

K.S: Moving to England from Hong Kong. Confucian values. Father's reaction to boyfriend. London as a utopia. Spiritual influences. Working as a Chinese artist.

KS

Clare (C) interviewing KS (KS)

Extract 1: 00.06 – 7.24

MOVING TO ENGLAND FROM HONGKONG AS A CHILD. CULTURAL DISLOCATION. CARRYING ON CONFUCIAN VALUES AND DAD'S REACTION TO BOYFRIEND.

K: I was born in Hong Kong and I moved to this country when I was six years old with my family. We went from a very tight-knit group and sense of community, lots of family, lots of friends to, and a very warm sunny place, to a little market town in Herefordshire where we were the only Chinese family and I think quite isolated, socially isolated, compared to the family life that we'd experienced over in Asia, and I think that had quite a profound impact on all my family members, but that's another story! What I'm going to talk about today really is that sense of um, family responsibility, the love between parents and children, you know? Our sense of duty. It's very ... it's strong in all families, hopefully, but it's particularly emphasised in ... in Chinese Confucian culture. So, I wanted to kind of look at this topic because it reflects very much with what I'm currently going through.

Erm, so Mum and Dad, they worked very hard. The whole family worked very hard in our ... in our Chinese take away fish and chip shop, and then Mum and Dad were able to take early retirement and went back to Hong Kong in 1989, with our encouragement, you know, none of us wanted to work in a shop anymore. All my siblings, you know, carried on working in catering. I was the only one that escaped that and became an artist, being the youngest. So I had a chance to try and process and analyse um, my life and the lives of other British Chinese or other East Asian people in the UK, and I, you know, have done that through the arts.

But I've also, obviously, reflected on my family experience and the sense of cultural dislocation that we went through, er, which had a very profound effect, as I say, on all my siblings. So, I think now, you know, erm ... many, many years later! I think my family's healed now, you know? All the various dysfunctional things we went through. I mean, the obvious one was the racism that used to take place in the, in the '70s, and my middle sister used to hide in the toilets, for example. It was that bad. But I don't want to bang on too much about that. I want to focus on, as I say, my ... my relationship with my parents, my ... you know, that sense of Confucian um, responsibility, especially as somebody who is bi, and somebody who is now currently single.

I was in a long term relationship with somebody for ten years and during that period um, I wanted to let Mum and Dad know that although this isn't the kind of relationship they would ideally want for me, um, that I would still maintain all my Confucian traditions and responsibilities. So I remember my ex and I, we went on a return visit to Hong Kong, er, when Mum and Dad were over there, and I was very keen to emphasise that we wanted to visit the graves of our ancestors. So we took a ferry trip back to Cheung Chau, Cheung Chau Island. Cheung Chau Island, where I was born and, you know, we went to the cemeteries, er, cemetery and Mum and Dad took me to all the various ... um, tomb, gravestones where my grandfather was, my grandmother, erm ... my oldest sister who died as a very young child, and you know, and we paid our respects and there's a ... there's quite a ritual that one does of laying out food offerings in a food and fruit offerings and three cups of um, rice wine, three cups of tea, burning incense, burning paper money, because the Chinese regard death as just, you're moving onto the other side, to the other shore, they rather poetically describe it as. A little bit, I suppose it's the equivalent to the idea of the River Styx in Greek mythology. So, there is a sense of, you know, you're communing with, with your, with your ancestors, with your loved ones, and they're just in another parallel universe, I suppose, if you want to kind of bring an interstellar understanding to it.

So, there's a, there's a real sense of being connected to your family and it's a very beautiful thing. I mean I'm not at all superstitious, I don't believe in an afterlife, but I thought the ritual was

wonderful and it's ... the ritual is really for the living. And my ex and I we took photographs. I videoed the whole thing and I really wanted to show Mum and Dad that actually we would be the dutiful children, you know, and rather than, you know, son and daughter in law, it's son and son in law, um, but, you know, we would carry on in the same way that they would be honoured, you know, in the afterlife, and they'd be taken care of, because you know, when you burn paper money and you burn other paper offerings, it's to say "We'll continue to provide for you materially in the next world." Hence the food and the drink, you know? It's all connected to ... to the essentials of life, I suppose. You know, it's not just about love and ... incense and flowers, it's also about very practical things and, you know, that's all very much part of Chinese culture.

So, so I did that, first of all. So that was a key moment, I guess, in terms of letting my dad know while he was still alive, that, that we would continue this tradition, and I remember even going on a ferry to Cheung Chau, he put his arm over my exes' shoulder and heard him, I overheard him say "Take care of my son" which was a very beautiful thing to say ...

Extract 2: 54.45 – 59.46

LONDON AS A UTOPIA. SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES. BEING CURRENTLY CHILDLESS AND SUPPORTING ARTISTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS.

K: London is a kind of Utopia, well apart from when crazy people knife others, the other day in Leytonstone, erm, other than moments like that, generally, London, at the moment, at this moment in time is a kind of Utopia, I think, an example to the rest of the world about ... not the government that we have but, you know, and the bombing of Syria and so on, but in terms of the diversity of the world co-existing, rubbing shoulders side by side, getting on the tube and there's every race, every sexuality, and it's wonderfully creative and ... so for me at the moment London is a kind of Utopia, you know, a sort of a gilded utopia, but it's somewhere I ... and that's why, as I say, back to the discussion with my mother, for me to give that up to go to Hong Kong, it really ... 'cos, 'cos the arts plays a huge ... without having children, you know, all my sort of paternal instincts have gone to supporting other artists.

I ran this theatre company for thirteen years and, you know, as a, as a director you are in a kind of, you know, not in a patronising way, but in a paternalistic role, you know, with other ... especially with a lot of actors. I mean fortunately the best actors are very mature, very, you know ... but there are certain actors who are quite fragile and you do have to be ... to help them feel safe and secure and do the best possible work that they can, be the best possible actor they can be, you have to be like a good parent. So I've done all that, through my nephews and nieces, through the arts, and I feel that continued calling because also, apart from ... the racism is one aspect of other, you know ... I mean I used to be a very religious person. Because of racism I became a Christian at school. Because of Christianity, I became very politicised while I was at university. I'm no longer religious, I'm a spiritual person. I'm more interested in East Asian religions than anything else. Buddhism, Taoism, those kinds of ideas, Shintoism, Korean Shamanism, those kinds of ideas. But um, a more sort of organic, connected to nature kind of philosophy. But um, so I'm spiritual but I, you know, I ... I ... my sort of ... I mean, my, I think, you know, I hope for more people, you know, what is our ... our purpose in life?

While we're here, other than to have a good time and to enjoy, but, you know, what ... what greater thing can there be but to try and create heaven on earth. 'Cos most people on earth are currently living in hell. If you look at statistics, and the developing world, and how many people are starving or um, you know, there's warfare or there's disease, you know, preventable disease, you know, and the climate change, all these kind of big issues that affect humanity, um, what ... what else is there of value? Other than human kindness to the people that you love, your family, your friends, as well as wide as you can be, whatever you can physically do, you know, or emotionally do, um, and then whatever you can do in terms of affecting and changing, lack of education, helping societies to evolve. So that's, that's my calling. That's why I'm here and I happen to be uniquely British and Chinese, so I want to use that to the ... to whatever advantage I can in terms of enabling East/West communication and dialogue, and making people less afraid of each other, more accepting, more

loving, more compassionate, all those things and, you know, if that's the ... you know, some people, they leave their mark through their children. If my Yuan Fen, which is Chinese idea of fate, if my Yuan Fen is that I don't have kids, is that I stay single all my life, you know, with intimate passionate lovers and friends who come in and out of my life and so on, I mean I'll always need love, I'll always need passion, I'll always need sensuality, you know, that's a very important part of my life, but if my Yuan Fen is that I'm single, I accept it, I embrace it.