

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

Interviewee: William Hsueh
Interviewer: Grace Chang
Student Assistant: Joanne Wang
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Transcribed by: Grace Chang
Edited by: Chris Johnson, Priscilla Li (11/24/2016)
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Background:

William Hsueh was born in Zhongqing, China in 1945. He, his mom, and his siblings moved to Hong Kong in 1951 as a result of the rising Chinese Cultural Revolution; his dad went to Hong Kong in 1948. He had a younger sister, an older sister, and an older brother that has worked, studied, and lived in different countries and States. While they were in Hong Kong, they were part of a Chinese refugee community, and they attended a church for these Chinese refugees. He went to Japan for his undergraduate degree in 1963 and finished in 1967. His return to Hong Kong, which was to span the whole summer, was cut short because of the continued political turmoil. He then moved to Purdue University for graduate school in 1967. He got married in the 1970s in California, and then his wife (Cynthia) and he lived in West Lafayette, Indiana while he finished his PhD. His wife was an ethnic Chinese born and raised in Japan. In 1972, he graduated with a PhD in Natural Science and then moved on to a research fellow position at the Stanford Medical School. Then he and his wife moved to Taiwan in 1977 for a research position at a new medical school for 2 years. But then in 1979, he was accepted into the Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis; they ended up staying in St. Louis for 17 years, as he finished his Master of Divinity and served as a pastor in the St. Louis Chinese Gospel Church. Seeing that they were getting comfortable there, they decided to move (he, his wife, and his three children) to Houston, as he had received a job offer from Houston Chinese Church in 1996. He has been a pastor there ever since, and has recently assumed the role of Senior Pastor.

Setting:

The interview was conducted at Houston Chinese Church, situated in one of the prayer rooms next to the offices of the pastors. The interview was about an hour and a quarter. He gave a detailed map of his life, geographically, religiously, related to his family, and related to his education/work. He depicted his family's experiences in the diasporic community within Hong Kong as well as within the U.S.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| WH | William Hsueh |
| GC | Grace Chang |
| JW | Joanne Wang |
| — | Speech cuts off; abrupt stop |
| ... | Speech trails off; pause |
| <i>Italics</i> | Emphasis |
| (?) | Preceding word may not be accurate |
| Brackets | Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.) |

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GC: [laughs] Um ok, so...hmmm [laughs] ok, should we start? Ok, um so for our projects, uh since we're focusing on I guess, like um immigrant life, we're going to interview you, jus—um, not only like as you as a pastor now but also how you got to this point. Um so, I guess for like the recording, can you introduce yourself a little bit?

WH: Yes. I'm William Hsueh. At this point, I'm the senior pastor at Houston Chinese Church. My...my first language would be Chinese, and then English. Um, I'm... is that adequate?

GC: Yeah, yeah. Okay, um, so I guess ... um just um starting from your background currently, um... what, um, I guess what led you to Houston Chinese Church?

WH: What led me to Houston Chinese Church? I was the pastor in St. Louis for about ... 14 years. Uh I live in St. Louis for 17 years, when it was around 19-1995. There we felt maybe it's time to move on. And just because we had been there for... for these years. So we felt quite comfortable with uh... with the work there. So we felt maybe uh we need to act another stage in life and also in ministry where we may have more challenge. And so that's how it started. And then though a series of events that we were asked to come here for interview. And so that's how we ended up here in 1996.

GC: Was HCC still young when you came here?

WH: No, HCC was ... was around for... almost 25 years already. They (?)—HCC started sometime in the '70s... late '70s... '78 or something. Yeah.

GC: Mmmm ok. So I guess like what kind of ministry were you doing in St. Louis then?

WH: I would (?) say church. Uh, I was a pastor of a Chinese church there.

GC: When did you start, um, I guess seminary then?

WH: Uh, I went to seminary in 1977. Ah no, no, no... in 1979. So I was there for 3 years. The seminary was located in St. Louis. So, as I was going to the scho—going to seminary, I also start to attend the Chinese church there. So... and the one year we got there, the pastor left, and so we started helping them out a little bit. And then upon my graduation day, asked if I would just stay and be their pastor.

GC: What was the seminary called?

WH: Uh Covenant Seminary.

GC: Is it inside the city or is it in a suburb?

WH: Hmmm it's umm... let me... it's hard to... how do we put it... not really inside the city, it's more in the suburbs. Yeah this seminary.

GC: So how did you find... 'cause I guess reading from the... the interview sheet you like went from California to St. Louis. So then how did you...

WH: Hmm that's kind of a long story... how far you want to go? How far back do you want to go?

GC: Umm... well depending, I guess I can go all the way back to even your childhood. So, pretty far back.

WH: Why don't I start with this... or otherwise it will be a little bit choppy and that... I came here as a graduate student for graduate studies in 1967. That's when I went to Purdue... that's in Indiana. Was there for 5 years... after I finished my graduate studies with a PhD degree, I went to Stanford. And...and did research for another 5 year in a

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medical school there. Uhhh, it was during that time I... I was trying to look for the job and also try to explore different opportunities in terms of career. And so this opportunity in Taiwan came up in '70... '77. I think in the spring of '77. And then after a series of interviews, they invited me to go there... to teach in a medical school for 2 years. And so we were there from '77 to '79. After we finish, um... after... uhhh... after finish my... and then we came back to St. Louis and uh... that's when I entered Covenant Seminary. So that's the story... that we were in California for about 5 years and then we went to Taiwan for 2 years and then we came back to St. ... well... went back ... and then went to St. Louis.

(5:15)

GC: Okay, I guess maybe we can start from the beginning of the story, I guess, and see your journey through like um I guess like your travels. So I guess you said you were born in China?

WH: Yeah I was born in China.

GC: And then, I guess like, when you were in China, um, did your—were your siblings born with you in China before you moved to....

WH: Can you repeat that again?

GC: Yeah. Were your siblings uh born with you when you were in China or did you move and then...

WH: No. I was born, I was ... I'm the third one in my family. I have one older sister and then one...is my oldest sister and then older brother...and then I have a younger sister. So I'm number three. Uh we were, we were all born in China. And I was born in '45... and then in '49 the Communists came. And then we stayed there for another 2 years...until '51, that's when we all went to Hong Kong. And so I went to elementary school and high school in Hong Kong. Um then after high school, I went to Japan for my college, and that's where I met my wife. And she's a... she's a Chinese but she grew up in Japan. And so that ... and all my siblings basically were in Hong Kong for a period of time, and my oldest sister went to Taiwan for college. And then, and then she came to the States for her graduate study. And then my brother also finished uhhhh uhh high school in Hong Kong and then came to the States for college and then went back to Hong Kong. And he was in the Christian ministry for ...for since 1968... 3. Until recently. And then my youngest sister, after high school in Hong Kong, she came to the States for her college. So that's a little bit of my family background.

GC: So did you grow up in a Christian family?

WH: Um not really. Uhhhhh my parents went to Hong Kong. My father went to Hong Kong in 1948, I think. And then my mother went in '51. And then sometime around 1955 or so, they became Christians. I was kinda...not really Christian family, but kind of a... was in the church when I was...when I was a um... I guess middle school... by that time was middle school. About to enter middle school.

(8:13)

GC: What is the church like in Hong Kong?

WH: Oh in those days, uh the church that I went to was a Lutheran church. Uh it was very simple. Just one flat...uh one flat in one of those apartment buildings. And we were in there...in that unit for ... for several years until '61... or '62 when they built uh a, a real church... church building. Um, that's the facility-wise it's very simple. Of course later on, the new building is much more sophisticated. Uh church life is basically you just go there for ... for Sunday. And then we'd have youth group. Uh that's usually on Saturday afternoon or evening, so...

GC: Was the youth, was the youth big? Or was it...

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WH: No, it depends. Like the church—but (?) that particular church that I was with was not growing (?) about 20 or 30 or so... but then you do have other churches, much more established churches ... that they would have large youth groups. Now, I mean, I mean large youth groups, large groups means that... that they would have different groups. They would have one for the middle schoolers, one for the high school. And so each one would have about anywhere from 30-40. Of course that's the biggest size church. And you have smaller churches then the size will be a bit smaller.

GC: Do they speak Cantonese or did they speak Mandarin?

WH: Mmmm again it depends on which church you go to. The church I went to uh we spoke Mandarin. But then, then later on they also started translation from Mandarin to Cantonese.

GC: Then did... is it a Mandarin church because a lot of people came from China?

WH: Yeah, especially the church that we... that I was with. The Lutheran church um... well I would say the majority of the other congregation members were made up of refugees from China. And so they were all Mandarin speaking ... but then some of the more established churches, just the Baptist church and the Anglican churches uh they would be more in the uh speak Cantonese.

GC: So when you joined that community was that church already established or did it happen?

WH: Uh... I think they just started. So it was a relatively small church. The apartment building... apartment flat can only hold... I guess at the most 100... at the most. Yeah. But then later on, when they moved to the new building, it was a much larger capacity. Yeah.

GC: Hm. Then, um, I guess like while you were in that church, um, how-how did that church fit in with the Cantonese like community?

WH: I mean in terms of the community... not really... it's more like a small community within the community. So there's not much interaction with the larger community, like the Cantonese was the main population. But uh but this church does reach out to those Mandarin speaking, and again most of them would be refugees. So during tho—days, those days, I still remember, you know the church would be giving out, um, butter, milk powder, flour, and all that kind of stuff, yeah. Because refugees in those days, uh, they really did not have much. So, the church would be getting its supply, I don't know from where. And then they would give it out to those who need... so it's uh very much, um, in those days... very much social oriented. Um mercy ministry.

GC: Do you think they gained a lot of, um, people by—through that way, or do you think it was because, coming from China that time, they were still like practicing Buddhism and like...

WH: Not rea—I mean those that are... that have those strong Buddhist background... probably the church will not be able to reach out to them. So you reach out to those who are a little bit more open. And, yeah, you do have people that will come to church primarily for those, um, for those uh so called welfare: milk, butter, and, and stuff like that. But some of them were converted and become very genuine believers. And then you have those that will come here just for the food and once they're satisfied, then (?) they will leave. You have that almost an—anywhere.

GC: How was it that, I guess um, your, I guess like, you and your brother um happened to go into like ministry? Was it independent of [incoherent]...?

WH: It's fairly independent. Um, I, I would not say that, uh, somehow we influenced each other. My brother, my brother is about four years older than me. So while I was in high school during my maturing years, my—he was in the States already. And then while he was in the States, he felt God was calling him into ministry. So uh he made the decision, um, he—I don't think he finished his last year of college, and then he went back to Hong Kong. Then he

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started out, uh, actually all his life was uh Chinese Christian literature and also ministry to, to China... to the Chinese churches back in China. So that has been his calling all these years. Whereas um I think it was during some—during... maybe during my last year in high school, um, I was wondering whether God was calling me into ministry, but I wasn't really sure. And then also my brother's decision of going to ministry, um, very much angered my father; he was very much against it to the point that my father almost want to break that father-son relationship with, with my brother. And because of that uh, it created a negative impact on me. So the thought of going into ministry at that time, was kinda not a very welcoming thought. And so with that thing kind of in the back burner, then I went to Japan for my—for, for college. So while I was in Japan, then my bro—by... it was about, I think it was about 6 months before I went, then my brother came back to, um, went back to Hong Kong. So we were together just for very few months... overlapping in terms of the time. And then we kind of go—um we went our own ways.

(16:01)

GC: I guess with like the plans of you and your siblings, was that all (?) each individually, was that your own choices or was that your parents' also?

WH: That's also our—it's um [unclear] it's our choices. My fam—yes, I think it's a little bit. I don't think my parents really...um impose some of their ideas on us. Um we, we pretty much had a, a free reign on what we want to do. Uh of course my brother's decision to go into ministry wasn't, wasn't pleasing to them. But then a few years later on, they accepted that... they were supportive of him. And then I basically uh went the academic route for many years. And they had nothing to be against that too, yeah. So I think our fami—my parents are fairly open in that perspective. Or maybe put it another way: they really don't know much what we should be doing. Um I think there's a mixture of that.

GC: I guess, were they unwilling to let you guys leave Hong Kong, or was it because... it's like all of you left.

WH: No, at that time was... uh when I left Hong Kong in 1963... I think Cultural Revolution just started in China. So Hong Kong started to become a little unstable during that period of time. And then the situation gets a little worse as the Cultural Revolution continued. When I graduated from college in '67, I was supposed to go back to Hong Kong and spend a whole summer there and then came—and then come to the States. But by then, the, the Cultural Revolution was at its height and then Hong Kong was very unstable; there were...um there was some you know bombs here and there. So making my father especially very paranoid. And so my 3-month stay-plan of stay in Hong Kong ended up just about 2 to 3 weeks. And then he wanted me to leave Hong Kong right away. So that's how we, we landed... uh I think by the time... I think by the time I left Hong Kong, I graduated. My younger sister also graduated from high school. And she was 4 years younger than me, so she graduated from high school. And then she also came to the States. So she—I think she was here a little earlier. Maybe one year later than me or one year earlier than...than me. Yeah.

GC: Was travelling difficult because of the Cultural Revolution?

WH: No. The Cultural Revolution was very much of a—it's a lot of turmoil in China. But outside China, um you don't have that kind of impact except you have their ideology and, and also the threat that the Communists would take over Ch—Hong Kong right away. But that did not materialize until um...until...uh 1997. Yeah. So in terms of travel, there really...there wasn't any kind of impact.

(19:50)

GC: Ok, so they wouldn't be like 'Oh you're coming from China area...' even to Japan... even they wouldn't?

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WH: No, this is a very... with uh there's uh there wasn't any restrictions. Of course the restriction would be primarily for those in China wanting to travel to outside China...uh it's almost impossible. But for those of us who lived outside of China—uh Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and all those...whether we're free...just, it's just like now. Yeah. Of course in those day, you don't fly all over the place. I went to Japan on a boat. And then my wife came to the States... yeah, she also came on a boat.

GC: So then you, from Hong Kong to the U.S., you also came by boat?

WH: Yeah, no, that was by plane. When I came back to the States...uh from Hong—from Japan, actually when I finished my college and went back to Hong Kong... At that time, the air travel was started to pick up. And so I was able to travel to fly from Japan to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong back to Japan and then to California. Yeah.

GC: So what was immigration like to the U.S. then, if you—that was already flying instead of by boat?

WH: Uh uh I came here as student. So that wasn't much of a problem. And then um and then my wife came as an immigrant. Her brother was here...uh was here quite early, so he was able to apply for them as immigrant. So by the time she came to the States, I think it was the same year as I came. In terms of college and age, she was 2 years behind me. So she was a U.S. resident already. So um...after we got married, it's kind of...kind of very...in a way very natural...that I just applied for residency...U.S. gr-green card. And then we just go from there...and then we got the green card. And then we, we never really bothered to apply for citizenship right away. Only after we get to, get to California and then we thought ah maybe we'll also apply for the citizenship, yeah.

GC: So did she travel with you when you were here? Or er Indiana and ...

WH: Yeah, okay this is how—I came here for graduate school. I was at Purdue...by the summer of '67. And then in '67, she also came with her parents from Japan to California. So she was in California and then they travelled to New York [coughs]...traveled to New York, and then back to, back to California-she went to school at Berkeley. And then we got married in, in the 1970...in Berkeley. And then she went back to Purdue with me, so.

GC: Did she—so she finished her school by then?

WH: She finished school uh at Berkeley, yeah.

GC: I guess, how did you apply to go to Purdue while you were in...

WH: In Japan.

GC: Japan. Oh, why Purdue? Or what...you were studying...

WH: Why Purdue? Uh, that's kind of um...my...let me, how do I put it this way. The college that I was in...in Japan...it's a small college. Liberal Arts. But it's fairly well known. And so one time, the department head of the Biological Sciences at Purdue came to Japan to visit. And that's how I got introduced to him... through my professor. I'm sure that's how...how that happen here. So he invited—said 'Why don't you apply to Purdue, and then we'd like to have you to come.' And so that's how...how that happened. It's very different from nowadays. But in those days uh...uh that kind of connection still—it helped.

GC: So you arrived in California and then you flew again to Purdue?

WH: Yeah. My sister, my older sister was in California...they're still, they're still in California...uh in Bay Area, Cupertino area, San Jose and all that. So that will always be our, our stop. Uh we—I stayed there for about a month

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or so. And then flew to...no I didn't, I didn't fly. Purdue, let me see, how did I, how did I get to Purdue? I can't remember now. Um...I might, I might have taken the train there. In those days, we travelled by train still. Uh, yeah.

GC: So then when you arrived there, because Purdue at that time was probably mostly... well I think now even still mostly like Caucasian, right?

(25:27)

WH: Um yeah, Purdue is still a... how, how would you say it. Mid-west university, Indiana, in the middle of nowhere. Uh but even then, they did have fairly large foreign student...graduate student especially. Um by the time I was there, I think we had about almost close to 400 um Chinese graduate students in Purdue. And most of them would be coming from Taiwan...in those days, I don't think we had any from China yet. But mostly from Taiwan. And very few from Hong Kong, yeah.

GC: So was there already a community there of ...

WH: Yeah, um there's the Chinese community, Chin—made of, made of, made up of students or graduate student and their family. And then we also had a bible study uh on campus...yeah a Chinese bible study, yeah.

GC: So there wasn't a lot of, I guess, like difficulty getting integrated into... 'cause when you came in, it was your first time in the U.S., so it must have been a little bit different at least.

WH: Well yeah, I think to the overall community, the bigger community, uh it is a little difficult, especially in Midwest. I mean our English...uh my English was okay. But then if you, if you go into some store some—when they hear your accent, uh they will look at you... sometimes you do get some unfriendly treatment at times, yeah. But it's kind of understandable because it was basically a very small...um besides the college..., the university nearby is basically farming. So you can't really expect too much. But nowadays, it's a little different, but still um...it's Midwest. 2, 2 hours from Chicago. Yeah, it's really in the middle of nowhere.

GC: So then your um, I guess, your supervisor was um in...your, your area was Natural Sciences?

WH: Yeah, uh biology, especially (?) yeah.

GC: So were you thinking uh...what were you thinking about?

WH: Nah I didn't think about anything. It was very...uh uh in those days, kind of naive too. When I was college studying Natural Science and Life Biology, because I don't like Chemistry, I don't like Physics, biology is kind of a ... fairly...not I would not say easy, but it's more, more palatable. And so I came here for graduate studies also in biology. Because in Japan, I had to study a lot of those subjects in Japanese. And so that really did not help my case.

GC: [laughs]

WH: Um so, yeah. Um so um...when I was in graduate school, I really, I really did not think in terms of 'what am I going to do afterwards.' Basically, it would be yeah, ah you either going to go to, go to industry, uh do the—take the research route, or you go to academic. Those are the two, two choices we have. But I do have some friends after, after either—yeah, mostly, mo—yeah after they got their PhD, uh they switch into medicine and I do have some friends that are like that. But I'm a kind of a...a, a what do you call it...more of a tunnel vision person. One thing at a time... you know? So I just think about getting my degree and they ask 'what are you going to do afterwards?' ...I say uh, 'well, wait and see.' And so that's uh...that's how I ended up in, in the lab side (?).

GC: So then how did you get the offer to go to Stanford Medical School?

(29:52)

WH: Ha... that's a... Okay, it was one year before uh I was supposed to graduate. Um I graduated in '72... so it was in '71, I start sending out letters uh to different schools that ask, looking for, basically, for postdoc positions. I sent one to, to Stanford... and then it was in the summer of '71, I went to California to visit my sister. So while I was there, I thought 'well, maybe I'll just drop by,' uh, 'Stanford and,' you know, 'try to make appointment to see the professor that I sent my letter to.' So we, we kind of ...uh we met up, and then almost right after I went back, that was in September, he asked 'will you be interested in coming next year?' And so it was uh... it was like uh... And so it was in a way I think God was... God was very good to me. I don't really have to switch road... 'okay I'm graduating next month, what do I am going to do now?' It's almost like one year before I graduate I already know where I will be going. And so it has been like that for... in some of those uh in some of those um, crucial points in my life, yeah.

GC: So then how did you send your application to a medical school if you didn't know if you wanted to go into medicine?

WH: Well when you do uh post doc research, it's almost like uh... you just send it to different places... and medical schools, they do a lot of those research that I'm interested in. And then also I sent it to some, some other universities. Um but yet Stanford happened to be the one that I visited...and then I got the offer. And since my sister was there... and then my wife's family also was in California, so it was kind of a fairly natural place for us to uh number one to visit and then to go back there.

GC: So did you have uh your first child while you were in California then?

WH: Yeah, our first child was born in California in Santa Clara in '73. And we graduated, um we left Purdue in '72 and then one year later he was born in California...yeah '73.

GC: The oldest is not Sean, right?

WH: No, Sean is the youngest. So Francis is the oldest. He's in New York now. And then our second one was born in Taiwan... and Sean was born in St. Louis, yeah.

GC: So then you were at Stanford for 5 years...

WH: For 5 years.

GC: Did you—while you were there, did you have a house also there? Or an apartment, or...?

WH: Um let's see, we live in apartment for about 2 year—2-3 years and then we move into condo.

GC: So then did you find, I guess since... was your program 5 years? So you knew you would stay there for 5 years...

WH: Not really...um the program...it's, it's a little different from, from what we are doing now. And nowadays, you talk—yeah, you have a project, a program for 2 years, undergrad for 2 years, but in those days, it was kind of a fairly open ended. Uh it was not par-... not exactly post doc position.... but most often research fellow. Uh he was a—he was telling me, what the professor was telling me, 'You can stay here as long as you want.' But yet I felt that I need to move on. Working at the same lab for 5 years is a little long, yeah.

GC: So were you starting to get um more interested in, I guess like, ministry during that time?

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WH: Uh interested? I, I'm not sure if that would be the right word. I've been involved with the fellowship group and bible study during Purdue, and then in California was involved in a Chinese church there. Also it's something that's fairly natural... just part of us that we get involved. We started our own small group at home, yeah. But yet uh, throughout that time, there was the lingering thought um, 'is that what God wants me to do? Continue to work in a research or academic field? Or does God have something else for me?' Uh that has been something that has constantly back in my mind because uh...maybe one reason was that in high school, I can't remember which year... maybe one or two years before I graduated, I went to some kind of rally, a gathering, a meetings...and there was an altar call, and I went up and the altar call was basically that you felt that God was calling you into ministry and you come forward. I came, I went forward... then I thought, 'Oh, maybe God wants me to be a missionary.' In those days, when you think of missionary, 'Oh God wants me to go to Africa' and all that. Uh but because of what happened to my brother, I never really continued to push to that. And then we know—we did not have anyone trying to ponder us...okay maybe you need to consider this and that. So it's almost just like back to life as usual. Um business as usual. And then while I was in Japan...occasionally I wondered, you know, what was God, what does God want me to do...and as the same kind of thoughts came up during the graduate school days and so on. So it has been always been there, but nothing solid and clear. And so that's why I continued to do what I was doing. It was in Taiwan that I felt that God was calling me into ministry.

(36:27)

GC: So then how did you decide to end your postdoc position?

WH: Uh basically I was looking for jobs for about a year and then a friend of mine came and approached me and said uh, 'This,' uh, 'president of this medical school in Taiwan is in Bay area.' Actually he, he was a fairly well known uh Christian among the Chinese students in the States and also in Taiwan. Actually he went back to Taiwan in the si...in the early '70s... a part of uh, as a mission as a career, and so on. So he was in Bay area trying to recruit some faculty for the new medical school. So we kind of debated a little whether we should even explore that. But then we—at that time we had also been praying to, to seek God's will, God's guidance in life. So we thought uh, when you're praying for God's guidance, and it's really not right for you, just to shut the door to this possibility. So I went for the interview, and then after the interview, I knew that if I would apply, most likely they would, they would take me. And that was anothe—another struggle. Um and so eventually I applied and then they, and then they made the offer. It was a 2 year contract, so with that understanding, we felt a little at ease going there. If it doesn't work out, we just come back, yeah.

GC: So then, I guess, at that point, you had like a family to take with you.

WH: Yeah, we had, we had the first son, Francis, was born. At the time, he uh he was born in '73... and then in '77, 5 year—no, '73, '77... yeah so by the time we went to Taiwan, he was around 4. And he fit quite well in, in the kindergarten there...um language wise, no problem...I mean just few months after we got there, yeah, he start speaking in Mandarin. And then forgot most of his English already.

GC: So then how was it for, I guess, you and your wife like to go back into a Chinese society after being in America?

WH: Uh for me, it's ok because for guys, we just go back to work, all right. Your lab is about the same no matter where you go. But for my wife, it was a really difficult adjustment. Um, Taiwan is really not...well Taiwan was Taiwan. Um the area that we stayed in was not...it was not in the city. It was more in the suburbs. In those days, the suburb was very much, very much village. Farmlands and so on... and then if we had to go into the city, uh we had to walk about 20 minutes to get to the bus stop and then take the bus, that was another 30 or 40 minutes to get into the city. So it's really inconvenient, uh the culture is different. Uh the place—the apartment we lived in...we live in apartment for about 6 months. Um 3 months...no...about...about 4 or 5 months. Uh every time, every time when

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you buy something, your neighbors would come in and look at it... and then they ask you how much it is and then find out that I was teaching in the school, and they will ask you how much you make. And that kind of thing... I mean, there isn't really privacy. So for me, it's ok, but for my wife, it's, it's harder... it's a difficult adjustment. And then I think about 5 months later, we move, we move into the school's uh housing. Uh those are really nice...very nice uh units. It's almost independent units, but they are next to one another. Very nice... again, but then it was up in the hill there, so you have to go out... you have to walk another 20 minutes downhill to take a taxi or take a bus. So, so living wise, it's not very convenient. So she had her... it was difficult for her, yeah.

(41:08)

GC: Was she also working? Or...

WH: No, she wasn't working...that makes it worse. She had to stay home in an environment like that... and then uh after one year, we had our second son, so it helped a little. And that was also the time when we start thinking about coming back... after the 2 years contract is over.

GC: Was it a difficult time to be working in the medical in Taiwan if...

WH: Not really, I mean it's difficult in the sense that it's a new school, so you have to start from scratch. You have to buy equipment and so...uh budget wise, they had a lot of money, because the government was really, was fully supporting that school. They wanted to make a medical school number one there.

GC: Where was it?

WH: Uh there (?), it's called Yang Ming Medical School, but now Medical College, but now it's called Yang Ming University.

GC: In?

WH: Uh that's in the outskirts of Taipei...are you familiar with Taiwan? You know, Tian Mu...Shi Tai...Tian Mu is where a lot of... it used to... maybe even, now I don't know...a lot of foreigners live. Do you know the—are you familiar with the, the veteran hospital: Rong Zong?

GC: Yes... it sounds kind of a little bit familiar.

WH: Okay, our school is actually right behind that General Veteran Hospital Rong Zong, it's uh half way on the top, on the hill. So you can see the school building from very far away. Uh since it's half up, half way up the hill, so when you take a taxi from the city, you would not tell them where you're going. Because when they find out you go to that place, they would not go. So you just say, 'ah, just a little more further a little more further...' and then when you get to the foothill, you say 'it's up there'...the guy would be complaining... you say 'oh, it's just another 10 minutes'... and so, and then one time, when she was pregnant, then the guy just actually just refused to, to go all the way up there. Because they know 'my car cannot go, climb up the hill.' And so...

GC: Wow... well your wife spoke Chinese though, right?

WH: Ummm yeah, but that was not her first language. Her first language is basically English and Japan—Japanese. But she went to an American school in Japan. And so, it's Japanese and English, yeah. And she speak, she spoke some Chinese at home and then when she went to the Chinese church in Tokyo, they speak, oh they speak all kinds of languages among the Chinese. So she pick up those Chinese...she was...her Chinese in those days were basically church Chinese. Other church vocabulary she can understand, the Bible words she can understand. And in Taiwan, she make an effort to, to learn the language. She went to a language school and study. Um that really help her... and now she, I mean she...she, she speak very good Chinese now.

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GC: Then were you part of a church when you were in the medical school at Taipei?

WH: Taiwan? Or...

GC: Mm-hmm.

WH: Yeah, we went to, we went to an international church...that, that in those days, uh it met at the Taipei...Taipei American School, somewhere in Shilin. And so that's where we met. So actua—so during those 2 years, we actually was meeting uh...we went to the quote-unquote international church, yeah.

(45:11)

GC: Oh, so she ... was it like you had—main language was Chinese, and then you had translators? Or...

WH: That would be all in English.

GC: Ohh.

WH: That's why she felt more comfortable than going to a Chinese church.

GC: So then were you...was that the church that your supervisor went to also?

WH: That was in...?

GC: In Taiwan.

WH: No...Taiwan uh...they all go to different—they went to different churches. I think we were the only one that went to this international church, yeah.

GC: Were most of the people there also...were there foreigners also there?

WH: Faculty, I would say you have quite a few from the States...but then they're all Chinese from the States... as they would go there for 2 years or 4 years. Um and then those...um they're quite... not a lot...I would say quite a few of them are Christians...they went back to Taiwan those days with a, with a mission purpose.

GC: So then when your second daughter?

WH: Son.

GC: Or your first...

WH: Second. I have 3 sons...they're all kids (?), all boys...

GC: Ohhh...so then, then... he was born then... he was just like raised in that home?

WH: Yeah, he was...well he was uh he was born in '78. And then we stayed there 'til '79, so basically he was just home with, with mom...uh during the first year.

GC: So I guess while you guys were deciding to move back...did you also, I guess, plan to stay in that, I guess, that kind of, that like, Biological Sciences?

WH: No, not really...um soon after I got to Taiwan, I felt that God was calling me uh into ministry but I wasn't really sure. So I kinda secretly make a deal...uh make a deal with God in the way that going to Taiwan, I was—I had to convince my wife, kind of persuade her, you know, to give a try. But seeing her difficulty in adjusting to that

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place, I said uh, I said ‘No, I’m not going to initiate any change, especially a very drastic change. If this is really God’s will to go into ministry, then it will have to come from [incoherent].’ It’s just that simple. I think that...that, that prayer was in December of the first year we went... and then 6 months later uh, Robin was born and then we were discussing, you know, what we would be doing after we come back to the States. So we look at possibility about going back to research or something. So there was that tim—in one of the discussion she brought up um the question was asking, ‘Have you thought about going to seminary?’ So out of the blue then (?) she popped that question. And so it was from there on, I st—I really start to feel very strongly that God was indeed (?) calling me into ministry.

GC: So then when you were in St. Louis, that was in seminary, or...?

WH: So after we made the decision that was in the summer of ’78, actually towards the end of the summer, we made that decision that God has call me to ministry. So we start making plans to come back and then star—also started applying for seminaries. So the seminary in St. Louis, the Covenant, was one of the, was one of the two that we applied.

GC: You and your wife applied together?

WH: Hmmm? Pardon?

GC: You and your wife applied together?

WH: No, no, no... just me...

GC: Oh, okay. So was your wife planning on um like, I guess, just uh raising your children?

WH: Yeah, because I felt it was my calling, but she was very supportive, yeah.

GC: So then when you moved back to St. Louis... or when you moved back to the States to St. Louis, then did you...um, I guess, was the seminary mostly um Asians, or...?

WH: They were all American. I was the—let’s see...I was the only Chinese there. Again, Covenant Seminary is at that time, it’s a very provincial seminary. It’s, it’s basically white, yeah.

(50:14)

GC: Did you find out about it just through your...?

WH: Uh, well that’s another story. Um, in my own Christian growth in, especially in the ‘70s, early ‘70, I was very much influenced by Francis Chaffer. Have you heard of his—read his book? Have you heard of him?

GC: Yeah...

WH: Okay. I was very much influenced by him, and then from time to time I would run into him at some of the conferences and I was talking to him about... it was more a curiosity you know what is some of the seminary that he would recommend, so. So basically he mentioned two...one is Westminster Seminary and the other is Covenant. So when we were in Taiwan, as we were going to the international church we met a missionary there... it turned out that he was from Covenant Seminary. So he was in St. Louis for a while. And so when I... when we were talking, he said, ‘Yeah,’ uh, ‘why don’t you consider Covenant?’ So as we applied, Covenant was the first among the two school... first to reply and offer us a... in those days it was a \$500 year scholarship. \$500 a semester or a year. I mean it’s just very little... it’s almost like a token. But you know, \$500, \$500 is \$500, and so we took it. And then, and we ended up in St. Louis, yeah.

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GC: Were you worried financially because you had two children?

WH: Oh yeah, we worried a lot. But [incoherent] God was very gracious providing us with what we need. Actually during those seminary years um, it just... it just like really amazing see how God provided for us, because we had a principal that we would not tell anyone about our financial needs. So we don't do... we don't send out those prayer letters and...and said only God would know. And then we trust that God would provide. And then very often, and then he just really out of the blue, he would be, he provided us throughout those 3 years.

GC: So then did you, all through this time, did your parents also know what was going on? Did you like...?

WH: Oh yeah, my parents—I... once I made the decision that God had called me to the ministry, I—I wrote to my parents. I think I taped, taped my experience and record it, sent it to my parents. I think that's what I did. And it was really amazing... I think it was uh...it was one of the—it was the Autumn Festival and my mother was uh at my sister's house for dinner, and then um... and then that night, she wasn't able to sleep well, so the next morning she, she was talking to my father, and then she told my father that, 'I have the feeling that William is going to go into that narrow road.' Narrow gate, narrow road. And then a couple days later, she got my tape recording about my experience. So that's uh my mom's, uh, by then, they were in very good terms with my brother. Of course my father still has some reservations about now it's me that's changing my career direction. Uh I guess he was disappointed, but there wasn't really much he can do. You know, by then, we are...I'm an adult. I was not asking for their permission, I was just basically informing them of our decision, yeah.

GC: So your parents came to the States to live with your sister.

WH: Yeah, not to live with her. My parents came in '75... while we were still in California. And they, they basic—they lived very close to my sister. So my sister, my older sister was the primary care person for them...for, for many years.

GC: So then, I guess, how was your seminary, because you had to do—because most of your um I guess most of your ministry was in Chinese because like going to all that, but then with this, you had to switch to English. Is that right?

WH: Language is not a problem for me. It's...like um, I—even when I was in high school in Hong Kong, we went to some kind of bilingual... so all of our textbooks and all of our classes were conducted in English, even though classmates would talk in Cantonese... and so English, and then my church life was Mandarin. When I went to Japan, the textbook again, they were all in English. Graduate school, it was all in English environment. So it was—the language wasn't really a problem for me, yeah. It's just switching from science to, to theology, now that's difficult, because science deals with observation and then facts, discussion. All your discussion is based on facts. But when you go to the theology, you start out with something that is abstract. And then, and then you try to end up with something that's more concrete. That to me is a major, major switch.

GC: When you were in seminary, did you um, did you know that, I guess that you wanted to become a pastor? Or...

WH: Yeah... I think that was very clear. Um even as I...even before I went into seminary, I knew that God was calling me into the church ministry. And not just any ministry but church ministry, that's pastoral, yeah. Can you, can you excuse me, I need to go to the restroom?

GC: Yeah!

WH: You also need to take a break.

GC: Yeah, yeah.

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(56:20-29)

[The recorder is paused, the interviewee takes a bathroom break. Then the interview resumes.]

GC: Yeah okay. Uh so I guess, you can just move on to, I guess, after you moved...or I guess your decision to move to Houston. I guess, after you got your um seminary degree, and then you decided to...or you were in the church in St. Louis for a little bit.

WH: Yeah. Mmhmm.

GC: And then, oh, and then you had Sean.

WH: Yeah.

GC: In St. Louis... So then, I guess what made you not want to stay in Louis, St. Louis?

WH: Not really. Basically, it just uh we've been there for quite a while, in the church for 14 years. And then we were in St. Louis altogether for about 17 years already. And then we just thinking about whether it was time to make a move. That was about 15 years...then we also felt that that was when my second son uh finished high school...finished high school, and then my... yeah, finished high school. And then Sean... Sean was just finished uh, finished up his preschool. So we thought if we have to move, this would be a good time to move. And so it just how, how things started. And I also felt that...uh we may be a little too comfortable in St. Louis. Um, maybe, you know, the things are so familiar, uh you become complacent. So we just thinking, wonder whether God...whether it was in God's plan that we will shift to another place or something.

GC: The church you were at um in St. Louis, was Chinese?

WH: Yeah, it's a Chinese church. It's called the Chinese ... St. Louis Chinese Gospel Church.

GC: So then when you were doing um your ministry there, it was all in Chinese too?

WH: Mmmm... That church is a little different from a lot of Chinese churches. That church was started back in 1924. It's almost similar to CCUC in Chicago. And so, uh, you have the more established church members, they have been there all their life. There was this lady—she came to this church when she was 4 or 6 years old. Like in 24—1924. And she stayed there all her life. She just passed away last year. And so her family, her children, her grandkids are all there. So for that group, it's primarily it's English speaking. But then meanwhile, you also have the new immigrants uh students coming in. Uh so that church, even though it has a long history, but it's also in constant turnover condition. Yeah... so going to that church, basically, it's fairly English, um because my sermon had to be in English, so I, so I kind of developed the discipline of writing sermon manuscript... a full manuscript since day one.

GC: So then how did you... or how did HCC, I guess, reach you?

(1:00:02)

WH: Uh in those days, during that year 1995, as we were trying to explore different options. Uh so some churches invited us over to the West coast to explore. And at that time, we were asking Mrs. Chen—Pastor Chen's wife. They was here...uh to help out with the travel arrangements. She was in t—she was in um, it's like a travel agency type, so when she asked us, I asked her to help me find pla—find airfares. And then after a while, she looked at my itinerary, she felt it's kind of strange. And no church will usually invite you to go over there on Sunday afternoon and then come back Monday, so she figured I must be interviewing. And so she brought it up... brought this to her

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husband, Pastor Chen at that time. And so he, he called and said, 'Would I be interested to come to Houston.' And so that's how... how it started, yeah.

GC: So did you, did you want to go to the uh West coast, or...?

WH: At first, California is some place that's kind of attractive... 'cause my...uh both our families were there. My aunt and my mother...and my mother was still alive. She was there. And then my...Cynthia's parents. Uh her father passed away by then. And so her, her siblings they were there. So it's kind of attracting, we wanted to explore, but it did not work out.

GC: So then at HCC, were they looking for...

WH: They were looking for a pastor... a Chinese pastor. And at that time, uh Pastor Chen was also wondering whether I would be interested to...uh to come and then he will eventually retire, going to some diff—Taiwan ministry, and I will become the, the Senior Pastor, something like that, yeah.

GC: So then when you moved here, you...you just bought a house?

WH: Yeah we bought a house, yeah. We had a house in St. Louis... we sold it, and then we bought one here.

GC: So then you're, I guess, well then that means your oldest son has— is already...

WH: Yeah, he was uh, he just finished college when we moved here. [coughs] So, let me see...[coughs] and then he, after college, he went to Oberlin and then after that, he spent one year in...let's see...he spent one year in China teaching English in a university there. And so by that time we moved down to Houston, he finished that one year. Yeah he finished that one year... so he came over and stayed with us um during that summer. But meanwhile he was trying to find a niche, or trying to fin—trying to really find what he wants to do. He was interested in law, actually. So when he was in China, he applied for law school... he took the MCAT... what is that... the LSAT. The LSAT, right. So he took that, and um... And it was kind of very interesting. Um so he was in St.—he was in Houston, he didn't like Houston... coming from Oberlin and so on... Houston is really hick town to him. So he um... he was trying to look for jobs. Um so he found those part-time... oh yeah yeah... so he applied for the Kroger, Kroger job... those cashier type. So one night he went in there for...for take a test. The test was really... was really stupid from his... from anyone's perspective. You know they ask you questions on this page... on the first page... and then the answers are on the second page. So they just want to see whether you know... you know how to flip and find the answer. So after the test, the guy told him 'You did very well, you know?' And so... and then he was so insulted... he's like 'I just finished college, and then I come over here... and look, and look for a job like this.' So that kind of motivated him that week uh... he's sent out his resume to ten places in New York... those law firms. And, and out of those 10, he got three phone calls and so he flew for interview... and then he never came back. And then after working there for two years, he went to law school. And so... his passion is really not law. Um, his passion in those days was making... filmmaking. So he had a partner who was also a lawyer. Uh they made two movies and then the partner went back to Korea. And so Francis um... so he quit that filmmaking path at this moment, and he went into music. He composed uh digital music. Which we don't understand, but apparently he's doing quite well. He enjoy that more than anything else.

(1:05:33)

GC: Is that what he's doing right now?

WH: That's what he's doing... right now...uh it's a long story, my family uh... Because when they had the first son... the wife was training in med school...was in medicine. And so uh she decided...and then...I can't remember all the details now...anyways, she had a job in a New York clinic um working— New York City clinic. And then

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they had a child, so he took maternity leave. In New York City, they give you 5 years maternity leave. They will keep the job without salary and then you can come back during the 5 years anytime. They will guarantee there will be a position there. So at the end of 5 year, they would decide what to do. And so they decided that she would go back to work, otherwise she would have to take all those tests, exams again... licensing. So she went back, and my son decided to stay home and watch the kids. So he's a stay home dad for about... almost 2 years... not quite 2 years. And a few months ago, he was offered a position, as a part time, it's a project. And so he took it, and then, while he was watching the kids, he go—he went to that... the music making. So his electronic digital music was fairly well received in Europe especially. Yes, he has his own album out now. And those vinyl album... not those CDs... but the vinyl ones. Uh that, that's him... that's Francis, yeah. So he just doesn't like uh Houston.

GC: So then did your second son also stay in Texas and go to UT?

WH: Yeah, he went to, he went to A&M...after he finished school, he found a job... actually, he was a—he found a consulting job, was travelling all over the place, and then he got married. And they settled in Austin, and about 2-3 years ago, they moved out to San Diego.

GC: And then I guess, then growing, then Sean grew up in Houston most of the...most of?

WH: Most of his... all of his life. Yeah.

GC: And then he's...he, well he graduated, right?

WH: He graduated last year. So he's um... he has his own business as photography. So that's what he's been doing.

GC: Did you, did you kind of take your father's approach and, I guess like, that you were very lenient with your kids... and what they did with their life?

WH: I'm kind of lenient in the sense... I felt... I'm really not in the position to tell my kids what to do. Um my principle is that I always encourage them to find something that some... to find a career that you enjoy. And that also fits you. Uh that's my basic uh approach. Um lenient, I think from some Chinese families...uh they would consider me as very lenient, maybe too lenient. But to me um, we just um... I think both Cynthia and I we just look at life differently... we felt that children need to do what they enjoy. Um that's really the bottom line. Of course we trust that God will guide them, and so our guideline is really that you walk with the Lord and then explore what he wants you to do.

GC: I guess, something that I didn't ask that I wanted to ask before: was the rest of your family, like um, um, like your extended family uh Christian also?

WH: No... not... unfortunately not. My brother in law, my older sister's husband, he was not a Christian... he was very um antagonistic even to this day. Uh my sister had not been going to church for a long while now. My younger sister had been going to church; um but they'd been going to mainline church, which is a little different from us, um but that's where they found their niche. Um my s—my brother, of course, is still, even though he is retired, but he is still very much into the China ministry. So sibling-wise, we're all kind of very diverse.

GC: Do you still um, I guess, does your family like come together?

WH: Oh yeah, we try. Of course when my parents were there, when they were still alive, then my parents would be the main attraction for all of us to gather. But even after my parents are gone, so now my oldest sister or my younger sister, they have been playing the role of gathering everyone together. Um so, um... actually, we get together once every...maybe around once every two years. But now as the kids are growing up, like with their own families, with their own jobs, it's very difficult to come together. But we still do our best... like this year um, just our family...um my kids... we plan for a reunion in San Diego. And then when my youngest sister found out that there we'll all be in

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San Diego, so she was trying to arrange another family gathering that was the big one... in northern California. Uh that's what my sister... older sister's 5th year anniversary. And I don't think my kids will be able to go up there, so we will be there so my sibling will still be uh coming together. We're quite close the 4 of us, yeah.

GC: So I guess um, you're retiring soon?

WH: Yeah, I'll be retiring next year, at the end of next year.

GC: So then do you see... are you going to stay here or are you...

WH: We don't know... we don't know... we're still kind of exploring, yeah.

GC: I think...

WH: Here it's just too hot for me.

GC: Hmm... I think, I think that's it... that I have... did I leave out anything? Okay yeah... I think that's it.

WH: That's it? Okay, good.

GC: Yeah, thank you for sharing your life with us. [laughs]

WH: I'm glad I can be, I can be helping you.

GC: Yeah, no, yeah. I think it's very interesting um listening to you, I guess... I don't think a lot of their... like the archive, I don't think, has a lot from like church backgrounds, so I think I just wanted to like integrate that into this.

WH: Okay, that's good.

GC: Yeah, but...thank you!

(1:12:57)

[The recorder is turned off, and the interview ends.]