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An Interview With

EDWARD PANG

May 18, 1977

Interviewed by

Jerry Young

Mississippi

Department of Archives and History

and the

Washington County Library System

Oral History Project:
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Interviewee: Edward Pang
Interviewer: Daisy Greene

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Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

YOUNG: This interview is being conducted by Jerry Young with Mr. Edward Pang, at Mr. Pang's home, located next door to Pang's Market, at 901 South Delesseps Street. The interview is being conducted on Wednesday morning, at 10:00 o'clock, on May 18, 1977. The first thing I am going to ask Mr. Pang to give me is some biographical background, specifically when he was born, where he was born, and who his parents are.

PANG: I was born in Canton, China, on November 11, 1911. My mother's maiden name is Chin See. My father's name is Pang Hong. But in Chinese we start with the last name first, so the family name would be Pang, and his given name is Hong. I moved to Hong Kong when I was about six or seven years old, and my father went back to Hong Kong in 1922, and brought my mother and myself over to the United States in 1922. At that time, when he brought us over, we were living in Frankfort, Indiana, and I went to the public schools in Frankfort and graduated in 1933. I was kind of small to play basket ball. I played basket ball up until I was in Junior High. When I got in High School, all the boys out-reached me.

YOUNG: Did you graduate from High School there?

PANG: Yes, I was a member of the Cheer Leaders when I was in High School. After I graduated from High

School, I went back to Hong Kong with my mother, and we were married in 1934, in Hong Kong.

YOUNG: I didn't understand that. After you finished High School, you and your mother went back to Hong Kong?

PANG: Went back for a visit.

YOUNG: All right, for a visit. And did you meet your wife in Hong Kong?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: Was it an arranged marriage?

PANG: No. I met her at a party, and through mutual friends we were introduced and we were married later on. We were married in Hong Kong Magistrate's office.

YOUNG: What is that now?

PANG: It is a Court where they function just like a Judge here, and to witness our marriage also were Reverend and Mrs. Wright. They were Missionaries in Hong Kong. And also the Vice Consul of the United States was a witness. The American Consul issued a marriage license to us.

YOUNG: What citizenship was your wife? At that time, was she a United States citizen?

PANG: She was born in The Dalles, Oregon. She went back to China when she was three years old.

YOUNG: And had she stayed there all that time?

PANG: Yes, all that time until we were married in 1934.

YOUNG: But even though she had been back in Hong Kong all those years, she still retained her United States citizenship.

PANG: Retained her citizenship, yes.

YOUNG: So that's how the American Consul gave you a marriage license?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: I see. Go ahead.

PANG: And then we came back. We lived in Indiana for -- we came back to the United States in 1935, and I helped my father. He had a laundry business there, and then for a while we - myself - had a restaurant business for a couple of years, and then we decided the restaurant business wasn't too prosperous at that time, you know, and so I came first down to the Delta in Greenville in 1940.

YOUNG: May I ask you why you chose to come to the Delta?

PANG: Well, I came down here to visit some friends, Min Sang and -

YOUNG: Min Sang?

PANG: Yes. So they persuaded me. They said, "Why don't you get in the grocery business?" Well, before that,

before I came down here I had worked in a grocery prior to coming down here in May of 1934. So, naturally, I knew the grocery business before I came down here.

YOUNG: The point is that you knew the grocery business and you knew the Min Sang family, and they were the ones who persuaded you to come?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: All right, go ahead.

PANG: So I went back to Frankfort, Indiana, and brought my family down here. I think it was a few weeks later. At that time, we had three children: David, the oldest boy, Marilyn, the oldest girl, and our third child, Edward, Jr. He was eight months old when we came down here. So we went in business on Union Street.

YOUNG: What was the name of the grocery?

PANG: Pang's Grocery. We were here during World War II, and then in 1946 we built where we are now. We've been here since. And then we had two other children born. The first was born in 1943, and the youngest born in 1952. We have three sons and two daughters. All of them graduated from High School here.

YOUNG: And what about their further education?

PANG: My oldest son went to Tulane University, and he graduated in Architecture. And then my oldest

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daughter attended MSCW. She attended three years there, and then she got married, and she finished her education in Centenary College, in Shreveport, Louisiana. She majored in Art. And our second son, Edward, Jr., attended the University of Houston, and he graduated with a Degree in Pharmacy. And then our daughter Carolyn attended Ole Miss and got a Degree in Education. Then our youngest son Benjamin attended Mississippi State University. He attended three years, and during the summer he got a job working for an architectural firm in Memphis, and he didn't go back to get his degree, and he is still working as a Designer in Memphis. Our other son is working in Memphis, and he is also associated with the Jones Architecture firm in Memphis. My oldest daughter got married, and she and her husband, who is a Pharmacist, have a Drug Store in Shreveport, Louisiana.

YOUNG: Could I back up and ask you some questions now? Tell me again how old you were when you came to this country?

PANG: I was eleven years old.

YOUNG: Why did your family come, in the first place?

PANG: Well, my grandfather was here.

YOUNG: Here?

PANG: In the United States.

YOUNG: In Frankfort?

PANG: No, he was on the West Coast, in San Francisco. And my father was a citizen of the United States. He was born in California.

YOUNG: Your father was born in California, but, in the meantime, he had gone back to Hong Kong?

PANG: He went back to China and married my mother.

YOUNG: And then, after their marriage, he came to this country?

PANG: After I was born he came back here to the United States.

YOUNG: Why did he choose to go to Indiana instead of to the West Coast?

PANG: Well, his uncle lived there, had a laundry business there, so he went back to Indiana in business with his uncle.

YOUNG: It seems as if everything is concerned with the family. If the family is established one place, then somebody would go there. All right, and then I know you told me why you came to Greenville. What was Greenville like when you came here in 1940? I know that things were very different here in Greenville from what they had been in Frankfort. What was it like?

PANG: Well, it was different from up in Indiana, and

most people here were friendly, you know. I would walk down the street and meet people, and they would speak to you, and it seemed like the Chinese people here - everybody was friendly - invited me into their homes, you know.

YOUNG: But there must have been a difference, too. I know, because, you went to school yourself in Frankfort, but when you came here in 1940, the Chinese couldn't go to Public Schools, could they?

PANG: No.

YOUNG: What did you do to educate the children?

PANG: Well, when I first came down here, I didn't know that. I didn't know that my children could not attend the Public Schools, so when I came down here my oldest children - my boy was only four years old then, and my oldest daughter was two, and my third child was only eight months old. So I said, well, I'll stay here until my children grow up, are old enough, and I'll move to somewhere else where they are able to attend the Public Schools. About that time, my son was -- World War II broke out, so before the war was over, about the conclusion of World War II - of course, at that time Reverend D. I. Young was Pastor of the Chinese Mission. He was full-time Pastor of the Chinese Mission at that time. Through his efforts and the efforts of Dr. Elliott, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, and Mr. Koonce, Superintendent of the Public Schools, through their

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efforts and a meeting with the School Board, our children were able to attend the Public School. Prior to that, we had only a one-room school house, and we had one teacher who would teach all the grade levels. At first, my oldest boy went to that school, and also my oldest daughter attended that school.

YOUNG: Where was the school?

PANG: On Nelson Street. The building is still standing.

YOUNG: The building is, I believe, close to Trigg School? Old Trigg School?

PANG: Yes, right across the street from Trigg School.

YOUNG: And when was that school done away with? Do you remember?

PANG: In 1946. We were integrated into the Public School System at the end of World War II, in 1946.

YOUNG: So it was about that time that the Chinese School discontinued?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: Let me ask you this, then. Education was obviously a problem for you when you first got here. Was there any problem in your relations with either the Caucasians or the Blacks?

PANG: No, there was no problem.

YOUNG: O. K., that leads me to my next question. You know, I think, traditionally the Chinese have been very quiet and they have not called public attention to themselves. I wonder why?

PANG: Well, history will tell you that the Chinese are a very patient people, and they also respect other people. And they would like other people to respect them. So the Chinese people have a very strong family, and they have taught their children to respect their elders and the fathers and mothers of their parents, and to also respect other people.

YOUNG: So, in other words, because of respect for other people and because of family closeness, Chinese people just don't call attention to themselves publicly like that. All right. Can you think - if you had to name one event that had helped the Chinese people in Greenville, could you name one event that had helped most?

PANG: As I said before, it was to have the Chinese people attend the Public School. Reverend D. I. Young would be the one.

YOUNG: Did World War II, also, in a sense, help?

PANG: Yes, World War II. At that time, China became one of the main Big-Four powers in the world. We were in the War together, fighting Japan in the Pacific, and that

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brought the Chinese people to be known, not as a backward country, but a progressive country.

YOUNG: Well, you mentioned the closeness of the Chinese family. Do you think that Chinese families are still as close as they were when you first came here?

PANG: Yes, in many respects they still are.

YOUNG: Are there ways in which the Chinese are different now than they were when you first came here?

PANG: I wouldn't say too much different. When I first came here, the children were very close to their parents, and they still are very close to the parents and to the family.

YOUNG: But I notice that most of the young people seem to be out of Greenville. Why is that?

PANG: Well, they have better opportunities at the bigger cities. For instance, myself, all of my children live in some other city, because the bigger the town or city, the bigger the opportunities, and my children - two of the boys, oldest and youngest, are in Memphis, and the second son is in Houston, and my youngest daughter, after she graduated from Ole Miss, she got a Degree in Education and went out to California and taught in Los Angeles for two years before she got married. She was offered a job here, my youngest daughter, and, in fact, Mrs. Avera taught her in the public school. She

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was Principal of Emma Boyd School at the time. Mrs. Avera offered the job.

YOUNG: That is Mildred Avera?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: But she decided not to take the job?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: I think one thing that has had a great influence on the Chinese Community was the Chinese Mission, and you are active in the Chinese Mission?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: Can you give us a kind of brief history of when it was established and why it was established, and what you did, and things like that?

PANG: The Chinese Mission was established in 1934. I have some little sketches up here. The Chinese Mission was established in 1934 by the late Mr. Kern Pratt and Mr. John Davis. They organized the Mission for the Chinese people so they could have a place to worship, and Reverend McMurry was the Pastor of the first Church at that time, and some of the teachers at the Chinese Mission, when they first organized, were Mrs. H. L. Wells, and also Mrs. Stebbins, and also Mrs. Holland, and Mrs. G. E. Alexander, and Mrs. A. G. Paxton, and Mrs. E. J. Smith - these were the teachers during the Mission - and Mrs. M. P. Massey, Mr. Jodie Graham, Mrs. M. E. Goodwin, and Mrs. R. N. Vest. Also another teacher was one

of Mrs. D. I. Young's daughters, Angie Young. She married a Mr. Golding.

YOUNG: Where did you have your meetings?

PANG: We had our meetings at the First Baptist Church. At that time, they called it the "Old Castle".

YOUNG: And when were the meetings held?

PANG: In the afternoons, at 2:30.

YOUNG: About how many members were there?

PANG: At that time, as I remember, not too many. I would say as many as twenty or twenty-five.

YOUNG: And what would happen if a person could not speak English and wanted to come to the meeting?

PANG: Well, at that time and later on during the War, we had Mr. Woo. He interpreted the worship service for the Chinese who could not understand English. The first full-time Pastor the Mission had was Reverend D. I. Young. That was in 1943. Previous to that, they had no full-time, just different ones would come and just give the service, conduct the service. And Rev. D. I. Young retired in 1960. Then we had Rev. Collins, he was next, and Rev. Alford - Pastors of the Chinese Mission - and Rev. Jimmy McGee, and Rev. Westbrook, and then Rev. Philip Wilkinson. The first Chinese W. M. U. was established, organized, in 1944. It was organized by Mrs. D. I. Young, Mrs. H. L. Wells and Mrs. Frank Stebbins. Also, we had R. A. and G. A. At the present time our Chinese Pastor is Mr. Ted Shepherd.

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YOUNG: The R. A. stands for "Royal Ambassador" and the G. A. stands for "Girls Auxilliary", and the WMU was "Women's Missionary Union"?

PANG: Yes. The Mission had retreats at the Leroy Percy Park, a combination by the Delta area - Cleveland, Hollandale, organized by the Home Mission Board. They had this retreat each year.

YOUNG: Is the Chinese Mission still functioning?

PANG: Oh, yes.

YOUNG: And about how many members are there in it now?

PANG: Oh, you mean regular attendance?

YOUNG: Total membership?

PANG: Total membership, I would say in the neighborhood of seventy-five.

YOUNG: And does it still meet on Sunday afternoon?

PANG: Yes, on Sunday afternoon.

YOUNG: Are there still Chinese in Greenville who cannot speak English?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: How many?

PANG: The younger generation speak very little.

YOUNG: Chinese?

PANG: Yes.

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YOUNG: How many Chinese are there in Greenville who cannot speak English?

PANG: Very few, except the Elderly ones. They don't speak too much, but they understand more than they can speak.

YOUNG: By the way, do you know what the approximate population of Chinese in Greenville is now?

PANG: Well, there's about 37 families.

YOUNG: So that would be definitely less than 500 Chinese people in Greenville now?

PANG: Oh, yes. I would say there are about 300.

YOUNG: Three hundred; and could I ask you this then, too. I know that a lot of Chinese young people are leaving Greenville and they have left Greenville, but what do you see as the future for the Chinese people in Greenville?

PANG: Well, some of them are going into other fields in Greenville beside the grocery store. Some are going into Electronics, Merchandise, and other fields such as Sales and Service, TV and appliances.

YOUNG: Restaurant?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: Could I ask you this: it seems that when so many Chinese people came to Greenville, they opened grocery stores. Is there a reason for that?

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PANG: Well, usually the Chinese would come in here and buy in the one already established as a Grocery Store.

YOUNG: You mean they go into business with somebody who is already established, or they buy --

PANG: They buy a business that is already established.

YOUNG: But you didn't do that, did you?

PANG: No.

YOUNG: You built your own?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: Did it require a lot of money to open the store at that time?

PANG: Well, at that time it didn't require a lot of money. I guess people trust the Chinese people, and they let them have credit.

YOUNG: You were talking about why the Chinese established groceries, and how credit was established. Is it not true that in the '20's and '30's that the Chinese did not go to the Banks and Lending Institutions, but they loaned money among themselves?

PANG: Yes. Well, usually relatives or friends would lend money to start up the business.

YOUNG: Where did you live when you had your first

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business on Union Street?

PANG: I lived next to the store, beside the store.

YOUNG: And now that you are in this business you live next door, too? That probably has advantages, too?

PANG: Yes, it does.

YOUNG: Let me ask you this: Is there anything which you would personally like to have included as a part of this tape? Anything that you think is important to be included which I have not asked you about?

PANG: Well, we have a Chinese Cemetery here.

YOUNG: Could you tell about that?

PANG: The Cemetery - we bought this land, we have about five acres - a non-profit organization. Mr. Frank Chu Lin was the first President of the Organization. He did a lot of hard work to get the Cemetery in good shape and organized, you know, and then after he left in 1959, he moved to California, and then I was elected President of the Chinese Cemetery Association, and I have been President since then.

YOUNG: Would you tell where the Cemetery is located?

PANG: The Cemetery is located on Crescent Drive - out on Main Extended on Crescent Drive.

YOUNG: About how many Chinese are buried there?

PANG: Well, we have another Cemetery. It is an

old Cemetery, off Reed Road, the first Chinese Cemetery, but since then we bought the new part, which is five acres of ground on Crescent Drive, and off-hand I wouldn't know how many.

YOUNG: The original Chinese Cemetery, is that located close to the County Home for the Aged?

PANG: Yes, behind it.

YOUNG: Are the graves marked?

PANG: Yes, some.

YOUNG: Does anyone keep it?

PANG: Yes, we have a caretaker down there to look after it. We have had different caretakers, but there used to be one, Mr. Vick Fava, and after he passed away we had different ones. Now we have one and he seems to be taking care of it very nicely.

YOUNG: Does he take care of the old Cemetery and the present Cemetery?

PANG: Yes.

YOUNG: When a Chinese dies in Greenville, can he automatically be buried there?

PANG: Yes. We do not charge anything for the plot. We only have them donate Fifty Dollars for the upkeep of the Cemetery.

YOUNG: Who gave the money for the land to be bought in the first place?

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PANG: They went around this Delta area to ask for donations to purchase. You know, in the Delta area, different towns. We asked the Chinese and also asked some Companies to donate some money to purchase this land.

YOUNG: I know that you are President of the Chinese Cemetery Association. Is there a person, a Chinese, in Greenville, who could be considered the Leader of the Chinese Community?

PANG: Well, I am also Superintendent of the Chinese Mission.

YOUNG: So, if a Chinese had a problem he needed advice on, he would more than likely come to you for help and advice?

PANG: Yes, I have helped where I can in many cases, legal, and otherwise, and family affairs, you know.

YOUNG: Would you mind talking a little about that - the legal and family matters, and what problems you helped with?

PANG: Some of the legal matters, such as immigration, you know, I have helped them to bring family or loved ones over from Hong Kong. Helped them fill out the applications, and if they want to become naturalized citizens, I help them to go to the Immigration Office to help them become naturalized American citizens.

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YOUNG: Have you ever had any problems with crime among the Chinese in Greenville?

PANG: No, sir. I can proudly say that the Chinese have paid respect to the Law in this country and this community.

YOUNG: I certainly think you have provided a lot of valuable information, but if you have anything that you would like to say, you certainly may.

PANG: Oh, yes, as a member of the First Baptist Church, and the people in Greenville here, even though they are not a member of the First Baptist Church, but were members of the Mission, they also helped and had a part in the Building Fund of the First Baptist Church, you know. Since I have become Superintendent of the Mission, each year at the end of the year, or at Thanksgiving time, we would have our annual Thanksgiving Banquet, and give a love offering to the First Church of \$1,000.00. And last year at the Thanksgiving Banquet the Chinese members of the Mission donated and contributed \$4,000.00 to the Building Fund.

YOUNG: That was quite admirable.

PANG: Yes, although some of them are not a member of the First Church, but most of the Mission members are members of the First Church, and I can say proudly that they very generously contributed and had a part in the Building Fund.

YOUNG: I think so, too. MISSISSIPPI DEPT. OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

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