多逃难的啊，一下发生了一下打仗了的 [‘those refugees from Northern Jiangsu—lots of refugees, all of a sudden so many from the war appeared’]—I saw so many, and in Shanghai—the alleys, and you know, my backdoor, you know, backdoor outside is the big trashcan, pile of trash—every winter, you know, in the winter time, in the morning you open up the backdoor and see a couple of infants—you know, died. You know, kids that were just dumped there.

WX: Wow, I see.

WC: So I saw the very sad things and all those students too—they come to our place—we don’t have that much money, that food, you know? We just some soup, 稀饭——

带我们这儿来喝喝 稀饭, [‘rice gruel, take them here to have some rice gruel’] ok? But, it’s a center here, and because they all after the teacher, and so, all those patriotic ideas and thoughts and talk about that, that’s why I grow up in that kind of environment.

WX: You mean patriotic as in towards China.

WC: Right. Towards China, Chinese, 中华民族 [‘The Chinese People’].

WX: Now did your parents run a soup kitchen for —

WC: It’s not a soup kitchen, per se. Just because we have a roof. We have a place. So they come along, and all kinds of arrangements. I can go details, and then we can’t finish this whole thing,
but anyways, in our place becomes a center, sort of like—and later on, during this—right before the ’49, and those students—they couldn’t stay there as refugees for long, you know? What do they do? They are all the high school age. Yes? So lots of them went back across the Yangtze River and went to 新四军 ['New Fourth Army'], you know? They all joined the 新四军 ['New Fourth Army'].

WX: They joined the army.

WC: They joined the army, you know. And when joined —

WX: After the Japanese left? Or before?

WC: No, even before. Oh yes, because the guerillas activities.

WX: Oh, so even though the—I see, it was in Shanghai.

WC: In other words, there is no clear line—where is the fire line? You know? And—so they went back, and the others ones couldn’t do that far away, or don’t dare to, ok, join that 伪政权 ['False government'], you know, the Japanese set up a puppet government, too.

WX: Oh, the Wangjingwei [Government].

WC: Right. And so they set up—they have a navy school—lots of them went in there, and just for the—一碗饭 ['a meal'], ok?

WX: Just so you could have something to eat.

WC: You can survive, ok? That’s all. And so all these things, it’s so vivid in my mind. And I watch this whole thing —

WX: And how old were you—you were a boy at this time?

WC: That was—you know, my elementary school years, 6 years, from ’41 to ’47. ’48 we went to Taiwan.

WX: Yes, now you say you went to Taiwan. Was that because the—Shanghai was being

WC: No, it’s not because of that.

WX: Ok.

WC: We leave—we left Shanghai earlier. Why? Because hey, to begin with, you are the Northerners in the South. That’s already odd, right?

WX: Right.
WC: Yes. You don’t have a friend, don’t have connections. It’s hard to live. You know, but in here, nowadays when you grow up here, you don’t feel that, I think.

WX: Yes, yes.

WC: But in that time, that is time. So we have no routes, no nothing. And then in Shanghai, what are you going to do? And then ok, the Japanese surrenders, ok—the Taiwan coming back, Taiwan is opportunity. So, those—in the navy, they all come out, they all turned into the customs—海关—海关学校，变成海关学校。海关有揭私庭，就是 [‘Customs—the Customs Service Academy—they turned into the Customs Service Academy. The Customs Patrol had Anti-Smuggling Patrol Boats, like ’]—kind of like a coast guard—but it’s 专门抓这个走私货的 [‘their mission was to catch smugglers’]—embargo—走私—走私叫什么呢？还不是 embargo 呢。走私，这个这个 [‘Smuggling—how do you say smuggling? It’s not embargo. Smuggling, this, this...’] —

WX: Is this a specific type of good? Zou si?

WC: Any kind of good. At that time any type of good—don’t allowed, but yet you do it.

WX: Oh, this is like kind of smuggling?

WC: Smuggling, ok? The Customs service had an anti-smuggling unit.

WX: So, they had boats —

WC: Along the coast, right. They got some weapons, too. So this whole—quite a few students joined that one. And as I said, some of them went back. But anyways, yes, the Japanese surrendered, and what are you going to do still is a problem, right? I mean, Shanghai and the Chiang Kai-shek come back—you know, with Americans’ help and this and that, to but—the civil war started in a hurry, you know? So, you still, you still have a whole—yes—you never can go back. So what are you going to do? So you need to find opportunity. Taiwan just come back, and brand new, sort of a—and so my grandfather then—they have a—they making the cigarettes, you know—they are making the cigarettes, so they try to set up a plant, making the cigarette paper in Taiwan. They send my father to Taiwan to handle that whole thing, and why send him? Because he knows Japanese, you know? He was teaching in that school for 4 years, you know? He knows Japanese and Taiwanese speak Japanese at that time.

WX: Right, they were a colony.

WC: Right. And Taiwan has timbers—lots of wood. That’s pulp—making pulp —

WX: So your grandfather sent your father to Taiwan.
WC: My grandfather is a businessman. He’s—you know, that story too long. He deals with Russians, he deals with the British, and the Americans, and you know, in cigarette business. Cigarette trade. And eventually, they make the cigarettes manufacture in China, and at the beginning, just the agent for the foreigner tobacco company, but later on, they manufacture. And 50 percent of that enterprise is actually Hong Kong tobacco. If you in— if you from China, your father must know. That—改革开放刚开始的时候，很多这些— 这个这个—很多这些走私的香烟啊，什么—都是在香港做的。都是英国公司，美国公司做的。但是那个公司做的那些呢，那些都是上海当年搬过去的。[‘When the Chinese Economic Reforms started, many of these—many of these smuggled tobacco products—those were all produced in Hong Kong, all by British companies, by American companies. But the ones produced by that company, those were all moved over from Shanghai.’]

So, anyways, that’s my—and—所以，我们到台湾去，是去找机会去的。[‘Therefore, we went to Taiwan for the purpose of finding opportunities.’]

[0:20:00]

[We have a brief conversation about keeping the interview in English]

WC: But anyways, so we went to Taiwan—it’s not because of the political upheavals. We—my family has nothing to do with the government—nothing. And the most was in, we say, is business. You know? But, you know, went to Taiwan, that’s a totally new world, you know? So, we in Taiwan, and I started the middle school and high school and college.

WX: You were in Taipei?

WC: Taipei. And so, later on, of course, in ’49, a whole bunch are coming. Totally the migrate to Taiwan—about 2 million.

WX: Oh ok, the people who were escaping from the communists.

WC: Right. And Taiwan at that time, originally had about 4 million people, and then all of a sudden added 2 million, you know—6 million. And to this day, of course, Taiwan talk about is 23 million. And the 外省人 [‘outsiders,’ literally people from outside the province], so called the 外省人—we were the 外省人 part. Doesn’t matter you have connection with the government or not, you know, the local people always against the foreigner or the outsider, you know? So the—that antagonism later on, especially because the Guomindang played it very unfairly—you know, in practice, and therefore hurt the feelings, so to speak. And that while until today, even, you know?

WX: I know there were some incidents after the Guomindang took power in Taiwan.
WC: Until this day—still, you know, the 民进党 [Democratic Progressive Party] wants independent and this and that, and why? It’s because they’ve been mistreated at the beginning. That’s all it is. But, on the other hand, the outsiders, all the 外省人, like us; we never really treated Taiwan as our home.

WX: Really?

WC: Right? Because you from outside. You coming there, right? And the early 60’s, late 50’s, and Taiwan become stabilized a little bit. And the only choice for any ambitious young man is to going out.

WX: Out of Taiwan?

WC: Out of Taiwan, yeah. But you can’t go back to China, you know? Where are you going to do? Go to the states.

WX: I see. So you came to Taiwan because—for economic reasons, and your family —

WC: Not even—yes, economic, finding opportunities—to survive.

WX: And did your mother and your other siblings also go with you?

WC: Oh yes.

WX: Ok, so your whole family did go to Taiwan, and so you say when you went there, you—eventually you discovered that —

WC: It’s not me discovered that—that generation’s the situation, yes. You know, Taiwan is so small, what are you going to do? You have a minority 2 million trying to control the 4 million, and then total is 6 million, and opportunity is limited. So even the government promoting this, starting from the late ’50’s, every year we have a general test—留学考试 [‘Examination for Study Abroad’].

WX: To go study abroad.

WC: To study abroad, ok—that’s all the college graduates. You first have to finish your military service. We all finished the 18 months military service.

WX: Which college did you go to? What did you study?

WC: Mechanical Engineer.

WX: Oh, in Taiwan.
WC: Right, in Taiwan you know. And then, that’s the only way, you know? So, when you say, you know, you migrating here—we are not really migrant. We come here to study, you know? But, as I said, we—the group, don’t consider Taiwan as our home. And therefore, if you studied here, and you gradually you got a degree, you know, U.S. at the early 60s—America is expanding, so lots of opportunities. And so, as long as you have a local degree, the U.S. wanted you to stay, okay? So we are very easily stayed here—you know, go back to where, you know? We have nowhere to go.

WX: So, what was the process of coming to the U.S. like for you? Were—you say that you came here on a student visa, right? So how hard was it to try to get to the U.S. at that time and in that environment—applying for the visa and everything?

WC: Well—well, that’s—now you’re thinking back, yes, lots of competition…

[Audio cuts out]

…but it’s not that hardship, especially after—you know, you got in here, of course, at that time the dollar-wise—it was a 40 dollar to 1—you know, 40 dollar Taiwan money equivalent to 1 dollar U.S. dollar. So, the parity is huge, you know? And here, everything’s very expensive. What are we going to do? So, the U.S. government put on a—say a, ‘Yes, you student, I welcome you, I need you, you know? But, everyone coming here need 25—2,400 dollars guaranteed money.

WX: Ok. You have to prove that before they would give you the entry.

WC: Yes, they going to give you the visa. Of course you have to prove you are healthy, and this and that, and the Chinese come, and the Taiwan government— ‘Ok, you have to pass the exam, and you have to [trails off].’ So, from late ’50s until middle ’70s—a little bit less than 20 years this is the normal way—right way, you know? Come here—total all together about 30 to 40 thousand good students—very even. And, we come here, that is why in the 80’s and 70’s and even in now, why every American university, big company, research groups, have all the Chinese. And professors and researchers—that’s a big contributor there. Ok—that’s 30 to 40 thousand. 30 to 40 thousand, actually only say 20% about succeeded—considered as succeeded. Successful. The standard I used is like I say, within 10 years, you got your degree, you got married, you find a job, you know? Maybe even you got a house and so on—and also, you still in you’re studying whatever the major—in your discipline.

WX: Now where did you—

[0:30:00]

WC: I consider this as successful. About 50%. So, in other words, 40 some thousand, and then down to 20 thousand. And then this 20 thousand end up with the professors, researchers, and you know? But, you are the first generation here, and you know—you need to double smart and triple effort, and that—we took that as a no complaint, you know, you just have to go through all these things. And yes, the hardship is, very few of us have—the government has no support. The
government means the Chinese government, or Taiwan government. They support about 10 each year—those are the super, super ones. They eventually went back. But the 99% actually stayed here. Very few went back—because Taiwan—no place to put all this. And so you know—U.S. at that time expanding anyway, and so 99% or 98% all stayed, all left here. And yes, you will have some hardship, by working in the summer, by doing some odd jobs—busboy to the library—you know, chauffeur, you know all kinds of things, whatever you do—and if you majored in science and engineering, and especially in science, you maybe have a better chance to—you know, working as a teaching assistant, or grader, you know? Grading papers and taking care of the labs—freshman labs, and so on. That’s what I did.

WX: Could you talk about where you first came to the U.S.? What was your port of entry and where did you study?

WC: The port of entry of that time—that’s kind of funny. You know, at Taiwan at that time, we studied English at the— I mean, especially, in Shanghai, we already—3rd grade we studied English, you know? And in Taiwan always and also in college all the textbooks all in English. But, the first thing I come here—I arrived 1964, February 17th in L.A. —

WX: On a ship?

WC: Not a ship—I’m flying, I flew in. And then the first the porter and the, you know, trying to got your luggage—ohh, I don’t understand what he’s talking about. [both laugh] And then, in two weeks, whatever the 2,400 dollars, you know, because all borrowed, ok? We just borrowed it—we sent it back. And all—another student needed it. You know? We started working. The first job I got—busboy—I worked 8 months on two jobs every day —

WX: In L.A. or in Houston?

WC: In L.A., yes. Dishwasher, and [chuckles] the server boy —

WX: What was the place? A restaurant?

WC: I mean, the U.S.C, the University of Southern California cafeteria. And a bowling alley.

WX: And you were studying at the same time.

WC: No, at the time, no study. Come here just work. Work eight months, make something like 7 or 800 dollars. And then I have another friend—we got about 30 some friends, you know? We all the same situation.

WX: Did you come together?

WC: No, no, no, we all converged around U.S.C there. And they all coming—some on boats, some from flights, and we all converged there, and referred each other, and where is the job—and you know, in the porter in the hotel, and all this and that, you know? Yes, even some sowing
shops making some clothes. We do all these things. Any kind of job. And at that time, I actually—the University of Missouri and U.S.C—I got two admission there.

WX: So you had to come to the United States in order apply for —

WC: No, yes I applied in Taipei, but don’t give you special—don’t give you any financial aid, what are you going to do?

WX: Oh, so you had to first make money before you can start studying.

WC: Right, make money to start. And then make money is not enough. So you still want to have some kind of assistantship. And so, you working, and then apply again. But U.S.C don’t give me any assistant—just the W-20. And —

WX: So you said you did chemical engineering in Taiwan, and then you came here to get a Masters”?

WC: Yes. But in Taiwan I already—I worked two years and nine months at the Taiwan fertilizer plant. I’m on shift engineering, and it turns out that that two years and nine months very useful—very good.

WX: Why was it useful?

WC: Well, you know, later on in here, later on my work, you know, and that plant is the most modern plant. We making the urea from coal—from coal converting all the way to urea. That process at that time is the top in the world. And is U.S. aid to Taiwan. And Iwas lucky enough and—you know, of course after test again, to be hired in that plant. And because of this is the first one—high pressure, high temperature, continuous operation—that’s the first one in Taiwan, therefore all kinds of trouble—we cannot start them, and the American contractor screwed it up, and designed it wrong, and then once we started we never can reach the designed capacity, and so we find—that two years and nine months we toured the plant 3, 4 times, you know, tore them all up and then I tried to find the problem, and then eventually we find the problem, but in the meantime you see all those on and off, on and off, just new college graduate and you are young, you know? You have lots of energy, so learn a lot. I say that’s—but, once you got here, you have to start from the ground level!

WX: Yes, you have to become busboy.

WC: Yes, I mean a busboy and a server boy, you know?

WX: How did you deal with that? That must have been a very big change from you going from working as an engineer —

WC: But you see, at that time the mentality was different, you know? Because we know it. We know it—you have to do it. There is no alternative.
WX: What did you think about when you decided to come to the U.S.? What was your vision of the life that you had after you moved to the U.S. and studied?

WC: Ok, the real reason is Taiwan has no opportunity for you—no future.

WX: Even though you were—but you working at —

WC: Yes I was working—in a way that’s pretty good. But on the other hand—hey, everyone is leaving! You know, why you stay, you know what I mean?

WX: Oh, ok. I see.

WC: 人浮于事。[More hands than needed (idiom); too many cooks spoil the broth] You know? Your future, you know? Of course, now if I now—I’m thinking back. I could have stayed, and actually I can make out much better than I am now, you know? Because a few of my—at that time the most good ones—gone.

WX: That’s really funny because my father says the same thing about if maybe if some of him—or people had stayed in China like him, they would actually —

WC: They stayed there and they end up with much better—you know? Your father’s one have a little bit different from us. Your father’s one, at least, you know, you still have a country, you still have a family there —

WX: In China.

WC: We don’t. Yes, we don’t, you see? In Taiwan, even migrating to Taiwan, you have nothing to do with Taiwan. Taiwan people even don’t like you, you know? So, they’re very—this is just because the—the big environment different, you know? 大的气候啊，不一样啊—

主导了一些的这些趣事。[ ‘The environment and situation was not different—that was the cause of these interesting times.’ ] So, you see, the—we come here, we know it’s tough, and yet we wanted to come, to prove ourselves. And, just like all I said, you need double smart, and triple effort. You only can get even, maybe.

WX: Oh, just to get even?

WC: Right? And there’s a glass ceiling there. I mean and you can never go through that, especially for the first generation. Because your value—your standards—you mindset—you cannot change it so much, you see. And that is why, in America, it’s the second generation and the third generation actually performed the best.

WX: Yes—because you were talking about the second and third generations, we can understand culture better—we have better maybe—our language isn’t such a —

[0:40:00]
WC: Right, and yet you still have that immigrants—the spirit—or the inference from your family. And you need to do working hard, you need to be you know, working hard, aiming high, and be always be humble, and then, and only then, you can make it here. Ok? America—in a way, give you more opportunities. America is young. It’s a young country, it’s open, much more open than any country. And especially—the East Asia countries—so long the history there—the history becomes a burden, you know. The feudal thinking—

WX: You mean, tradition.

WC: Right, the tradition becomes a burden in many ways. Because it hinders the change, you know, it don’t want to change that.

WX: Did you feel that when you were a first generation immigrant here? Did you feel that you know, you were very different from the country that you’re in, and you felt like—is that something you felt that you—you were very different, you couldn’t change?

WC: Well, it’s a—it is different. But when you were first coming at that time, you really don’t have time to think all these things. You just—hey—becomes a machine in a way. [chuckles]

WX: You mean you just do a job—

WC: And gradually, gradually, and yet, hey you are not dummy, and you are the college graduates, you are the top of the grade, and then what? Then you started thinking back—you thinking back where you’re from, and why I’m here, and all this and that—that is why we become so involved with the when China started. See, I’m coming here in 1964, and in 1965 China exploded the first atomic bomb. And then all of a sudden—oh golly! There is hope for China! Because China was chaotic for so long! It doesn’t matter you are how good, you are how loyal or you are unloyal or you are traitor or what—doesn’t matter. Even you don’t have your fundamentals, what are you going to do? It’s a desperate situation, you see? And otherwise, you won’t become a refugee, or you know. But just like I said, you see the—when I left—my wife left in ’62, Taiwan. Taiwan actually until 1967, 68, they started this economic takeoff, you know? And then the real changes come in. In other words, if I stayed in Taiwan for another 5 years, I may end up with not coming. You know, not going out.

WX: Right. But you didn’t, you had no way of knowing that.

WC: Right. But you see, the society is a—even economic—yes, you have this model, that model. But they are all dynamic! The human society is dynamic, is moving, is changing all the time. You know—so that is why I say the right people, right timing, and then you can make a difference. It’s timing. Right people, right time, and right situation, but if you miss the timing, miss the—doesn’t matter how smart or how dumb—it don’t make sense. [chuckles]

WX: Well, that’s—

WC: Do you understand?
WX: Yes, I understand.

WC: Yes, you are the smart one, the coming generation, you know. And now you do these things—actually, it’s you already trying you know to thinking back, trying to helping, trying to realize—this is great. This will prepare you, you know. And when we at that time —

WX: You said you—you said that you had to just do your job, you couldn’t really think about where you had come from, and what your situation was.

WC: Yes, because you see—at that time—in L.A. we started as a—we were about 30 some people all together. Later, after 1 semester and 1 summer, that’s 8 months I worked. After that, we needed to make a decision, you know? You either go to school, or you started the education in L.A., you know? U.S.C admitted me, but they don’t give you financial aid. LSU give you the teaching assistant.

WX: Louisiana?

WC: Right. 90 dollars a month. And I said I go. That’s why I went to Louisiana. Went to Louisiana LSU at that time—I was in the newer campus in the New Orleans. Even in Baton Rouge, it’s more than 20,000 student body—only 50 foreigners, foreign students.

WX: Yes, especially Louisiana, I can imagine.

WC: Right, and the Chinese—all together—from Hong Kongs and Taiwans all added together something like 10, 8 or 10, you know. That’s all. And the early years, you don’t have so many, so many—oriental or Asian flavor. You know. And so—I ended up in the South, and I said, ‘ok, to study.’ And because of I wanted that teaching assistantship—engineering they don’t give you teaching assistant—chemistry give you. Science they do. So, change major—this is just, you know, be very practical, and because you need to survive, what are you going to do?

WX: Right—so you were—this is for your masters, right? And, you also you said your wife was also with you at the time.

WC: Well my wife I only met her in LSU. She was in L.A. and the same thing, but I didn’t know her. But Taiwan’s pretty small, and then we met and then I talk about it—‘oh you know who, you know who, and then we all each other.’ [WX chuckles] And she’s—her situation even worse than me, but anyway, you know, we all—that’s over now, but anyway, we work hard, and to fit the situation, and America is new, it’s young, and America needs people, and so as long as you’re honest and working hard, aiming high, and be humble, ok—that’s my motto.

WX: And that’s the American Dream.

WC: Right, and then you can make it. You know? You. Can. Make it. So the—I say my group, even this morning, you know, our taiji group, we got almost a hundred some people—
everywhere, you know all the Chinese, and most of them are all retired. 50 percent are all Ph.D.’s, you know, retired. And by the way, I did not get my Ph.D.

WX: Right. You said you did all the research, but —

WC: I did all the research, I did—I studied it all the way to 80’s, you know, and in other words, what I find later is the— you keep—you need to keep learning, you know. It’s all life—it’s a lifelong process.

WX: Education.

WC: Right. My first job here is the—is in polymers. And I never had any polymer experience before.

WX: This is in Houston?

WC: In Houston, yes. So I needed to study, yes. So I go to U,H., the night school, yes? So every day, and —

WX: And what year was this in?

WC: Oh—1968—all the way to ‘81, to 1981. Always study, and I working, and two jobs— because my wife works too, you know. And have a kids, and a house, and a cars, and you know, and I never had a weekend.

WX: Wow. And can I ask you when did you and your wife get married? In LSU?

WC: Yes.

WX: Ok. So a few years before you came to Houston.

[0:50:00]

WC: Yes, and from LSU I went to West Virginia for 9 months. There’s a research program there. And I was hoping that part can maybe work out toward the Ph.D., and didn’t work out, and I said come on, and I started working.

WX: Did you have a vision or kind of a hope for what you wanted to do after you finished your college? What was your plan at time, for like having a family, or having a career? Could you talk about that at that time?

WC: Career wise, I think I’m—I say pretty fortunate in a way, and I—you know, every—the formal job—the real job I started in 1968. Until 1996. That’s my professional—30 some years, always in chemistry and chemical engineer. Most of them are chemical engineering work. Kind of like backwards integration from polymer all the way to the wellhead, you know? So the wellhead means the oilfield engineering, and my first job as fertilizer, that’s from coal, you
know? So I never left my field. And that is why the—especially the late—most the—in America, I was working with Fluor-Daniel, and that’s engineering firm. And engineering firm, and more diversified, because different project, and you need to adjusting and learning, and so, in other words, you always under challenge. And so, I’m a very practical type of person, and I don’t believe too much bullshit, and [both chuckle] I need one plus one equal to two —

WX: I see, as an engineer.

WC: Kind of stubborn and stupid, you know—square, huh? So the —

WX: Were you one of the first kind of Asian Americans who were in your company? Was that kind of the work environment at that time?

WC: Ok, Fluor at that time, in the process department we have another one guy, and he actually from Shanghai in ’47. He came to the United States as a middle-schooler. That’s different, you see. And with—his name’s Bob [?]. He’s passed away now. His father is—if he is white is what, he should be the chief in NASA, you know. The American the astronaut—the clothes—that equipment, that’s all his design, his group. He’s a pretty famous one, you know, And Bob is him, and his brother I think is in [?]. His brother-in-law, Dr. Wei, in MIT Chem. E. Department Head, you know, at that time. And so, the first, as I said, again, you know the first generation, especially the Chinese, almost 99% is in technical fields, is doing the fundamentals. Relatively few—this is only recently, it went up to become department head, or CEO, or some things. And, so in many ways, we have—we’ve been pretty fair to the society —

WX: Oh, yes? You feel like—it’s been—society has been pretty fair to you when you came here with your family?

WC: Yes, in both ways. It works both ways, you know. And we feel pretty fair to this society too. Because we contributed our best years, our most efforts, you know? We never lazy, we never run away from tax or responsibility, you know? And you know, along the same line, we produced the two best kids. And they did it fine too. And so I’m not saying me—I’m saying this—my group—this generation.

WX: You’re saying that your generation of Chinese [trails off].

WC: We did fairly…

WX: You felt like you contributed a lot to this country—you felt like you honestly did.

WC: Yes, we honestly took advantage of the society too, right? They provided opportunity to us. You know, so it works both ways. And so, I—I think the, you know, I mentioned a little bit when we saw China as coming, and we feel proud, and all those things, that’s just natural, you know? Because first generation, especially, you cannot forgot your—where you’re coming from. And it’s logical, and that is why me and my family and my group of people—we got a whole group, we belong to this NACA—you know, National Chinese American Association, and we were pushing for the U.S.-China normalization, and you know. And we were the awareness group,
you can call that. But of course, in the early years, the U.S. government, or the right wingers—they even don’t trust us, you know? Oh yes—the FBI check on us, you know, and every time you paid a visit to China, you come back, you know, they want an interview with you, you know.

WX: Wait, was this in the 70s or 60s?

WC: Eighties

WX: Eighties, ok. Because this is kind of before the Chinese economic reforms.

WC: No, it’s already started.

WX: Because now they wouldn’t do that right?

WC: Oh, still do that. Yes, depends on why—you be careful, you know! In other words—this kind of competition—ok—I consider this normal, you know. In other words, if you play fair, it should not be any of those animosities, right? And so, the—if you have a crooked mind, you trying to do something evil [chuckles], of course you have an action, you have a reaction. And then it becomes worse. That’s—I hope the next generation, you guys come in, and China and U.S. is on the opposite side of the globe, you know, and in many thinkings and many ways, this is their way, this way is that way—and so you say, who is right, who is wrong? No—there is no such thing as right and wrong. It’s different. It’s different, you know. So, with this kind of understanding, and I think U.S. and China really should be—should be good friends.

WX: Ok, so you think that—I see, you’re saying that it’s up to our generation.

WC: Right. It’s a continuous process, because it’s dynamic. It needs a constant effort toward it. But, in the meantime, the public needs to be educated. Or lots of people, they just don’t have the time or don’t have the will to try and understand it, even. You know, they think so limited, they satisfied. You know, they don’t care. But you have to care, nowadays. Everything’s so quick. It’s supposed to be what—2045, the computer even catch up on the brain.

WX: Ok. I know that —

WC: [chuckles] Right—it’s coming! We know that. So therefore. Because everything’s so quick, interconnected so intensely and so—everyone needs to be aware and anyone and everyone needs to be involved. And you cannot escape anymore.

WX: You’re talking about cultural understanding.

WC: Right, you cannot say it just isolating—hey, I live my own way, forget about it—that’s no way—no way you can do that anymore.

[Audio resumes]
WX: Now, that’s interesting because I imagine maybe when, during your time as an immigrant, you know, that was a time when the United States—there was not this type of cultural dialogue. I don’t know how well you were received in your society—how you felt you were received. Did you have—were you able to—did you have friends who were Americans in the early years? What was your life on campus?

[1:00:00]

WC: [sighs] Ok. One reason I left L.A.—in L.A., in U.S.C, University of Southern California, the Chinese—you cannot date a white girl. They don’t along with you.

WX: Yes, I can see that.

WC: But in the South, they play with us—you know, in the party together, we have no problem.

WX: Ok, I was surprised, because I would think in the South they would have a bigger problem.

WC: Right—you have it the other way—no, it’s not. [WX laughs] You know, so because物以稀为贵 [Highly valuable due to rarity (idiom)], ok? We are very few. Every one of us got scholarships, one way or another. And, of course, we behaved ourselves too. And so we were loved and cared of.

WX: By —

WC: By the community, by the school body.

WX: Oh really?

WC: Yes.

WX: You didn’t feel isolated from the school body?

WC: No, I did not feel isolated at all, you know? When I got married and you know, the church members, and you know they want to sponsor this and do that, and we have a hundred guests—whole majority is Americans.

WX: So, when you were here at —

WC: That was, you know, I didn’t expect that. You know, but of course, to follow up what your concern, your thinking there, is—later on, for instance now—if we have a party or what, I say—hey, 90% is Chinese rather than the Americans anymore. That really shows the cultural difference. Because after all, so many years, we trying to be Americanize, we trying to be, but yet, still there’s a difference. The values is different, you know. And yes, I even can tell you now—and—both my girls—I think you already that both of them are quite outstanding, quite good. Ok—they both are you know, the medical doctors, and but one married—a Jewish—her medical school classmate. You know—the other one—she went to Harvard, yes—she even more
excellent, more outstanding, and yet, she trying to find, she couldn’t find, and she wanted to, to marry or to have some Chinese boy —

WX: Oh, she wanted to marry someone who was Chinese?

WC: Yes. But—couldn’t find it! Finally—at thirty-three years old, still married a German descent—a New Yorker. Her age, her group. So, I end up with both of them married, you know, married—out of the —

WX: Out of the country, or out of the —

WC: Right, out of the culture, out of the inheritance, or what, you know? Now—you see, I blame them, or I blame myself—or I should I blame or I should happy or what? You can’t explain anything, you know? They are so smart, and yet finally they end up with this way, and if I have this Chinese, I should kill myself, right?

WX: That’s the tradition. [chuckles]

WC: How can I even couldn’t hold my own kids—my race!

WX: Control—controlled your own family.

WC: Yes. So—that’s a—but on the other hand you think about America—what is America? America is a melting pot, is a big mixer, you know. So, all you boil down to and finally what you can say? When they really wanted to marry them, and my first one, especially I was in Beijing and you know—call me long distance—she said, she wanted to do that. But I know the boy long time ago already—they’ve been go along for 10 years. And then I said, ‘Well, your decision.’ You know, I can’t dominate. And I prefer, I can say, but—you love her and he loves you, and what I can do?

WX: Now, that’s a very kind of—an American way to approach the problem.

WC: Yes, it’s an open way. In other words, it’s individualism, and also—individual reason, the most important part is you need to take responsibility for your actions. The same thing—you talk about freedom, you talk about democracy. If you don’t have a discipline, you don’t know what you’re doing there—you know, that’s chaos, that’s not democracy. [Repeatedly thumps table for emphasis] So you need discipline, you need self respect, and then you need respect to the others—only then you qualify for saying that the democracy. Yes—for say you want to go your own way, you have your own life and this and that. If you don’t have the responsibility, forget it.

And of course, we’ve been training them—I think pretty good. They fitted all right, they doing all right. They don’t bother us at all. [both chuckle] But—like you said, that’s American way, that’s not Chinese way. But yet, my first time I went back to China—1978. Very few people went back. I bring my whole family. So—my first girl when she was 10, my second girl when she was 4.
WX: Oh they went back to China at this time.

WC: They went back to China, that was the first time, yes. And then later on, they’ve been back and forth many times now. And I trying to make commitment to me, to myself, even now—every year, at least once, I went to China. I truly believe these two, you know, opposite countries got to be friends, got to be understand each other, got to be cooperating, and got to be mutually respect. And then, and only then, you can looking forward to the peaceful world, and prosperity, and—because—that—that’s my—my promise to yourself.

WX: So you feel like you’ve tried to see kind of the events of your life in this regard? Like, you talked about your daughters, and—do you feel like in a lot of other respects in your life you’ve tried to Americanize, or you tried to change your thinking?

WC: I’m not Americanizing or what, and in my mind I’m a Chinese, and legally I’m American. And as I said, we coming at the time America was expanding—they really need talented people, and so therefore, you know, like now, the Chinese trying to come here have the visa problems, have—all kinds of problems, at that time, we have minimum. And even come to here, you trying to become naturalizing and all these things—we almost automatically—we don’t have wait—we don’t have to hire lawyer. No, we do it just fill in with a form, in a line—that’s it. You know?

WX: As long as you had the money, right?

WC: No, it’s not the money—the 2,400, yes. But the money is actually is borrowed—

WX: [both laugh] from the people who are already in the U.S.—they send it.

WC: Well—I don’t know. But at that time—our group—I say, it’s this 40 some thousand, you know. 这个四，五万人啊—相当的整齐，相当的—相当的不错。[‘These 40, 50 thousand people—relatively orderly, relatively—relatively high quality.’] That actually changed the image of what is China and Chinese to Americans.

[1:10:00]

Because the America before—is what—is the railroad laborer—restaurants —

WX: Laundry —

WC: Laundry, and you know, coolies, low class, opium, pigtail—you know, those stereotypes. But in our group—no. In other words, during World War II, like qian 学生 [‘Something ??? students ’], and those, they have a small group—they were exchange students too, you know, 容闳，那个时候—庚子赔款—八国联军完了—这庚子赔款，有一大堆清华留学生，什么来—那一批也是很好，但是他们很少。人很少。[‘The time of Rong Hong (1828-1912, First Chinese student in the U.S.)—the Boxer Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship Program—after the Eight Nation Alliance (The Boxer rebellion)—this Scholarship
Program, there was this group of Qinghua study abroad students, these were also very good, but they were very few in number. The massive one is this late 50’s to middle 70’s. The
国民党，这一大批。

The Nationalists—this big group. But, I’m not Guomindang, we have nothing to do with the government. It’s the situation, it’s the environment different.

WX: Yes, it’s the when like when you said, the U.S. needed —

WC: Right, that is why when Deng Xiaoping in 1979 came here—we are the group receiving him, helping him. And he was open—you know, he said one advantage China has for the open up so relatively easy—so because China has an overseas national—a national treasury of people, yes? In masses all over the world—somewhere around 30 to 40 thousand, 30 to 40 million, you know, people—this is a treasury. And in the U.S., actually at that time less than 1 million Chinese nationals. At this time, I think it’s 3.8 million now, you know? And so, the situation is quite different now, and different time and different approaches needed, different people, different mentalities—hopefully, everything’s toward the better end.

WX: So you feel like your view of this situation has changed as you’ve been in the U.S.? How have you views of about your role in the United States and your view of the United States changed as you’ve been in the United States.

WC: Ok, this part maybe you don’t want to put it on here. [chuckles] I just come back from D.C. We have a group—it’s our—our junior middle school friends in Taiwan—we have a—
我是师大附中的。

[I’m an alumni of the Affiliated Senior High School of National Taiwan Normal University.]

WX: Oh, this is a reunion.

WC: In other words, it’s a subordinate middle school to the normal university in Taiwan. And this middle school is one of the top in Taiwan. And so the—our—you know, over 50 years already, we still have this reunion every year, you know? And to begin with, about 80 people only. And now we still have 20 to 30 people every time we are together. So therefore, why I’m saying that is we all are fundamentally in technical—professors and all this, and we all agreed in answering in question there—how we view the U.S. at this point. Number 1, first, we lived through the best part of America, you know, from the early 60’s you know, all the way. Now, of course, lots of people talk about America maybe it’s declining—or America is—you know, the future is dimmed, and this and that. But I think in lots of ways it’s because the other people is catching up.

WX: The world is catching up, you mean.

WC: The world is catching up. That part contributes more than say, America declining. America—not necessarily decline. It’s young, it’s more dynamic—the change so quick. You know? When Obama got elected that night, Yale—in Yale campus, in the dorm, they all coming out, raise the flag, sing the national anthem. Trying to say, hey, there’s a promise here. Another 30 years, and brand new America is coming. So, so lots of good people here, you know, those
excellent in—those do the good ones. Yes, whole bunch of junkies, lots of flunk out, and but—this society is polarizing, which is no good. But that’s the fact. In other wise, the good part, it’s so good, and the lousy part is so lousy—the danger is the middle class is disappearing.

WX: Yes. That’s what a lot of people are saying right now.

WC: Right. That is, as I see it, as more danger than anything else.

WX: So you feel like, when you were here, for example, you felt like you were part of that middle class, and you said you were here for the best years of America, and you—so that was the kind of middle class experience for you. Is that right?

WC: Now I thinking back—yes, I can say that. But as I say at the beginning, I always feel I’m the first generation. I have to working hard. I cannot live an easy life. I have to be double smart and triple effort, and I can only got equal.

WX: Do you feel that —

WC: I’m still feeling that.

WX: But do you feel like during the time when —

WC: But that’s ok, you see? You see what I mean? But I’m not feeling—say if I feel, ‘Hey I’m so great, I’m successful,’ then you lost your humble part. And then you lost yourself, the next thing going to be. And then you going to be in trouble. Because the society—I mean, the environment is changing. Because when you compare, and only then you will see the good and the bad and the ordinary. You see, you remember what I just said? Working hard, aiming high, and then be humble.

WX: Right, the humble part, that’s important.

WC: Otherwise, you will fail in here.

WX: You know, you talked about how you said you had to be double smart and triple—work triple hard, but then you do feel then that this society has treated you fairly. Just to be even—you have to be working that hard just to be even, and yet—?

WC: That’s all right, because I am an outsider—right? Why should I be treated like a king, or have some special privilege.

WX: But do you ever feel like you were —

WC: Discriminating, you mean?

WX: Yes, or barriers?
WC: Yes, barriers, and discrimination—yes, they do have it. Like say, when I’m working, you know, at the company, and you know, say they need a promotion or a performance review, you know they always can find a reason. What is the best reason to find fault on you? Your English no good.

WX: Oh…

WC: Ok—it’s very true. You know?

WX: Did that happen to you?

WC: Oh yes, it hurt you. But relatively speaking, and my English is not that bad, you know. When I giving seminars, and—at Fluor, we have a constant study and training program. Every senior engineer needed to give lectures, you know. And all those things I did ok. But still—hey—lots of those slacks and lots of those things and—we are not [?] with it—we don’t know, you see?

[1:20:00]

Like I say, 三个臭皮匠一个诸葛亮，啊。你懂不懂？ ['Three unskilled cobblers are superior to one Zhuge Liang,' (idiom, Zhuge Liang was a famous military strategist) do you understand? ]

WX: 我懂诸葛亮 —

WC: The equivalent, I say, like say—Monday morning—Monday morning, what the center—the football—the quarterback. The Monday morning quarterback. I mean—this kind of thing—I mean, we naturally is deficiency. You know? And how you going to complain, but like you say, at the moment, at that time, yes—I feel mistreated. I think I’m smart. I think I know that question. But I cannot explain it better than—you know?

WX: The —

WC: Right. Because those handicaps—they are handicaps, so once you start your thinking that way, or that’s after you’ve been beating down so many times, you realize, you have to admit it, because I said, you want to play fair, or at least I’m asking fair play, right? And also, in answering your question in another way—my first job here was in a smaller company. In a smaller company you have benefit. Because smaller company have very few people. And if you are smart enough, boy, anything and everything all turn up on you. So only first year I’m a little bit hard, and then the rest—the whole company depend on me. I’m become the technical guru —

WX: You mean you proved myself?

WC: Yes, I proved myself, yes. Otherwise, why they trust me, why they wanted me, you know? Why they keep promoting me, yes? And the—it’s all because as I thinking back now, because I
realized I’m the first generation, I need to be double smart, I need to be triple effort. And I need always thinking I’m in danger, rather than I can relax, and I can enjoy—no.

WX: I see, I understand what you’re saying.

WC: I always alert, keeping my alert. You see, my first assignment out of the country, assignment on my job, went to Greece. You know—the Greece is the first oilfield offshore. The company—nobody wants to go! Because too dangerous. The sulfur content over 50%. In other words, if in the U.S., that kind of field we never touch it even. You know? Sulfur in the form of H2S. H2S in 20 ppm going to make you faint. 50 ppm—parts per million, going to kill you.

WX: And so you had to—you were —

WC: No, not I had to—I volunteered. Because most people don’t want to that, you see? Hey, when you moving, there’s opportunities. If you stand there still [thumps table rapidly for emphasis], you lost that, you know. So, I think I can do it, they say dangerous, so what? You know, be careful, that’s all. So I took that assignment. And actually I performed very well. And those kind of—I just use that as one example. To do somebody didn’t want to do the thing. To take the challenges, you know, it’s unusual one, abnormal one. Do it.

WX: So, you—that’s how you approached your career.

WC: Yes.

WX: Do you feel that outside of your work though, did you feel you had to prove yourself in the community?

WC: All the time.

WX: Or to your neighbors, the people who you knew?

WC: That part—that part at the beginning, yes. Later on, I think that part have more to do with personality, rather than culture. And once you realize several of those key points, you know you realize you know, who you are and then you know kind of who he is, and then what? I’m devising a way to deal with you, you know, so it becomes a non-issue. And yes—once a while still coming up, because you look at my name—I’m insisting on using that name. I don’t want to put a ‘David’ and ‘John’ and ‘Bill’, and you know? I put—and therefore, there’s lots of time they say, ‘Ho, this guy just coming or what, right?’ You don’t know nothing, right? They try to take advantage me. That’s alright. You know, you do it, and I know it [laughs]! In other words, my approach—maybe that’s—my approach is: be honest, face it.

WX: Be honest and face it.

WC: Right—any kind of problem. You come in—you know, have an honest evaluation of the situation and understanding, and then I face the problem. I’m not escaping or run away from the problem.
WX: You’re saying that’s why you didn’t change your name—that’s the philosophy.

WC: Yes, that’s kind of—that kind of in a way like an attitude, or way of life, or way of approaching things, so therefore I, like the situation like you said it—you feel discriminated, you feel—yes, I do have those situations, but never really bothered me that much. Because as I see it, and then I face it. Even say—in the coworker, and working together. You know, after couple of times, and give you the performance review, and hey—sometimes becomes argument, you know becomes I don’t agree what you did, this and that. That’s all right. Open it up. Talk it over. And then, what’s the problem? Let’s try to solve it, if we can. If we don’t, ok, I’ll give you some time, you know? So—I think in answering your question, I think yes, we did facing all those, but I took a different approach. Rather than say I hate that and I get away from it, or I got scared, or go back home crying, or—no, I don’t do that. In other words, whatever the problem is, try to solve it. How to solve it? Face it. How to face it? Understand it? How to understand it? Study. Research. Dig out. When you’re doing the digging and searching and started with you, yourself. And then, put yourself in the other shoes. See why he do that. You know, in other words, try to cover as fair as possible. America is famous—it’s the fair play. Let’s do the fair way, right? And so I do this with the tax guy, I do this with the officials, I do this with the FBI guy, all my advisor, or my boss, or—and therefore you see, I end up with—I know it—say this is the CEO, big manager, those things—forget it, you know. The first generation, you have no way to getting that. Doesn’t matter how working hard you are. Especially like us—you don’t have capital. You don’t have your peer group, your support, your relatives, your connections—we don’t have all this.

WX: It’s not like how it would be in China.

[1:30:00]

WC: Right. We don’t. So face it. So what you’re going to do under the situation like this? See? And so, we just—you know, so, 好像什么—什么这个半夜鬼来了我也不怕，什么的啊。就说是，我自己—就是境内去 play fair, 啊？那我也不是不多求那一些不应该得的，是不是？我怕什么？所以—而且还有- 有的很多时候，那是[Almost like—some kind of ghosts come in the middle of the night, I’m still not afraid. So as to say, I just try to play fair, ok? And I also don’t keep wanting things that I shouldn’t get. What do I need to be afraid of? Thus, there are also many times, the... ] anything happen, I want to solve it right away—I’m not procrastinating. And of course, if you didn’t understand it—you did not do the research, you didn’t really think through, you know, you better really slow down, give it some time, right? Be a little bit patient. That’s also needed. So, I say, mostly, and to this point, I’m 76 years old already. And I say, just be fair. I mean, this society is—is ok. It’s not—it could be better, it could be worse. It could be worse.

WX: But you’re saying to just play it fair—that’s how you would approach things.

WC: Right. Play it fair and be honest, be reasonable, and I don’t see any problem. And I say, even now even now the immigration seems to become a big issue, you know? And hey, to begin
with, you have to respect that Spanish or that—Chicanos—that culture you have to understand. Their culture is—the national percentage in the Ph.D. is the Spanish population even lower or less than the blacks, you know. Very few. They have minimum Ph.D.’s, because their culture doesn’t ask for that. They don’t want you to keep pushing, pushing, pushing. They want to ‘fiesta’. They want to party, you know? And they got a C and a D, they already happy, because they didn’t flunk out. You know, my wife works for the University of St. Thomas for almost 40 years, and you know, she has all kinds of students. If it’s a Vietnamese or a Japanese, Korean, Chinese—A, A, A—everything A, you know. If it’s a [laughs] Mexican or South American—‘Ohh, I’m so happy, I got a D, because F—flunk out.’ So it’s different culture—different value. So, therefore, you don’t expect them, don’t expect them too much, you know, and therefore, you don’t have to feel, don’t have to—and so, the Chinese culture pushes for the excellence.

WX: So, right, definitely—that’s one thing that you didn’t—one way that you’re culture’s very much part of you, throughout your experiences that you’ve described.

WC: And also, compared with what? With the top bunch of society. You don’t compare yourself with the lower part. You know what I mean? You remember when I said the American needed the real one, real good—you know that in your class and the smart fellow, and the ones they are not dumb at all—very smart. Until 1968, Rice University used to be—they don’t charge you —

WX: Yes, tuition.

WC: Right, don’t charge you anything. Instead, they give you money, and only as a science and engineering school. Until ’68 they started accepting the state funding. And then they lowered their standards, and—but they still keep their every year, 600 class you know, they never really want to expand until—until—oh what until what? The 80s.

WX: Yes, that’s when they started building lot of new colleges.

WC: Becoming bigger university and have the liberal arts. But—Rice is pretty good.

WX: So, I’m kind of wondering. I want to go back to what you said at the beginning, which I thought was very interesting, that you said that Taiwan is not your home, and you may have felt that there were points in your life with—you were without a home, you didn’t feel like you were from Taiwan. So, could I ask, where would you after this—where do consider your home to be, whether it’s U.S. or China.

WC: I think I mentioned that psychologically, or my feeling wise, mentally, I’m thinking, ok, I’m Chinese, ok, I’m 100% Chinese. And yet, I stayed here for so long, and my—the families, the connections, and whatever, it’s all American. But emotionally, I’m still I have to go to China every year, and now I ever subscribe the Chinese TV program [both laugh], and I watch those shows and you know, and bring me back, all the Chinese culture, the depth of the culture, you know. It’s so deep, and you can’t get away, you know? But of course on the other hand, say I want to show it to my girls—they don’t want to watch! [both laugh]
WX: So how do you —

WC: Even my wife don’t want to watch that. And so, all of a sudden you go—it’s pretty hard, and I still—because I went back to China pretty early and you know 1978 at that time very few people, and of course they treated me like foreign experts, and this and that, and I did cultural exchange, and I did all those things, and all the top shots, I met them. But you know, for—not once, even more than once, I wanted to go back. But China, they told me, they said no, we need friends, we have too few friends outside China. You stay outside—even better for us and for both sides to understand each other. And that I derived from that point to come to this point. I said my objective, even my life’s objective is to build the best bridge—let the two cultures and two peoples to understand each other.

WX: So that’s how you would answer the question.

WC: Yes. And—I cannot forget about my culture and my people. I still have relatives in China, you know, and yet, in their minds, they are not necessarily consider me 100% Chinese either, you see? I got it—no, most of those during the exchange period—those—my counterparts, especially in 1996 to ‘98 I worked two years in the petroleum industry. But all those—they all retired now. Even the consulate the general office—this ten past envoys—they all retired. But yet, I still maintain a couple of good friends. Every time I go back, you know, we all had a very good meeting and you know, and even now once a while we call each other. And so, you ask me I am American or I am a Chinese, I have to answer you in both ways. You know, I cannot say one and one only—that’s unfair.

[1:40:00]

We consider ourselves—in a way, consider myself like a universe people, or —

WX: Or a world citizen, maybe?

WC: World citizen—that idea may be a little bit glorified. But it is, in a way—because all over the world, pretty much I went quite a few places. Before 1998, or say before year 2000, most traveling are just working, you know, working, working. And but after that, year 2000 to now, these 10 years I’ve been just touring and visiting and traveling for fun.

WX: To different places?

WC: Different places, and also China is very good—so many tourist attraction places, and especially the culture part. And just about everywhere I went through, and so in a way—yes, you can consider I’m quite diversified or quite universal, or—but that again, is one benefit. If you’re working hard, you have the ability—ability I mean two things—financially and physically. And I’m still alive. [laughs]

WX: You’re still healthy, I can tell.
WC: And you’re mind has to be clear, right, and you have to have enough money on me to do all these things. And I’m not kind of taking kind of advantage, no—governmental grant or special grant, I’m not. I’m on my own. Where is my money coming from? From my working, yes. And so, so I feel pretty even and peaceful. And every since year 50—50 years old—the people were start to thinking to contributing and to care or to bring up, you know, somebody else. And so I did some of those too, but the bigger one I still not doing yet—I sponsored a couple of students from Qinghua to here, you know. And that’s in the 80’s, they all happened in the 80’s. And, ever since the 改革开放以后，国内来的新的—就像 [‘After the Chinese Economic Reforms, the new group that was coming from China, like’]—your father, that generation, that group—they are pretty good, yes. They are fairly—they are more daring in many ways than us. I think in many ways there is a country, there is a homeland supporting them. And psychologically, they have it more relax. But in our case, no. We were not.

WX: I see, that’s very different. They do have families back there, and they you know were able to go to college back there. Ok.

WC: Today’s China—compared to 50 years China, totally different, you see. And but—still on the China I have one more saying here—China’s still divided.

WX: China’s still divided. And which way are you talking about.

WC: I’m talking about Taiwan and China, ok? That is no good, ok. For whatever the reason, we need to do our foremost to work towards, to finish it.

WX: Yes, it’s not good to have this unresolved.

WC: No, and in a way because of strategic reason or what, U.S. seems to play the double standard and triple tricks, and that’s—that’s not fair play, to my standard, ok. And so the past 10 some years, I’ve been promoting this very heavily, you know. I try to resolve this thing. And now, by the thousands and tens of thousands, people cross the back and forth, you know, but yet, you know, the politicians still play the hardball and try to use the foreign power or foreign involvement, trying to refuse this reunification thing. It’s ridiculous. And —

WX: I see what you’re saying. Because you believe in—you want to see in the next generation, more dialogue. Because in your generation, you experienced —

WC: So many chaos.

WX: Both in China and also coming to a new country as an immigrant without support.

WC: Right.

WX: And the next logical step is, as you say, for China and the U.S. to be more together, to work together better for both people to understand better. The issue with Taiwan is something in the way of that.
WC: Right. And also, the number one and number two trying to work together is very hard. That competition is very steep. So we need from all fronts, you know. All generations, all sides. And therefore, don’t think say you’re just student now, or just you’re just new graduate, you don’t have any social status, and therefore it’s not your business—no. No. Everyone’s business. Everyone is peace-loving and looking forward. And really have some thought about world peace, about U.S. and China’s re-approaching or understanding—you know you have to be in many, many ways, many, many directions.

WX: Right, you’re saying it’s not maybe just maybe if you’re in government or you don’t—it’s not just the leaders—it’s—

WC: Right, it’s every field. Every way. And it’s a long way, and my—you said that from 50, 60 years ago—I’m over fifty years here. And you looking back on these things, you know, it made a tremendous difference, tremendous progress already. And yet, like you say, [laughs] who you consider you are? I mean, I still have difficulty to describe or to definitely—because it is all mixed. You know, like nowadays, you know just because Twitter or Facebook or all those things, you can ignite a fire in the middle east, you know? And all those things are changing so fast. So therefore mindset has to be up to date, you know? Has to be follow up the events and so—and then, only then—number one, maybe you understand you protect yourself, number two, not to be attacked or what—you need aware and you need self-protect. You need to—and then, just like the Jesus Christ said—I’m not a Christian or what, but you understand yourself, and then you can understand yourself. And then you can love somebody else. That means you can contribute. Otherwise they all start with you understand yourself, and then control yourself, and then you love somebody. So this is a sequence here, and so that’s why I said young people—golly, you guys got lots to—[laughs]

WX: Right, as you said, our generation.

WC: So, in a way, I know you try to set up, or provide something in this archive thing, and whatever I said here may not be very fitted here, but—

WX: No, this is very good.

[1:50:00]

WC: Yes, but what I say is most, at least in my generation, we all have this kind of thinking, you know? And yet because we are the minorities’ minority, it’s very hard for us to be shining, to be glorified, or what. Because—hey, to say the least, they going to mistrust you, or don’t understand you, or don’t want to trust you to begin with, right? To begin with. And then, doesn’t matter how much effort and then you still not only in vain, and then you maybe get a whole bunch of trouble for nothing, you know. And that is why—pretty discouraging in a way, and yet, ok, because of that then we do nothing? That’s not good either. So, so I guess my final conclusion is this: before when I first in 1968 come to Houston—that time Houston had about 5,000 Asian—East Asia people. For 5,000 among them, about 3,000 are Chinese origin. About 2,000 are the 3rd, 4th generations—you know the old, old. They are pretty much dying off now, you know. And from
that 5,000—that’s 1968, now, what? About 50 years later—Houston area, everybody’s talking about what? 200,000—about 500,000 now?

WX: Yes, of the Asian Americans.

WC: If you include Indians and all those —

WX: Yes that sounds about right.

WC: About half a million now. So, it’s—it’s quite a bit of difference. And yet, you see how many of them don’t really have any—I say every one of them have their complaints, their problem, their good and bad concerns. And how many of them are really like to answer the question? Because like we have in a way, if you strictly speaking, there’s a loyalty problem here too, you know? That is why sometimes, and if the minorities’ minority got into trouble, it always just like the performance review—‘Your English No Good.’ Say, ‘Hey, you have a loyalty problem.’ That is why when you are a minorities’ minority group, sometimes very hard for you to express yourself in a right way and a useful way. That is I think a major part of the reason why it seems—yet you are so smart, but on the other hand, your guys seem to contribute to the community minimum. You know, that’s the white people’s complain the Asians.

WX: Yes, we don’t really—we stick to ourselves, or —

WC: Right, we don’t involve that much.

WX: And you say the problem is that we—could you say again what you think the reason for that is?

WC: It’s a minorities’ minority, and therefore if you try to express yourself, just unintentionally or intentionally you missed something, you very easily to be misjudged, or misunderstood.

WX: Are you talking about minority as in the Chinese Americans within the larger minority?

WC: Within a larger community. Say, in other words, why—for instance in the last election trying to vote the—running for the councilman. Used to be, we—even when Chinese was very few at that time we always at least have one councilman in Houston city is Chinese descent—Martha Wang, and then later the Hannah Chou, but now we don’t have any. Last time we don’t have any, and now, Texas increasing 4 congressional district—the congressman have 4 more positions coming up. I try to say East Asia means the Korean, the Chinese, the Japanese. At least one should be ours.

WX: Yes, representation, but it’s not.

WC: But so far, the only one I can look at—maybe Vietnamese, maybe that Vo—that Vo, that guy, he going to run it, I think. And so, the involvement, because of the cultural difference, you know, we never fully integrated in that sense.
WX: No, that’s true. Would you say that we don’t feel we’re a part of that culture. We don’t feel we’re a part of it, even though we succeeded.

WC: Right. We are smart enough. We are succeeded in many ways. But, we are not involved in that—in that political arena.

WX: And you would say it’s a feeling if cultural distance, not integration.

WC: And then it’s a confidence problem. I think your generation needs somebody coming up, because the second and third generation—hey, already quite a few the Chinese writer—started with the—the—

WX: Amy Tan?

WC: The Amy Tan thing, and then you know we have quite a few now.

WX: I mean there’s Asian Americans in government, like Elaine Chao, Steven Chu.

WC: Right, but we need more.

WX: Political activity.

WC: In other words, involvement and with the—the best combination of both cultures, of both societies—the best part of America, the best part of China—if we can put these two together, that’s perfect.

[end of interview]