

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

Interviewee: Hung Hsien (Margaret Chang)

Interviewer: Taylor Ginter, Xingyi Li

Date/Time of Interview: May 12, 2017

Transcribed by: Taylor Ginter, Xingyi Li

Audio Track Time: 1:18:27

Background:

Hung Hsien, also known as Margaret Chang, was born in Yangzhou, China in 1933 in a very artistic and prominent family. She settled in Taiwan with her family in 1948. She studied traditional Chinese painting with Prince Pu Hsinyu and in the Normal University of Taiwan. After she married T.C. Chang in 1957, the couple moved to Chicago where Hung Hsien studied painting in both Northwestern University and the Art Institute of Chicago. Hung Hsien's work was exhibited and collected in several museums including Smithsonian Museum, Museum in Hong Kong, and Art Institute of Chicago, etc. Now, Hung Hsien and T.C. Chang live in the museum district in Houston. She teaches at Glassell School of Arts and teaches Tai Chi at Young Center. She and her husband are good at playing tennis.

Setting:

The interview took place on May 12, 2017 in Hung Hsien and T.C. Chang's apartment in the Hermann Park neighborhood. Katherine Shen was also present during the interview and she and Mr. Chang can be heard during parts. After the interview Mrs. Hung pulled out and hung up one of her paintings for us to see.

Key:

HH: Hung Hsien

XL: Xingyi Li

TG: Taylor Ginter

TC: T.C. Chang

KS: Katherine Shen

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

TG: Okay. Hello, my name is Taylor Ginter. It is uh May 12 [2017] at around 5:30 and we are interviewing uh Hung Hsien or Mrs. Margaret Chang.

XL: This is Xingyi...uh this is Xingyi Li.

TG: And we're with uh Houston Asian American Archives [sic] for Rice University. Um, so, first of all, what name do you go by most? Um...do you use Hung Hsien...?

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HH: [overlapping] Well, at—at home uh...I do use my Chinese name. And also uh my old—old Chinese friends and the...the friends know I'm artist, they will call me Hung Hsien. Uh...but otherwise, Margaret is easier for them to say.

TG: Okay. Um, so when and where were you born, and can you talk about what your childhood was like?

HH: Yeah, I was born in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. Where is my hometown and uh...I have three sisters. They are all older than I am. Then, I have two brothers. They are younger than I am. So when I was four years old we had to move to Sichuan province because uh that's the war started [TG: Mmhmm.] to—uh with Japanese. And...

XL: So which part in Sichuan?

HH: Mm?

XL: Which part in Sichuan?

HH: Uh yeah. First we were in Tongkin (?).

XL: Oh, okay.

HH: Yeah in Tongkin (?) and uh from Tongkin, because it was bombing all the time and uh my father was working for the government and uh every day, he just had to have uh he has to help people uh...to...to gets a safe place. Because he works uh in the...the Soc—Social...?

TC: Interior. Interior Department.

HH: No, no, no. At that time it wasn't the Interior Department. [to TC] *Sihui bu* (?).

TC: Si...uh...si....

XL: Is it like social?

HH: Yeah, social.

TC: Social.

HH: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

TG: So were you affected by the war? Besides having to move, did it affect your everyday life?

HH: Uh that time I was too young. I—I—it didn't affect me at all. So we moved to Guizhou [XL: Mmhmm.]. Guizhou. It—uh it's much safe place. And uh my three sisters,

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they can go to school. But uh...myself and my two brothers, we were too young, we just stay at home [TG: Mmhhh.]. And uh after a—a year, we moved back to Tongkin (?) [XL: Mmhhh.]. To Tongkin (?) we moved to...to the suburban area, which is called Xailongtan.

XL: Oh.

HH: Uh they—all the school were there, the—the university, uh the high school, and the middle school. All there. Yeah so—we can go to school. So from there, up—uh so until the war finished in 1945, we go back to Nanking [TG: Mmhhh.] because my father works for the government. So we stayed in Nanking for three years. That time I remember very well uh because I was already from thirteen to fifteen. And uh...I really like—liked Nanking, lots of uh places we can go to visit. From there when the Communists took over China, we moved to Taiwan. That—that island [XL and TG: Mmhhh.]. And uh I was there for ten years. Studied in the high school, and also finished in the college in the—in the art, art department. The—the university's called...called uh...that time it's called...Teacher's College.

TG: Okay.

KS: I think the English name is something like—

XL: Oh like...National Taiwan or...

TC: Taiwan Normal University.

HH: National—National Taiwan Normal University.

XL: Yeah.

TG: So were you studying to be a teacher, or just studying art?

HH: Uh just study for art. Yeah. But—but you, you...it also train as a teacher. Art teacher. Yes.

TG: Were you studying painting at this time?

HH: Yes. Uh in the school we study both Chinese painting and Western painting. Two. So both are equally uh...ours to study.

TG: Oh, okay.

HH: But if, for Chinese painting, I also studied private lesson with uh my—my uh...master. His name is Pu. The last name is Pu.

XL and TG: Mmm.

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HH: Pu. And I—I studied uh I go to his...his studio to study with uh...the traditional Chinese painting. But—but in school there are many other Chinese teachers to teach brush painting. Also I learned more from my...my—my private teacher because—because he has uh...more to offer.

TG: Mm.

HH: But for oil painting and watercolor painting, I also learned a lot. Yes. Besides that we also studied some other—other courses.

TG: What interested you in painting?

HH: Oh...since I was a young, young girl, I always liked to draw. And uh I always like landscapes.

TG: Mmhmm.

HH: So uh that made, made me to like art all the time.

XL: So what—were your parents influencing you, that you like paintings? From your childhood?

HH: Well, they, they didn't directly to influence—influence me anything. But my father writes very good Chinese uh calligraphy. And very often people come to ask him uh to for a piece of writing. You know, to hang it on the wall.

XL: Yeah.

HH: So my father always uh do it for them. And uh when he...do the writing uh of calligraphy—because every time you have to ground lots of ink, he will let me help him to do that. Uh also help him when he—when he sit there to, to write, I will stand on the other side and uh holding the sheet—the paper for him. But of course if it's uh...long, long hanging scroll with big character, he will standing up to do it. And uh then I will just con—uh continue to pull—to pull the—the paper for him. And that somehow for six children, he'll always ask me to do it [laughter]. Yes, I guess uh he can tell who—who...is more interested in Chinese culture [laughter].

TG: Are any of your siblings artist?

HH: Hmm?

TG: Are any of your siblings artists?

HH: Oh! Yeah, yeah. My—my mother's uh grandfather, he was a professional artist.

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TG: Mm.

HH: Yeah, he paints Chinese tradition painting. So at home where...where Yangzhou is, and uh he—he will make living by—by artist. As—as artist.

XL: Mm. And what was his name?

HH: His name is uh...Ye Mei.

XL: Oh! Okay, I think I know—

HH: Yeah.

XL: —know that. Or—

HH: Eh?

XL: —I think I know the artist? He was pretty famous—he was like really famous during Qing Dynasty. As an artist.

HH: Late—must be late Qing. Yeah. I never saw his painting [XL laughs] my—myself but yeah. But—but if we didn't move to Taiwan, probably have chance to find his work. But uh...but too bad I didn't see anything of his work. [laughs].

TG: How would you describe your painting style?

HH: Well, at the beginning, I...learned Chinese tradition painting. Because uh in the old time as a student you just—you just uh...do what the teacher does. And uh you follow his style. So everybody just follow their—their teacher's uh...style. But—but when—when I was at Normal University that time, one of the uh...art teachers, he...he taught uh Western style. So he tell us—he said that, “You know, no matter how good you are, uh...how good you can copy the old masters, but you're still not yourself.”

TG: Mmhmm.

HH: So I remembered it and uh I always think, how can I get the painting that uh is—is from my—myself. But at that time you cannot get away from the form because uh it's all set. Uh...my—my Chinese uh...uh private teacher, he didn't—he didn't tell me anything too, because he—he is very old-fashioned...person. So until I came to—to this country, first thing I—I got much more chance to...to see—to visit the museum and uh to see good shows and uh study the all different western artists. And uh from there I understand what is individual style.

TG: Mmhmm.

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HH: So I said, “I’m going to—to start to, to try.” And I just struggle, I struggle. And it is very, very hard at beginning. You, you cannot get uh...away from the, the old form until I can, until one day I just uh suddenly uh...developed uh much, much further and then I see myself so, so I know that’s how to do the next step. Uh then, then I just have no problem [TG and HH laugh]. Uh well, uh but just in between that uh...period, it’s pretty hard. Yeah, you have to get through to both to—to know how to get away from it. And then, then I just try to think what to do with the brush and the ink. I—one thing I’m pretty sure that between oil paintings and the Chinese painting, I do love Chinese painting so much. It, it is because the brush. Uh the brush, I found out, really I can express myself much more than...uh limited by the...the oil.

TG: Mmhmm.

HH: You, you see. The oil...brush, it’s much stiff, but the Chinese brush, oh you can just hold it, do anything you want [laughs]. So, so I’m even paint different style, I’m still so happy I learned it. But that time...many young Chinese artist. They all want to study western painting. So uh they don’t, they don’t really want to learn brushwork anymore.

TG: Mmm.

HH: Yeah that’s really shame to give up. But—but I kept it. I still using it and uh very, very few Chinese artists today they use brush. You know, you know what they do? Even paint on the rice paper with ink but uh they use brush [laughter]. Even roller because they think these are much new tools [TG and XL: Oh...] and uh the brush is old [laughs]. Yeah you should just throw it away.

TG: So they don’t use the brush?

HH: Yeah...

TG: Mmm.

HH: Yeah. Even—even use the spray [TG and XL: Oh!]. Yeah that’s something new [TG laughing] and quick, and quick. Yeah. But I, I’m still stroke by stroke. You know, later I do not grind the ink anymore because it takes too much time. And large paintings. For small paintings is alright. But when you ground the ink, the ink stick itself—if it’s a good piece it [XL and HH at same time: smells good]. And the color is good—even black. But good black color. Yeah, that’s very important. And uh other—nowadays everybody use the bottle ink.

TG: Mm.

HH: [laughs]

TG: Was it hard to find ink to grind, here in America?

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HH: Uh...well...in the Chinese uh...store, you can, you can, get the ink stick but uh not good quality. If real good quality it's expensive. It's made in the old time. You buy it as a piece of antique [HH and TG laugh].

XL: So do you have the collection of grind ink?

HH: Yeah.

XL: Oh wow.

HH: And now you do that. Actually, it's good for you. Give you time to warm up yourself, to think what to do, and uh to get yourself uh it's like meditation to be quiet.

TG: Do you...so your husband was saying you've been in this apartment for about 30 years?

HH: Yeah!

TG: Do you paint in this apartment? Is this your studio?

HH: Uh yes. Yes, I did some paintings in this studio. Yeah [laughs]. But uh we, we used to have a house in Evanston, Illinois.

TG: Yeah.

HH: And uh...we...the second floor, we always take the big room as my studio [all laugh]. Now we take the—the living room and dining room [all laugh].

TG: Um...how did your work end up in the Smithsonian?

HH: Uh you know, you cannot—that's something uh...I didn't, I even didn't know anything about it. Just suddenly I got the letter from them [TG and XL laugh]. To tell me "Send us ten slides. We will select—we would like to select your painting from it. Just select one painting." So that, of course, I was really happy about it. I send them ten slides. Then they limited to maybe a few, a few. Said to "send the original painting to us." After we sent all original paintings to them uh...then they said that "we are going to choose one. The curator liked it." Uh usually, you know, and this, the museum, they have the budget for buying paintings. Uh also for, for budget to buy certain paintings. Uh every art museum are different. But for Smithsonian, they don't uh...they don't...very few times they buy paintings. Mostly just for people—donate it.

TG: Mmhmm.

HH: Yeah, so after they...decide which painting they want, and uh then they...they tell me that, "we have—we need someone to buy it." And uh...at that time, one, one person uh...he—she, she works there. Also she knows my work. So—so she [said] "we need to

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buy it for them.” So she paid, paid it. Uh...that—that painting [TG: Mmhmm.]. Because the artist uh cannot give painting to them. If you want to get into the museum you—they—it’s not allowed.

TG: Oh.

HH: Yeah. Then uh then I got another letter. Said uh, “Now we have the meeting. The director, he likes another painting” [all laughing]. But they already bought the first one. Yeah. The...the director liked the way it’s bigger with two sheets put together just like the one in the living room. Uh...let me see...oh yeah! So—so they said that I have to find someone to buy, to buy it [all laugh]. Well, at that time, I teach at—taught at Jung Center. So that uh the next morning I went to Jung Center to teach. One of the board member, she knows me. She said, “Margaret, what’s new?” [TG and XL laugh]. Yeah. I said, yeah I told her the story. She—she just said right away, “I’ll buy it!” [all laugh]. She says, “I’ll buy it!” Didn’t even look [at] the painting.

TG: Oh! [laughs]

HH: The painting already sends to—to there. But she trust that’s a good place so—so she said that, “Oh that’s okay, I’ll buy it!” Oh! I...so, so simple! [all laugh] I didn’t do—I didn’t do anything! [laughs]

TG: So are the paintings still there?

HH: Eh?

TG: Are the paintings still there?

HH: Oh yes, it’s their collection.

TG: Oh, okay.

HH: Yeah. And then um...peop—so people paid—bought it for them and then they keep it for their collection. And also I heard that every five years they will exhibit the piece, they collected. But the reason is uh of course, first thing, if every painting all put on wall, they don’t have that much space.

XL and TG: [laugh] Yeah.

HH: Another thing, it’s not good for the painting if the painting is on the wall all the time for dispo—disposal...dis—[to TC] *riguang? Cai (?) tamen.*

XL: Oh.

HH: Yeah, the...it’s not good for the painting. Yeah. Oh, usually some—some places, when they exhibit the antique paintings, every five minutes the—the lights will—

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TC: Goes off.

HH: —turn off for—you know, just like the eye: open and close [laughter]. Open, close. Yeah. Just, just try to save the painting.

TG: Mmhmm.

TC: You are the world's (?) first living artist—tell them that.

HH: Oh yeah, I was the first living artist they...they selected.

TG: Wow!

HH: Yeah. Because usually, museums, they don't buy the living artist's work until you've died.

TG: Right.

HH: Yeah, then, then they be sure you alright (?) [laughter]. But—but they changed to policy. So I was the first one they—they selected. Yeah [laughs].

TG: That's cool. Um are you still painting today?

HH: Today, I still paint—paint, but uh I don't do—I do it very slowly. Not productive as before when I was 40 and 50.

TG: What is your—

HH: 30! Yes. 30, 40, 50.

TG: Um, what is your like creative process as you paint? Um...so you said like grinding the stones is some sort of meditation [HH laughs], what else do you do to get ready to paint?

HH: Uh...well. Yeah, the only thing is it has to be quiet. Yeah. No one bother me [TG and HH laugh]. Cannot have any—anything bother me. Either outside or inside of uh my mind. Yeah. Then, then I will uh...gradually get into the mood. Then I start it. So when I start it I will just follow what I started. That's uh different than western painting. When you paint oil, uh right now I'm talking about the realistic style, you do sketch on it. If you paint a portrait, you get a outline of it. Then you put...color on it. But for, for Chinese painting we don't do the sketch directly on the paper. So it's just a white sheet.

TG: Mmhmm.

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HH: A white sheet. Usually, even a white sheet, this is my own experience. I still look, look at it [laughs] I still look at it. Actually it's—all the stuff is in my mind. But almost I, I can see it on the paper. And uh I just—just one stroke by one stroke, dot after a dot. Uh it's uh in China, there's uh one word that's just number one, that one: *yi*.

TG and XL: Mmhmm.

HH: *Yi*. So very simple. Very—*yi*. So you...that's how you start it. From there, it's all by yourself [TG and HH laugh]. So—so how do you develop on the sheet. That's—even myself, I feel very maze—mazing [like a maze?]. Because one of the—the point from Taiwan was at the Rice University invite him to come here to give a...a lesson and a talk. I—I know him before, that's Yu Guangzhong (?).

XL: Oh.

HH: Yeah, Yu Guangzhong (?). Yeah, he came here. He ask me a question, very, very interesting. He said that, “where do you, after you finish the painting, where you started it and uh where is the ending of the painting?” [TG laughs] Yeah. I said, “Well, it is different as musician. For, for a music piece, you have to start somewhere. Then, end somewhere. But for the painting, after you finish it, you cannot tell! [XL and TG laugh] I cannot tell you where—where I started it. That's very interesting between music and art—artwork. Yeah, and so I just—from one stroke and with the ink, then get more and more...built-up. It's interesting, almost like the—the children to play those wood pieces [Lincoln Logs]. You—you just try to build it [TG: Oh yeah.]. Finally you see something. But of course, you have to know to do—many—things. It's not a real rule because you can always create your own rule. Yeah. And uh that's—that there's no certain thing is a rule. So uh for me it's very free to...to paint.

XL: So do you have a picture of what you are going to paint like beforehand—before you've started? Do you have a picture in your mind?

HH: Uh...no not really.

XL: Oh, okay.

HH: Not really. I'm—I may think of certain kind of mood. [XL: Mmhmm.] Yeah. Or some kind of—even some landscape uh...I saw. I just really like it. But...but even I don't have sketch. I can, I can remember it. But—but you cannot directly to use it. It's no, no use. Uh but all these things, they help me. Yeah, they do help me. And when I see the—see a mountain, maybe I see something different than other people see it. Yeah. It's—that is what I—I want to catch from there. Catch different things. Mmm...some of the lights, or the color, the shape, and...but when I started my own painting, all the shapes, I made it. It's not directly from the nature. But of course, you still see the things from nature. Some people, they saw some of my paintings, uh...oh they—they always say, “I find something there. It looks like an animal's head [laughter]. Or like the animal's body.” Yeah. It

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happens that way. Just something—many, many things that I liked, I may catch it from my eye. Maybe they get into my mind. Yeah.

TG: So shifting gears a little bit, when did you first come to the US? Uh...did you move directly to Chicago, or Evanston?

HH: I...when I came to Chicago from Taiwan, I stayed there for ten years. Yeah, because of course we get married first and uh stayed in Evanston—very nice place near Northwestern University. And after ten years uh I went uh Hong Kong. The Chinese University they ask—invite me to go there to teach Chinese painting. Yeah. And the interesting thing was uh some of the—I heard some, some artists there, they say, “why not to have us?” Because I came from United States [laughs]. And they really want a...a someone to teach Chinese brush painting.

XL: Oh.

HH: But—but of course my method of teaching...very different from—from, they teach there.

TC: We were in Evanston about twenty years. You said ten.

HH: Oh, really?

TC: Yeah. [laughter] We went to Northwestern first and then uh...

HH: Okay, uh... ‘60s and ‘70s, right.

TC: Yup.

HH: Yes... ‘60s and ‘70s, mmhmm. I went there—uh I went Hong Kong at end of ‘70s.

TC: Yeah.

HH: Yeah, right. Then, in Hong Kong I stayed for four years and then moved to here.

TG: To Houston?

HH: Mmhmm [laughs].

TG: Um...how did you meet your husband?

HH: I met him when we, when we were young. Yes, both of our family—the fathers, they know each other very well. And uh...you know, in China, sometime the parents will—if they are good friend, they are thinking, “well, if you have a son, I have a daughter [XL and TG laugh] then we will be very nice” [laughs]. Yeah, that’s happened, happened that

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way. So, when he was ten years old, his father brought him to our house and they introduce him to my, my father [laughs].

XL: How old were you then?

HH: Huh?

XL: How old were you?

HH: Let's see...I was seven years old.

XL: Oh! [laughter]

TG: Wow!

XL: So that's the first time that you met him?

HH: Yes. I didn't talk to him [all laugh].

TG: So did you stay in touch while you were growing up? Or, how did you end up...?

HH: Well, we didn't really think in touch of each other but we always move to the same place. So all, so still we can see each other. Yeah, like in—in Nanking. Uh I mean—*dui*, yes, in Nanking, we...we have chance to see each other and uh in Taiwan, we also have chance to see each other until he left Taiwan. Because he came here first.

TG: Mm.

HH: Yeah.

TG: So were you...did you purposefully go to like Taiwan together? Or it just—it was coincidental?

HH: That—uh at that time we were teenage.

TG: Okay.

HH: Yeah. So we just uh go with our family.

TG: Oh, so your families independently decided?

HH: Yes.

TG: Okay. Um...so what brought you to Houston, when you finally came here?

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HH: Oh, after I finish school in...Hong Kong, my husband also worked there as architect in one of the architecture firms. So after there...one of uh...his friend from Hong Kong, he, he came here. He moved to Houston. They also had a big, big firm. So he asked T.C., "Would you like to move here and also work in the firm as an architect?" They were looking for an architect. Yeah, that's how we, we came here.

TG: Okay.

TC: Yeah, also interesting, the Hong Kong was given back to China.

XL: Mmhmm.

HH: Oh, yeah.

TC: Doomsday!

TG: Oh.

TC: So everybody lost their lease.

TG and XL: Oh!

TC: So the Hong Kong organized and shift some assets to this country. So they bought a company here just in case if communists play rough [HH laughs] [inaudible] back door to, to run. So that company do real estate and do parking [XL: Oh.]. Yeah. They have 90 cities in this country.

TG: Nine zero?

TC: Nine zero.

TG: Wow.

TC: Yeah.

HH: Yeah, you know, in Hong Kong, the place is so small, you're hard to find the parking space [all laugh]. When they heard that, "Oh! Here you can park anywhere!" [laughter]

TC: They park something like 60, 70 million cars a year [laughter].

TG: Um and...did you purposefully want to live in the museum district?

HH: I would...I would, yeah. I would like to—to choose this place. Well, we did looking for a while.

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XL: Mmhmm.

HH: Uh...first, because uh he always wear uh tennis—tennis clothes [laughter] and the—the realtor...said—saw him, said, “Oh, I can find you apartment they have tennis court!” [laughter]. And then looked at this—this park [Hermann Park], the museum is next to it! “Oh,” I said. “That’s funny! Cannot find better place!”

TC: And also, it’s what they call “foresight.” You see I had heart attack 16 years ago. [XL: Oh.] Yeah. And in five minutes I was at the hospital.

TG: Oh! Right.

XL: Oh! [TG laughs]

TC: So it didn’t do much damage.

TG: Good!

TC: Yeah, that was important.

TG: So how have you seen Houston change throughout the years?

[00:39:56]

HH: Oh yes, it has really changed a lot. At first when we moved here, I wasn’t happy at all, and the museum were very small; at that time, you don’t have to buy tickets to get in.

TG: Is it the Museum of Fine Art?

HH: Yeah, well because everywhere you go, especially New York, it’s very expensive.

TG: [Overlapping] Right.

HH: Now they cost like forty dollars to go to the Modern Art Museum for one time! [laugh]

TG: Yeah! [laugh]

HH: Yeah here...here that time, you don’t have to pay or just a couple dollars, something like that. And not much to see. [laugh] But gradually, they built another building and they um are getting better and better. Yeah now even they think this is the, this is the good museum. And the Menil Museum was finished later, and the downtown opera house...they are all after we moved here. Yes, we see a lot of changes and also especially this park. Usually you don’t see much over the other side. Now this is an old building. [laugh]

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TG: Hmm. So how does Houston compare to Chicago? Most specifically regards to the Asian Americans population.

HH: Because nowadays, not just the people are from Taiwan also people from Mainland China. I think even more people from Mainland China. And um... lot of them come to Houston, or Dallas. So you can go to parking lot, suddenly you can hear people speak Beijing dialect. [TS and HH laugh] Yes, but when we're in Chicago, we don't see Chinese. All of my artist friends are all Western artist. And only when we go to Chinatown. But those Chinese, they are oversea Chinese. They only speak Cantonese. You have no communication with them. And we do have some Chinese friends. They teach at the University of China, oh I mean the University of Chicago. But it's the south side. We live in the north side. There isn't much chance to see them.

TG: Do you spend a lot of time in Chinatown in Houston?

HH: No. But when we need Chinese grocery and Chinese dinner, we still go to Chinatown.

TG: So, with regards to the art scene would you said that Houston has more Asian artists than Chicago?

HH: That I do not know. I do not know. Here, I do not really have artist friends, very few because I taught at Glassell Art School, the Fine Art Museum, um from Fine Art Museum.

TG: In Chicago?

HH and TC: Here.

TG: Oh.

TC: It's part of the Museum of Fine Art. She taught here.

HH: Yeah I know some of the Western teachers and made friend with them. But some of the Chinese artists from Mainland China and Taiwan, they like big house. So they are not near here.

TG: Um have you ever face any discrimination being an immigrant?

[00:45:00]

HH: Well let's let's try it again.

TG: I mean have you ever face any discrimination?

HH: Um we were okay. All the time we were very happy. Because all the American friends we have, they treat us very nicely. We didn't have any trouble.

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TC: When I first came in College of North Carolina, the black people sit in the back of the bus. The transportation has separate bathrooms.

HH: That was when he came.

TC: I came in 52', she came in 58' and um... but my roommate told me that you are not black. [laugh] You are not white but you are visitor. He said, but you are definitely not black, so that's how we feel like it is our second country, even for Houston now, we've been here the longest. Also in China, we've been moving around. Five years, eight years are the oldest the number of years. But in this country now, this is our home. [laugh]

HH: We were very lucky. Somehow the American friends we have, they all treat us very nicely. And like every year for the Thanksgiving, we would always be invited to have turkey dinners. The American friends' family, either with their parents, or themselves.

TG: Do you still celebrate Chinese holidays while you are here?

HH: Oh yes. Yeah, all the Chinese festivals.

TG: Did you experience any kind of culture shock?

HH: Not very much. Because like Western movies, when we were in China or Taiwan, we see more American movies. Yeah, so the culture, we also have English class to study English. But we never meet any Western people. Very seldom to have Western people to meet over there. So when I was really trying to speak English was when I came here.

XL: So do you have any language barrier after you came here?

HH: Yeah, I even cannot figure out whether you are from Europe, different countries or you are local people here. And after I stayed for a while then I found out it's very different. [laugh]

TG: How have you been involved in Houston Chinese, Taiwanese community? I think Katherine told me that you taught Tai Chi at the Young Center and you taught Chinese calligraphy at the Chengmei Buddhist temple?

HH: Yes.

TG: Could you talk a little bit more about the experience?

HH: Yes. At Young Center, all the friends and students I met, they are all Americans. No Chinese come to Young Center. And where was the other place that you are asking?

TG: The Chengmei Buddhist temple?

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HH: Oh the temple is all Chinese, only a couple of visitors that you see are Western people. So they are mostly from Taiwan because this temple is originally from Taiwan. This is a branch.

TG: Okay, so you were teaching at these places?

HH: Yes, um about three years.

KS: Maybe how did she get started teaching Tai Chi?

TG: Yeah, that's a good question. How did you get started teaching Tai Chi?

HH: Well, when I was forty years old, because I worked too hard. My back had trouble. Yeah, I can hardly move even sometimes, and I went to see Western doctors, didn't help me at all. So I started to do yoga and still didn't feel really good. Until I went to Hong Kong to teach at a Chinese University, and one of the teachers, he originally came from Beijing. He learned Tai Chi when he was ten years old, so he played very well himself. And then we a few of our friends asked him if he can teach us. He said, well I will teach you to learn, I will be very glad to teach you. So when is like we, ours were in the art department, other one was in the philosophy department and then there is a couple more in different department. And the teacher himself was from the mathematic department. So once a week, we will study from him. And when they ask him, I said well, the professor form the um... the philosophy department, I say that he is very smart because every form he taught. Because they are very new to me, I say that why he can always remember and I can't remember. I say that I don't know how many time I can remember. He said don't worry, actually what he did is not right. [laugh] He said actually you are the best one because all the form you learned from me and you did it correctly, if you can't remember the form, that's okay, you will remember it. So when I come back from Hong Kong, I finished to learn the Tai Chi from him. So when we are here, one of my friends here...oh actually I went back to Chicago first before I came here because I still have the old house there. And one of our American friends told us, he went to China with a group of Americans. They tried to learn Tai Chi from a Tai Chi master but he teaches modern Tai Chi. [laugh] He teaches modern Tai Chi, anyway, so one of the students studied from him, actually, she came from Houston. And when she found that I am coming to Houston she said that I am going to give you her name. So when I came here, I just connected her and got to know her. She's a very nice person. And one time, that teacher teaches the modern Tai Chi came here to teach, so my friend Jian Xiaorui, Xiaorui, she's the host to organize everything. She also asked me hope that I would join her so I could meet with this Chinese teacher. So that's how I got to know this friend. The Chinese Tai Chi teacher, I founded that he studied modern dance here. [laugh] So he just combined Tai Chi with modern dance here so he called it modern Tai Chi. [laugh] And he tried to make it different. And that time this girlfriend, she teaches at Young Center, but after a while, her back hurt. [laugh] She cannot teach, she told me she cannot teach anymore. So then I said that okay I will teach it. But I was still afraid. I called my teacher and said what should I tell her I can teach or not to teach. Because in China, if the teacher said that you are not good, you cannot do it. But he said it's okay, you go ahead, you can teach. [laugh] So

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then now I go and teach. So actually, after teaching, every time I learn something new. Because you have to really really concentrate to let the students know how to do it. Then I have to develop certain teaching method, so what's that was interesting. So that was what the Chinese says “教学相长” (Jiao Xue Xiang Zhang, a Chinese saying that means people learn while they teach). So when you teach, you also learn.

[00:57:31]

TC: Yeah it keeps her healthy.

[all laugh]

XL: So is your back still hurt or is it well now?

HH: It's getting better, but the thing is that I am getting old. So it is not easy to get well. So once a week, I do special training to stretch my leg and also fix my back.

TG: When you were teaching art, do you also find that you were learning while you were teaching?

HH: Yes I learned how to teach them. Some artists they cannot teach the students what to do. Like my private teacher, the Master Pu, he cannot tell you what to do. He is good himself because his level is way high and himself was self-taught. So you really have to figure out yourself what to do. Sometimes, even if you go with a good teacher, you do learn the right thing and good manner too, good thinking, but you still have to do it your way, you have to think how to develop it yourself. He cannot teach you everything, no one can teach you anything, but a good teacher can always start you something. That's very important.

TG: Do you feel like you had more room to be creative once you were doing art, making work in the U.S.? Like could you get outside of the rules and the boundaries when studying in the U.S.?

HH: Do you mind to repeat it?

TG: Um so as compared to making art in China, do you feel like you have more freedom to be creative here?

HH: Yes, definitely, because my teacher cannot watch me. [laugh] Otherwise, they just shake their heads, say that's too bad. [laugh]

[1:00:30]

TC: [Inaudible] One of the old master teacher from Taiwan University. And um after the Northwestern had her five years, she has a big show, about thirty oil paintings and thirty brush paintings. And he came and look the show and then came back to our house and

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telling me, he said, Margaret is such a talented young artist, it's a really shame that her painting I couldn't really understand.

TG and XL: Ohh.

KS: Referring to her western painting.

TC: Yes, because all of a sudden, she departed from the traditional Chinese.

HH: Actually he didn't know I wasn't really stopped the connection from the old Chinese art. It is always there. You cannot say everything by myself because that's the background you have.

TC: You learned from the past and then you create new.

TG: Yeah. How has it been since Mr. Chang is an architect, have you had any artistic inspiration from him?

HH: Yes, from lots of different areas, especially for the space. Because architecture always try to create the space, different way, different angle. That has opened my eye and made my vision, to see things differently.

TC: And also there's a case, I designed the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center and the director came to our house and look at the walls. He said whose painting are these. I said Margaret. He said those are good enough for show. So that was her first museum show.

XL: [overlapping] Oh.

TG: Was the one that you designed?

TC: The one that I designed. [laugh]

TG: Wow.

TC: So that's my contribution. [laugh] Young artist, the hardest thing is to have museum show. And she's lucky that she was only thirty.

HH: Yeah that was very lucky, not all the artists have that a good opportunity.

TC: [overlapping] Because the museum was so big.

HH: Brand new!

[all laugh]

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TC: That's why she paints the painting fifteen feet wide. Fifteen feet, ten feet in order to... you know they usually they give a show, they give you ten month. So she really work.
[laugh]

XL: So how do you see your paintings? How do you see or perceive your paintings? Like what genre of the painting is it? For example, do you think it is a combination of Chinese traditional and Western work?

HH: Um you mean to compare with these?

XL: No I just want to ask how do you see your own painting?

HH: With the traditional Chinese painting?

XL: I mean like do you think it belongs to?

TG: Like do you think your painting belongs to Western, Eastern or a mix?

HH: Oh I see. Well, I still think it's Chinese painting. Yes definitely. Because I'm using the same ink, same brush, same kind of technique. But of course, I developed further of my technique. That doesn't mean you are not Chinese artist. But of course, the form changed. I don't see a lot of Western artists have this kind of form.

TG: What do you mean by form?

HH: The composition, the style, everything. Because in my mind, I still use the tradition Chinese methods to paint. The Chinese philosophy, you do everything from your heart, your mind and I think it's very different from Western painting. But I did study Western painting very carefully and all the modern Western artists. Like every time I go to New York and Washington D.C., there are some of the Western painters I like. Their work very very much those European artists. Yes, they made me feel I don't have to afraid of anything, I can just go ahead and paint. Yeah, at that I had big influence from them. To learn how to be yourself, how to be creative. If I didn't come to the United States, I still in Taiwan, I don't think I can develop my style that much.

TG: So how do you consider yourself? More Chinese or more American?

HH: Personally?

TG: Yeah.

HH: Personally I'm Chinese. Because at home we speak Chinese, we cook Chinese food. Nothing very very different as in China. Except here, of course we get used to everything. When we see Americans, some are our friends some are not our friends, we don't feel strange. I think we are part of the Western now, but inside, we are still Chinese.

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TG: When was the last time you went back to China?

HH: In the eighties.

TG: When you were in Hong Kong before you came to Houston.

HH: Oh okay.

TG: Yeah I went back three times. I went all the way back to visit my hometown. And I also go to northern area.

XL: Are your family still in Taiwan?

HH: Pardon me?

XL: Are your family still in Taiwan?

HH: I have one sister, she lives in Taiwan. The other sisters and brothers are here. They are all in California. [laugh] But it's very nice in the summer time we can stay with them.

TG: Yeah, get out of Houston.

HH: Is there anything else you have to ask?

XL: Can you tell me about your family now, with T.C. Do you have any daughters and sons?

HH: Well, T.C. came from a big family, they have eight children, two brothers and the rest are all girls. And in my family, we have six. But two of us, we don't have children. But all of our brothers and sisters, they all have children.

TC: So when we have a reunion, forty, fifty people show up.

[laugh]

XL: Do you celebrate Chinese New Year together with your family?

HH: Well, here it's just two of us. Though we celebrate with friends.

TC: And we're going to celebrate with Katherine for the coming festival.

XL: Oh the dragon boat festival.

KS: Yeah the dragon boat festival.

TG: How did you and Katherine meet?

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HH: After she moved here to the building.

KS: Yeah a friend of ours told us that do you realize that there's a famous artist in your building? I said really? We were not introduced by our friends, but we are just kind of self introduced by ourselves one day when we were downstairs together.

TG: Is there anything else that you want to share with us that we haven't covered?

TC: Yeah Margaret was one time a very good tennis player.

TG: Oh you also play tennis. [laugh]

TC: Yeah. We won the husband and wife's tennis tournament six times.

HH: [overlapping] We entered... we entered the...

[laugh]

HH: This husband and wife tournament in Houston. They have more than thirty years.

TC: Fifty years.

HH: Fifty years history. Oh thank you. (Katherine Shen brought Hung Hsien the trophy plate). We got a lot of the plates and cups. Yeah and it says the husband-wife's winner. And when they, usually they will fix by age. After they call century, two add together. Century is one hundred years old. Then we were over one hundred years old. So then we're playing 120, we're playing 130. And so by that time, I got better and better and those original winners, they are getting worse and worse. At the beginnings, they don't even think I'm... they always think I am easy to be beat. But I just learned from experience. So later, we beat all the winner. And always, your opponents hit the ball to the women because they know he can get it. So they hit to me. But always the last ball I hit back I was the winning shot. And actually there was a secret that the other players do not know. It is easy for me. When I was standing in front of the net. One of the stroke is so easy for me to do, you know why, they will hit me directly, give me nut ball. Then I will swing the racket from the left side to the right side, the ball will just drop down to the other side to win it. You know what, for Chinese calligraphy. And that's the 勾 and in this way (This part is in Chinese), it's very easy.

TG: So calligraphy made you a better tennis player.

HH: Yes! Also there's something else made him a good tennis player.

XL: Architect?

HH: Yeah you know what's that the Chinese Weiqi (围棋, goal), the Chinese Chess.

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TG: Yeah it's goal.

HH: Yeah black white chips. All you need is to occupy the space. As architect, he studied space, for Chinese chess, he studied space, for tennis field, he studied space.

TC: When you design, one terminal is 800 feet long and all connect together is like 2000. But when you do the [inaudible], you only triple the scale. So when you design a house, you know, a room, every inch counts. So you are still in the same size, but how to visualize a room size over 2000 feet.

HH: So we know a little bit more than them.

[all laugh]

TG: Alright. Is there anything else you would like to add?

HH: Well, I... usually I just do my art work and try to be very quiet. But as I taught in Chicago before after we moved to here, I also taught at a few places. I think I do have a good influence for the students. So they learn the Chinese culture, Chinese art and I think it's a good influence...or Chinese Tai Chi. I think it is really nice here like Young Center they offer these courses. So people can really expose to different thing, different experience.

KS: So therefore, immigrants like Margaret, she can contribute to the society here, develop community because of all the programs available here.

TG: That's great.

[HH laugh]

TG: Alright, thank you very much for your time and sharing your stories with us.

HH: Thank you.

[01:18:28]