



Transcript of Interview with Peter Ng

Interviewed by Susie Dickson and Susie Ling on July 2, 2024

Susie Ling [00:00:01] Today is July 2nd. My name is Susie Ling, and I have the honor of sitting with Mr. Peter Ng, past president of the Eng Association [伍胥山公所] and also past president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Tell us why you got involved with the CCBA.

Peter Ng [00:00:26] Trying to give back to the community and do my part. However, it's—actually started way back when I joined my own family association. So I was the vice president, and then the president was Mr. Sui San Ng and he told me, "Hey, we need a delegate to represent the Eng Association to CCBA. Would you like to do that?" So I did. That was back in 1981. So I became the director. But then I only served two years, and I became very busy in my own business. So I withdraw, and I stay away for a while. Then it was until 1993, I went back to my association to help out a convention for the whole US. So it was then I become more involved into the community, particularly my own association. And then in the year 2000, I become the president. And then the directorship for the Eng Association at CCBA opens up. So that's when I re-joined CCBA.

Speaker 1 [00:01:51] As in leadership.

Peter Ng [00:01:53] Right. As a director.

Susie Ling [00:01:55] How did you feel about CCBA when you first came to know it in 1981?

Peter Ng [00:02:02] I was just learning. I was looking at everyone sitting there talking about the community and all the little things going on in Chinatown. I was just fascinated in the way they debate, the way they argue. I would say it's interesting, but I was young. What do I know? I just sit there and listen and observe.

Susie Ling [00:02:23] So who were the directors at that time?

Peter Ng [00:02:27] It was Mr. Lau, 劉子鎮. Yeah, from the Lung Kong Association.

Susie Ling [00:02:34] And who were the other members that were debating and conversing?

Peter Ng [00:02:40] Everybody was having their own opinion, but for the goodness of Chinatown, of course. For some of them, they use different tactics and trying to get their points across. So, I didn't know much about Chinatown at the time, so it's just observing. So you have the first, Mr. Larry Wong, who was well-respected, and served way back and Mr. Long Gong Yu. Those are really the old pioneers of Chinatown.

Susie Ling [00:03:15] Actually, the CCBA has a longer history than it—by the 1980s was already 100 years old. You were the one who sort of got the organization to write down their history and started to think about a website. So can you tell us a little bit about Los Angeles CCBA origins?



Peter Ng [00:03:38] Well, we, like all the big cities, the immigrants from China, Chinese, they came here and most of them come from the same province, right? Guangdong, and from the different district: Toisan, Sunwui, Yanping, Hoiping. These are the four major ones. So they came here, and they formed different groups and sort of like they help each other. If you are coming from the same family, the same last name, or the same district. It's—that's the way it is in those days. Whether or not you're Chinese or Irish or any—Italian. Same way. That's how we form. So, I involve in CCBA because I became director, and then gradually, in 2007 I was volunteered to become to one of the officers, president. So I ran, and I got elected. So I became CCBA president in 2008. And that's when I really dig deep into it. I must say that I got a lot of influence from Mr. Joe Chu. Joe Chu is—was former CCBA president. He put together a book when it was 100 years old. I don't know. No, that's not a hundred years old. The book was published in 1995. There was a paperback book. So I have a copy of that. I read it and I thought, wow, this is good because it records many events in Chinatown and CCBA—related to CCBA. So—and when I was in office, they told me, "Hey, it's going to be 120 years." So what we call in Chinese, there's a—they call this a period of time, right? Every 60 years there's one period of time, so there's 120 years. It is a milestone. You must do something. I said, "Are you sure?" It was kind of pressure for me, so I thought, oh, gee, what can we do? So I looked at that book, 1995 and then 2008, that's about 13 years later, right? And I said, "Maybe we can do something better and more comprehensive, more detailed." So I commissioned Ms. Yin Tin Lee and with the help of many donations and also how to write it. So I had a lot of help. I really appreciate all this effort to put this book together.

Susie Ling [00:06:35] That's wonderful. So in your administration from 2008 to 2010, what was the structure of the CCBA?

Peter Ng [00:06:45] The structure is pretty much the same. Although I did remember that we get one of the important members to come back. Not during my tenure because when I approached them, when they become effective, I already left office, which is the Chinatown Corporation. They donated the land for the current building to build. And then when I was in office in 2008, I noticed they are not among the voting members. They were absent. So I said, "Hey, why? Why are they not here?" And I saw that we have evidence that that they write an agreement saying that CCBA, the land is donated by them and they became a permanent member, unconditional, meaning they don't have to pay dues. So I looked at that and then said, "What happened?" So I approached some of the members of the Chinatown Cooperation, I think it was Larry, Larry Jeong at the time. And of course, the twenty-year-old Jason. Who else? Tony Quan. So I approached them and I said, "Why you guys don't come and attend the meetings?" And they say, "Oh, you guys talk Chinese. We don't understand." And then I said, "No, no, no, no. Come on, you have to, you are a permanent member. You're actually the one that gave us the land, we really appreciate it." So I brought that up, and they put in this resolution in 2009, so they joined 2010.

Susie Ling [00:08:41] So how many members do you have now—or had then?

Peter Ng [00:08:45] Well, with them would be total 27.

Susie Ling [00:08:49] And the other organizations are the family associations.



Peter Ng [00:08:55] Right, yeah. Family associations, the district associations like Hoy Ping [開平], Ning Yang [Hoy Sun Ning Yung, 台山寧陽會館], those are the—for locality. And of course [Ning Kui Kong Wue 台山寧僑公會] and Sunwei [新會, Kong Chow Association]. Yanping [恩平] don't have one.

Susie Ling [00:09:19] Let's talk about some of the sub-organizations under the CCBA. There's the Confucius Temple, the Chinese Cemetery, and the Welfare Committee. Can you tell us what was the reason these were established?

Peter Ng [00:09:35] Well, I was not privy at the time when they were first established. But, we know, this sub-committee organizations. They are formed out of need of the Chinese immigrants. Number one, the school they're going to want to maintain the Chinese culture for the kids so they formed the Chinese school. They were very successful actually, in fact, we have photos in the CCBA that we have so much activities in there. I think that the enrollment is over—close to a thousand, if I am not mistaken. And they even have a marching band and everybody has a uniform and have the instrument and they would participate in various different parades. It was really proud of—the pride of Chinatown. Of Los Angeles. I actually saw them perform when I first come to the States in the 70s, and I was very impressed. I said, "Wow," because I had never seen a marching band. But they were great. They were great. Unfortunately now it's not as many members, so we don't have that anymore. And then as far as the cemetery, that's natural, because in the old days, when you move here, you usually—usually you go back home, right? But unfortunately it is very costly. So they get to bury here and then eventually—I'm sure that some of you may hear about the Evergreen Cemetery, along First Street. Many of the Chinese immigrants were buried alongside because they were not allowed to be buried in the Evergreen Cemetery, even though they pay more money for it. So, I'm sure that way back then, that group, they will get this piece of land from the government and then it became the Chinese cemetery. So until this day, they still maintain it for the purpose of the Chinese that cannot afford to have them send back the deceased. The earliest one to bury that I have seen in the cemetery is in the 1930s, so that's probably when it was established, at first, some of them—no, it was earlier? Probably. So those tombstones that I saw. Probably a lot longer, like you said. But the one that I saw was as early as 1930s. I know that there's one famous person that helped Dr. Sun Yat-sen in the Revolution used to be in San Francisco, but after he get older, he moved to L.A. and he was buried there. So you imagine, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Revolution is in 1911, and I forget what year he passed away. And he's buried there in L.A. Must be him.

Susie Ling [00:12:54] Why don't you share his name?

Peter Ng [00:12:57] Wong Sam Duk. Yeah, Wong Sam Duk. Yeah. He—because Dr. Sun Yat-sen, when he came to the U.S., he would stop over in different cities. So he was—he was arrested or something in San Francisco. So he bailed him out. And then they become good friends, and he would escort him to different cities to raise money for the revolution. I have to verify the name and I know it's Wong, that's for sure. May not be Wong Sam Duk.

Susie Ling [00:13:42] Another sub-organization is the Welfare Committee that was established in 1951.



Peter Ng [00:13:50] They went there primarily just to take care of anything well-being, just like a nonprofit of today. So anything you need, you would go there and then they'll help you solve the problems. So that's the main focus of that.

Susie Ling [00:14:05] And it has solved a lot of problems.

Peter Ng [00:14:07] Yeah, they have because they have to have someone to help them. Whether it's dispute, whether within ourselves or—but in those days, the Chinese always just have within themselves. If you go out to the mainstream folks, they would not, they would not pay attention to you.

Susie Ling [00:14:33] Actually, when you first joined the CCBA in the 1970s and 1980s, the Welfare Committee was also dealing a lot with the new Vietnamese refugees that were coming into Chinatown. What did they actually do?

Peter Ng [00:14:49] They would go—they were situated in—settled in, temporarily, in Camp Pendleton. So folks from here—the closest one is right here because Chinese population is in L.A., unlike San Diego, it's very rare population-wise. So over here, the Chinese would gather clothing and drive there every day to make sure those refugees are taken care of because the language problem that they don't have anyone. So where would they... What would they do? Because eventually they get sent away. So the CCBA here, many of the folks that I know have gone there during that time, daily, to take care of—bring things to them, clothing, food, make sure they have the proper nutrition because they may not have the kind of Chinese food that they have in Camp Pendleton. So Ted Cheung, 張永中—he was, he was going there every day. He's still—he lives in Monterey Park. So you've got to get a hold of him. He can tell stories about that.

Susie Ling [00:16:19] Very, very impressive. Now CCBA also has these related organizations such as the Chinatown Service Center, which you are now executive director of, as well as the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce. What is the relationship now? Or in your, you know, administration or your tenureship between CCBA and these two agencies?

Peter Ng [00:16:45] I think it's both in collaboration and also fiduciary relationship. I inquired to one of our founding board members, the gentleman. It slipped my mind about his name, he wrote the first grant for us, workforce, and the grant was 5,000 dollars. I don't know whether it was that grant or another grant that later on that I know that CCBA has to be like an endorser to the city for the funding. That—because I can imagine that when you're a new corporation, a new nonprofit, you may not have, necessarily have the credential or the credibility to take in a large amount for you to run the program. So they may need someone to endorse. Like a support letter or something like that. And I'm sure CCBA has done that for CSC, Chinatown Service Center. And then as the years go by because of the relationship and the connection that the CCBA has, we kind of count on each other to do the programs for the immigrants here and in Chinatown. So CSC started to become official in 1975, even though that we started in 1971. In those days, we started in the church, right? The Methodist Church. So the church itself has plenty of connections. However, it may not reach out to the family associations. That's another stigma. If you don't go to church, you would go to associations and have networking and help each other



on that. So having CCBA actually is a way to connect with the other segments of the population.

Susie Ling [00:18:51] Is the Chinatown Service Center still have a relationship with CCBA today on a sort of a semi-formal?

Peter Ng [00:18:59] Well, I—every month I have a directors meeting, and I would go there and do a report.

Susie Ling [00:19:06] Wow. So, yes.

Peter Ng [00:19:08] A monthly report, yes. So they can be aware of what we are doing and what is available to their members or vice versa and what CCBA is happening. So we can plan and support.

Susie Ling [00:19:20] That's wonderful. There is also this agency called the U.S. Chinese Welfare Association.

Peter Ng [00:19:28] That one there, I was told, although now the organization is somewhat dormant, but I do know there is still some funding in that organization. And the purpose of this organization was for the purpose of increasing the number of immigrants, allotment from the government. I was told that before it become today that you have so many coming over every year, you can only allow 105 allotment per year from China. Now it has increased to 30,000 per year. And that is the effort of this organization. It is a national organization. Is not just L.A. I think there's one in D.C, there's one in San Francisco, and there's one here. And then the D.C. one kind of folded and then gradually the San Francisco one also folded. So only one left here. And I know that they have they—that they do have a president.

Susie Ling [00:20:42] Yes. They've been doing some retirement seminars from what I read.

Peter Ng [00:20:48] Yeah. They do. From time to time they do that, yeah. Because the immigration quota, they have already accomplished that.

Susie Ling [00:20:58] They have.

Peter Ng [00:20:59] So they don't have to worry about that.

Susie Ling [00:21:00] I see. And since 1982, another related organization to the CCBA is the basketball team.

Peter Ng [00:21:09] Yeah.

Susie Ling [00:21:10] How did that come about?

Peter Ng [00:21:12] Well, you gotta have some fun too, besides working. So, I know they have not just basketball, they have volleyball too. Yeah. The basketball is the good—all



the—the one that—those that like playing basketball, they would play in the Alpine Rec. And they called themselves the old horse—the mascot is called old horse. Why did they call them old horse? Because there is a young horse. So they called themselves old horses. So—but as far as volleyball is—is also like an activity by this organization called Quen Fung. Quen Fung is for folks that like singing. Singing Chinese opera. But that's—not everybody likes to sing, some kids they would like to be in sports, so they have a volleyball team. Quen Fung, yeah. So there's actually more than basketball.

Susie Ling [00:22:20] Are these? The singing choir is fairly young? Is that what you're saying?

Peter Ng [00:22:26] No, middle age.

Susie Ling [00:22:26] No, it's all mixed.

Peter Ng [00:22:27] Yeah, middle-aged, older, yeah.

Susie Ling [00:22:29] Middle age is young these days.

Peter Ng [00:22:32] That's true. Well, I would say at least 50. To me, 50 now is young.

Susie Ling [00:22:41] I agree with you. Now, however, sort of segue to that, the CCBA has really tried to reach out to a younger, more 21st-century audience. And I understand that the website, you also had some initiative on that to sort of move towards more open communication.

Peter Ng [00:23:08] Well, I—actually CCBA had the website before I became president, but I just put more content in it. And then after that, I just let them develop by itself. I'm not really the one that responsible to renew whatever the content will be. So it should be updated. And I think they're doing a pretty good job on that. But just one of the one that joined the process.

Susie Ling [00:23:38] What is CCBA's relationship with other CCBA's in the United States?

Peter Ng [00:23:46] There is probably—every major urban city has a CCBA, right? In whatever name, but basically they are the conglomerate of or consortium of other associations. So I know that there is an annual meeting that formed by, they call them the Federation of Chinese Organization of the Americas. And it used to have members not only for the U.S. and Canada. They have members from Central America.

Susie Ling [00:24:32] Nice.

Peter Ng [00:24:33] Yeah. So now has changed because of the environment. So now I know that in the last recent years, only the U.S. associations have been participating in this meeting, annual meeting.

Susie Ling [00:24:55] So there is no formal relationship between the CCBA's.



Peter Ng [00:25:01] No, everybody running on their own. Yeah. Or independently ran. They have their own bylaws. They have their own structure. They have their own system of election. Everyone is different.

Susie Ling [00:25:12] So, for example, if the Eng Association is in the CCBALA [Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Los Angeles], it may not necessarily be in the CCBA—

Peter Ng [00:25:20] Oh, no, definitely not.

Susie Ling [00:25:21] —Another city.

Peter Ng [00:25:25] For us, we do have chapters in big city like San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, Chicago, New York. And each one of those cities has a CCBA and naturally they are a member of that location's CCBA. But they would have to abide by—

Susie Ling [00:25:45] Different rules.

Peter Ng [00:25:47] —Each local way of running things. Although, for us, kinship is the same.

Susie Ling [00:25:54] Yes. That's important. So is the CCBA interested in getting involved in Los Angeles politics or mainstream politics?

Peter Ng [00:26:04] I think they try, and I think they can do a better job than that. I think mainly they must have some of that to be consistent in doing so. But you have to normally, to sometimes give donations to the elected officials is important but you also you have to participate in there. So sometimes time or language do have a challenge so it depends on who is the leader, it's apparent [?]. I think they always have wanted to be involved in it.

Susie Ling [00:26:43] Does the CCBA get involved with Japanese American groups or African American groups in the local communities?

Peter Ng [00:26:53] Not that I know of. Not CCBA. Yeah, pretty much, just take care of the Chinese business. But, yeah, they don't get involved with other ethnic groups.

Susie Ling [00:27:07] CCBA, however, does historically and even today get involved in international politics and the issues of Taiwan, Hong Kong, China overseas is a complicated one. How does CCBA deal with this difficult complexity?

Peter Ng [00:27:28] Well, that is one of the longest challenge that CCBA faced. But traditionally CCBA is always pro the government in Taiwan, but not with China because Republic of China was help, also established by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and CCBA has a role in it. And they always be very proud of being part of the one that helped to establish democracy in China and—but then the environment changed, and there are new members that came from the mainland and for them, the Revolution is a long time ago. They just care about the recent history, so their understanding and their thoughts are somewhat different. And sometimes they become not agreeable in certain things. And I think CCBA



was trying to calm itself, not to have people—not to argue because of that, to be respectful to each other and just maintain the best we can be for the local immigrants here. I think that would be good. However, sometimes they still have a certain—A little ambitious movement and all that. So CCBA trying their best to do it very calmly and to maintain the harmony.

Susie Ling [00:29:14] CCBA does host some Taiwan delegations and visiting groups and, but they do not do this formally with Chinese PRC delegations.

Peter Ng [00:29:28] Yes, that is true. They don't. Because based on what I just said, for them, helping the Republic of China—that's why they are still flying the flag of the Republic of China in front. So it's a symbol that they still would be for Taiwan and so the Beijing, the government, they would not appreciate that. So they tried to avoid having embarrassment between each other. Very respectful, I would say. Not aggressive. They just—they are also very respectful to the local organization. So I think they have a mutual understanding on that.

Susie Ling [00:30:17] Thank you. So as a long time Chinese American leader here in Los Angeles, what is your hope for CCBA as we move into the next 20 years?

Peter Ng [00:30:31] I hope the new generation would be involved more and the current leadership would recognize that, to bring in more. Because after all, we are in a country where we have a democracy that has a process, due process on anything that we do and—some of the leadership, they do not have that experience on that, however, the young ones because of their involvement in the society and the community that they work in, they have that kind of experience and they would be bringing some more experience that would be more—more suitable for the future of CCBA.

Susie Ling [00:31:29] Actually, Susan had the other questions, so let's just time out for a while.

Susan Dickson [00:31:35] I did have some other questions.

Susie Ling [00:31:37] Go ahead.

Susan Dickson [00:31:38] I'll move here so you don't have to look. So, I was a little confused about what you were saying about the singers because I was thinking the singers were from the different associations as opposed to being CCBA.

Peter Ng [00:31:56] That's correct. The CCBA, basically their function is not to have a singing club or anything like that. However, a lot of the members, they join singing clubs, or they are from associations. So there are various different singing clubs in the Southland here.

Susan Dickson [00:32:16] Okay. That's right. Okay, now the other thing that we didn't cover at all is the role of women. Because for a long time you look at all the pictures, and it was... It was all men.



Peter Ng [00:32:30] Yes.

Susan Dickson [00:32:30] So could you tell about the change and why it was made and what difference its made to have people like May Lau and stuff as leaders? So—

Peter Ng [00:32:46] Well, as a—with time, you have to evolve. Still today, some associations do not allow women to vote, and even though the women doing most of the hard work there—they're cooking, preparing food for everybody, and working hard and they still don't have the say. So some associations have changed in recent years, allowing women to vote and become a member, a voting member, which is great. As far as CCBA goes, it's the same tradition, however, there's no bylaw in CCBA to restrict any sex or race. Because being a nonprofit in the U.S., CCBA is a nonprofit, not C3, but C4. But still, being in that category, you cannot restrict in the matter of sex and race. So when we see that there is a capable person who happens to be female, they want to run. And those—we do have some members that are more forward-thinking, so we would support. We like to see the changes.

Susan Dickson [00:34:10] So—but how do you see the women helping CCBA now? I mean, their role has changed. There are a few that have gone to leadership positions. So.

Peter Ng [00:34:23] Well, women have a different gene and different way of thinking, that's for sure. I do not expect them to think like a man or man think like a woman. I know nowadays you cannot classify any of these based on sex. However, I think they do possess a certain—things that sometimes I may or may not be able to present. And I think it's a good way to have inclusive. We have to be embrace, and it doesn't matter who you are, and that's definitely not because you're a woman. So I think that's the very reason that we allow women. May Lau is the first president, but also Mary, Mary Yee is the first woman Supervisor way back. Yeah.

Susan Dickson [00:35:19] I did not know that.

Peter Ng [00:35:20] Yes, Mary. She's still alive. Yeah.

Susan Dickson [00:35:24] Okay, so before we started taping, you were talking about language. So if you are speaking Cantonese—because I've actually been to things where you're trilingual and you do your own translation for yourself. But how does language figure into going for—what things are now and going forward?

Peter Ng [00:35:52] I think it's definitely is a must that we include those that do not speak the Chinese language coming in because it should not be a requirement to speak Chinese. So my own association, the Eng Association, the last two presidents, they are born here, and they speak very little Chinese. So with today's technologies, which would be very helpful to do the instant translation too, although, we have a person to interpret right away. So same goes with CCBA. So you will see more and more folks that speak English. And then we have instant translation to—for the benefit of those who do not understand English. So that way we can encourage more new generation to come in and join CCBA.



Susan Dickson [00:36:50] Okay. Another thing, doesn't CCBA have a scholarship program?

Peter Ng [00:36:57] Not that I know of it's not some—it's not a program that would be consistently on a yearly basis.

Susan Dickson [00:37:09] Just—but some of the associations have scholarships.

Peter Ng [00:37:12] Yeah. Some associations have it year after year. That I am pretty sure.

Susan Dickson [00:37:17] Okay. So I know that one of the new things that you're involved with with Chinatown Service Center, but I'm kind of wondering if CCBA is—is there—there's a—we're wanting to identify legacy businesses in Chinatown. So how—what's that program and how are you involved?

Peter Ng [00:37:43] Yeah, that is important because the legacy program has been brewing around for quite some time now. And thanks to Dorothy Siu Wong, she brought to our attention way back, and she's been advocating to the city of L.A. to make sure that Chinatown business would be a part of that. Unfortunately, CCBA dealing with the mainstream city hall matter, they are still lacking the people. So Chinatown Service Center, of course we—it is our duty to help. Whatever is necessary. So Dorothy approached us and we are helping the local business to identify themselves and put in applications online so they can be classified as a legacy business.

Susan Dickson [00:38:39] So what are some of the applications that have been completed?

Peter Ng [00:38:44] So far, I know there's only two. That is on the website, which is the jewelry store over on Bamboo Lane.

Susan Dickson [00:38:52] Jin Hing [Jewelry].

Peter Ng [00:38:54] Jin Hing.

Susan Dickson [00:38:54] And?

Peter Ng [00:38:55] [00:38:55 The other one is Phoenix Bakery.

Susan Dickson [00:38:58] You're going to look at him, but I talked to Ken Chan yesterday, and he said—

Peter Ng [00:39:02] Ken, Ken is one of them. Yeah, Phoenix Bakery. He's already in. He's already in. There's a good side of that too. If you accepted to be in, you're eligible to apply for a grant of up to 10,000 dollars to 20,000 dollars, which is good help. So we are in the process of putting approximately 15 to 20 businesses online helping the business owners. The deadline is coming up in about two weeks. We have a list of at least 15 that I know of.



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Susan Dickson [00:39:38] Did you think of anything else?

Susie Ling [00:39:44] Well, on behalf of the Chinese Historical Society, we'd like to thank you for your time. This marks the ending of this recording with Susie Ling and Susan Dickson and Peter Ng as our interview on July 2nd, 2024. Thank you, sir.

Peter Ng [00:40:00] Thank you for having me.