

Coney Island History Project Oral History Archive 康尼岛历史工程口述历史典藏

Interviewee: Ansen Tang 采访者: 邓铭贤

Interviewer: Xiao Yu Li 访问者: 李晓瑜

<https://www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive/ansen-tang>

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(00:00:00-00:00:40) **Xiao Yu:** This is Xiao Yu Li from the Coney Island History Project. Today, we are talking with Ansen Tang of the United Chinese Association of Brooklyn in Bensonhurst. He will speak in Cantonese. This interview will be conducted in Cantonese. We are from the Coney Island History Project. Today, we are honored to have Mr. Tang as our interview guest. We asked Mr. Tang to talk about his birthplace and his childhood experiences.

(00:00:40-00:01:05) **Ansen:** Hello, my surname is Tang. My Chinese name is 邓铭贤 (Ansen Tang). My English name is Ansen Tang. I was born in Hong Kong. I studied in Hong Kong until the fifth grade. In fifth grade, I immigrated to New York and studied in middle school.

(00:01:06-00:01:25) **Xiao Yu:** You mentioned that when you were 11 years old, you and your family from Hong Kong immigrated to the United States. What year did you come to the United States, and what do you remember?

(00:01:27-00:02:20) **Ansen:** I immigrated to the United States around August 2002. I remember when I immigrated here, the 9/11 event happened the year before. I felt a little scared at the time because when I was in Hong Kong, I watched the news and saw the 9/11 incident, which worried me. However, we had to complete the immigration process so that I could immigrate to America to study. The main reason for immigrating to America is the quality of life. My family wanted me to go to school in America, study in college, and make a better life.

(00:02:22-00:02:30) **Xiao Yu:** Do you remember what your childhood was like?

(00:02:31-00:03:27) **Ansen:** When it comes to childhood experiences, the most important experience is at school. I went to kindergarten and primary school in Hong Kong when I was a child. During that time, I could play with my classmates, play table tennis, and play game consoles. That was the best time. When I was in Hong Kong, I didn't have to worry about where to go. I could go around other places and go shopping. In my childhood experience, we didn't buy a lot of things. The most important thing is that I could go out shopping with friends. This childhood experience was the best experience of my life.

(00:03:30-00:03:51) **Xiao Yu:** After you came to America, what made your family decide to move to America? How did you all come to live in Brooklyn?

(00:03:52-00:04:56) **Ansen:** The main reason we came to America was that my parents wanted us to study in America. We came here to study in the hope that we can improve our lives and pass this to the next generation. I wanted to come here at a young age to learn English so I could go to middle school and university. After that, I can find a good career and make life better. Why am I in Brooklyn? The reason is that we have grandparents over here, and my father's relatives have immigrated here. As soon as we came to the United States, we came to live in Brooklyn, New York.

(00:04:58-00:05:04) **Xiao Yu:** What was your first impression of Bensonhurst in Brooklyn?

(00:05:05-00:06:27) **Ansen:** The first impression when I came to Bensonhurst in Brooklyn was that the place was huge. During that time, there were more and more Chinese people here. The first impression was that the subway here is very old. Compared with the subway in Hong Kong, American subways are dirty, noisy, and outdated. We used to hear in Hong Kong that Brooklyn or America is very advanced. However, I was shocked when I got here and saw the subway. Well, that's quite an impression. We both lived near the subway, which was noisy when we slept because the subway ran all the time and the house was a bit shaky and noisy, so that's my impression of coming to Brooklyn.

(00:06:29-00:06:39) **Xiao Yu:** So after coming to Bensonhurst, what are your special memories?

(00:06:40-00:07:40) **Ansen:** My special memory is that I was studying in Bensonhurst. I was in middle school and studied all the time. I moved many times in the Bensonhurst area. I see more and more Chinese people in Bensonhurst; I see a lot of changes. For instance, more and more Chinese shops are opening here on Bay Parkway on 86th Street, and it has become like a small Chinatown. This is a good impression. If I move to another place, I know what 86th Street looks like and that this is a small Chinatown.

(00:07:42-00:07:55) **Xiao Yu:** You mentioned that you went to school in the United States when you were a child, can you share your experience of going to school in the United States for the first time?

(00:07:57-00:09:07) **Ansen:** When I went to school in the United States for the first time, I had to wear a school uniform: a white shirt and black trousers. When I was in junior high school, I was unfamiliar with places, and my English level was average. We are also new immigrants. The school randomly marked our names and told us which classrooms we should go to. However, in the end, it turned out that the class we stayed in was not a fixed classroom. My two brothers were assigned to other classrooms. They transferred the names of my two brothers to other classrooms. That's what we experienced when we entered this school and moved from one classroom to another. This was my first experience going to junior high school.

(00:09:08-00:09:14) **Xiao Yu:** Which school did you go to?

(00:09:15-00:09:40) **Ansen:** If you're talking about middle school, I went to St. Joseph Catholic. If I remember correctly, it was I.S. 281. For high school, it was Lafayette High School.

(00:09:42-00:09:49) **Xiao Yu:** Can you share your experience in Lafayette High School?

(00:09:51-00:11:24) **Ansen:** I was studying at Lafayette High School during that time, and I heard people say that Lafayette High School was very dangerous because some students bullied Chinese people or there were a lot of violent incidents in the school. However, when I was at Lafayette High School, luckily, I did not experience that. When people mentioned this event before, they were frightened. At Lafayette High School, I made many friends and learned a lot. The most important thing is communication between people. Sometimes, some people may ask you questions, and if you don't know how to answer them, they will assume you don't understand. When I went to this school during that time, my English level became very good, so I could communicate with anyone and nothing special happened. After four years at Lafayette High School, I graduated. Another year, I heard they said they wanted to close Lafayette High

School because many bad things happened. So, I am very fortunate to have completed these four years of study at Lafayette High School.

(00:11:29-00:11:33) **Xiao Yu:** What subjects did you like in school?

(00:11:34-00:12:27) **Ansen:** I liked to draw at school, plus I learned a little Spanish. I don't speak Mandarin, but I did not choose to take Mandarin courses. I wanted to try to learn other languages, so I chose to take the three-year Spanish course, Spanish and Art courses at Lafayette High School. I loved drawing when I was a kid.

(00:12:32-00:12:46) **Xiao Yu:** Let's talk about the United Chinese Association of Brooklyn. When was UCAOB established? What is its mission?

(00:12:48-00:13:46) **Ansen:** United Chinese Association of Brooklyn was established in 2002 as a non-profit organization. The organization's mission is to use community resources to improve the quality of life for Chinese people. This organization was founded by a group of volunteers who wanted to provide social welfare services, cultural events, a speaker's center, and group healthcare. These resources are provided to people in the Bensonhurst community.

(00:13:48-00:14:03) **Xiao Yu:** How long have you been working at UCAOB? What is your job title? Why do you like this job?

(00:14:05-00:15:14) **Ansen:** About five years ago, I actually started working for the Chinese association. At first, I was a computer teacher, providing digital literacy and computer classes for the seniors of the Chinese association. Then two years ago, I became the office manager of the Chinese association, and then I was promoted to the executive director. Now, our Chinese association has three branches to serve people. As for work, I like to do community work itself. I can also serve the elderly, children, low-income people, and all who live in the community. I love doing this job, and I feel like I help many people. I have always been doing things in this community, especially in the Brooklyn Chinese Association.

(00:15:18-00:15:30) **Xiao Yu:** What made you more actively involved in the UCAOB organization?

(00:15:31-00:16:44) **Ansen:** Most importantly, I am the program director of the after-school program at the UCAOB. I've gotten to know the community and the children we serve there, and I thought about doing more things. I know that the Chinese association has many services for the elderly. Later, I joined UCAOB and wanted to do some services for the elderly. For instance, I help them read letters, translate and communicate with them. I love these jobs related to social work. So, I started to do some services for the elderly in the Chinese association. Therefore, I really like working in this community center that serves the public.

(00:16:46-00:17:00) **Xiao Yu:** You mentioned that you are now an executive director. What are your usual responsibilities?

(00:17:01-00:17:56) **Ansen:** My main responsibility is to be in charge of three places that serve the community. I am the manager of all three places. However, the main job is to sign some contracts with the government to help the organization maintain its budget and apply for additional funding that will give the organization more resources and more programs. I communicate with the government and its representatives about how to get more resources for

this organization, and then go to the public to use those government resources. Therefore, my main service is to communicate with the government and its representatives.

(00:17:59-00:18:05) **Xiao Yu:** What was your biggest challenge at UCAOB?

(00:18:08-00:19:22) **Ansen:** The biggest challenge was figuring out if I was the right fit for the job. I always like to communicate with people. However, I did not know how to communicate at the time. If you asked me to learn one thing about government officials, I knew nothing, especially since proposals and budgets were my biggest challenge because I had never learned all of those things. However, I gradually learned. I emailed government officials, called them, and asked them how to do these things. The main purpose is to communicate with them and then get more funding. This is our ultimate goal. However, making proposals and budgets were my biggest challenges when I came to UCAOB.

(00:19:27-00:19:54) **Xiao Yu:** I saw that you had the 2022 Chinese New Year event in February. You mentioned that you had the lion dance performance. Could you share the history of the lion dance and your preparations for the UCAOB performance?

(00:19:57-00:23:59) **Ansen:** The lion dance is one of the teams from UCAOB. We usually want to teach some children and adults who are interested in joining our lion dance team. And then, for example, we will perform a lion dance for the Chinese New Year celebration because it is a traditional performance. Then it can also show Americans what our lion dance looks like. Chinese New Year is a very suitable activity for performing lion dances, so lion dances are mostly performed during the Chinese New Year. For example, the lion dance team does not have to perform at a party; it can be a wedding and a new opening. We are all invited by people who want us to help them with their lion dance or parade. We all perform lion dances. When everyone sees the lion dance, you know that the lion dance needs to play drums and the gong. If they hear the lion dance from a distance, people will realize that the lion dance is coming, and they will be very happy about this. The lion dance brings people happy memories. So, the lion dance, if we have a wedding venue or party, we all have to perform a lion dance to make people feel very grand. The lion dance is to defeat those evil things. If the lion dances coming out, it is a very righteous thing. You can bring joy to people. In short, bad things... once you come out with the lion dance, you can make bad things disappear and go away. So, the history of this lion dance is like this, just bring the ceremony. Some people say that we are a dragon dance as a whole, but there is a difference. The lion dance represents a lion. That is, there are northern lions and southern lions. However, if you perform it for Americans, they will say the lion dance is the dragon dance. 龙 (long) represents dragon. So, I want to bring an accurate understanding of the lion dance to others. The most important thing is that we often perform a lion dance and then tell others that it is a lion dance, not a dragon dance. Many people cannot distinguish a lion dance. They usually think it is a dragon dance. This lion dance team is composed of teenagers. The training class is used to train children. They can learn the lion dance when they are young. They don't have to grow up and start to learn. They can learn to perform the lion dance when they are children. They can not only learn lion dances but musical accompaniment can also be learned. They can play drums, hit cymbals, and play gongs. So, if you participate in the lion dance, you can actually learn about the music and how to move the lion's head. These are good lessons for the lion dance team.

(00:24:00-00:24:14) **Xiao Yu:** After coming to the United States, have you ever celebrated those traditional Chinese festivals and how did you celebrate them?

(00:24:16-00:25:44) **Ansen:** During that time, there were traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Lunar New Year, which I celebrated when I came to the United States. For example, during the Lunar New Year, we all enjoy New Year's Day or New Year's Eve dinner, collect red envelopes, and visit relatives and friends for New Year's greetings. This Lunar New Year, I participated in all these activities. The Dragon Boat Festival is all about eating zongzi, watching the dragon boat, and we all go to celebrate. Our Chinese Association holds a dumpling competition at every Dragon Boat Festival. We asked some people who know how to make dumplings to enter a competition to see how many dumplings they made. I have celebrated the Dragon Boat Festival. The mid-autumn festival is all about eating moon cakes. Eating dumplings during the Lantern Festival. I have celebrated these traditional Chinese festivals since coming to America

(00:25:45-00:26:04) **Xiao Yu:** Can you share the experience with the UCAOB's members who have served in the community, and how many people has UCAOB served this year?

(00:26:05-00:29:05) **Ansen:** Our Chinese Association has roughly three branches in Brooklyn: Bensonhurst, Dyker Heights, and Sheepshead Bay. We are primarily responsible for this community, like [during] this pandemic. We collect large amounts of government resources or other people's donations. We distribute many COVID-19 PPE, required materials, masks, sanitizers, and face shields (KN95). These are all supplies that fight against the pandemic. In addition to the community, we have senior center services. We have social services. And we have youth services. We have another department that helps community members with all their health insurance choices. We can help people apply for low-income or family medical insurance. We are focused on getting funding to achieve such a thing and asking people to get involved in Obamacare. We serve more than 5,000 people each year. Since our association was established, we have now served a total of more than 100,000 people. The Chinese association was founded originally because the students were being bullied. We got those volunteers and representatives to establish this organization and serve all Asians. Of course, the organization is of Asian descent and was founded by Chinese people. We not only serve the Chinese but also serve everyone. No matter what nationality you are, you will be served whatever you need. The Chinese Association is now in three branch locations: Sheepshead Bay, Bensonhurst, and Dyker Heights. We serve people in the borough of Brooklyn.

(00:29:08-00:29:39) **Xiao Yu:** According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the Asian population of Bensonhurst has increased by 46,000, surpassing Sunset Park and the populations of Chinatown in Manhattan. How has Chinese community development in Bensonhurst affected the UCAOB organization and its plans?

(00:29:40-00:31:12) **Ansen:** The impact is quite large because there are more Chinese in Bensonhurst than the population of Sunset Park and Chinatown in Manhattan in the Census Bureau data. The reason is that the government knows more Chinese people are here. The most important thing for them is allocating all resources and funds to our non-profit community service center. The public knows that the dissemination of government resources information comes from non-profit centers, so the government allocates more resources, and it also knows that more places with Chinese people will look for resources. They (the government) will better understand what resources and materials are available to these organizations. Our Chinese associations or other associations will get more resources from the government and representatives. In this way, they can give more space to Chinese people. So with this data, the Census can know that having so many Chinese people over here is highly influential. For our

non-profit organization, the impact is good in that it gives us more resources, and we can deliver those resources to the public.

(00:31:12-00:31:30) **Xiao Yu:** What new projects or activities does UCAOB have now? Can you share what projects or activities your employees or colleagues have done recently?

(00:31:32-00:37:06) **Ansen:** Now we are all doing "NYC Speaks" (nycspeaks.org) recently because this year a new mayor who took office... The new mayor took office to investigate what the community or the public needs, so the Chinese association is cooperating with this government initiative, called NYC Speaks. So this project is to investigate what our people need, how many resources they want, and what complaints they have. We all conduct an investigation through NYC Speaks. This is one of the projects that we help the Mayor's Office to conduct a survey, and then we want to do a large-scale people's health (project). Most health projects are done in the summertime because many people do this kind of thing in June. We mainly invite insurance companies, doctors, hospitals, government agencies, or those non-profit organizations to cooperate in running these large-scale health projects on the street so that the public can rely on these projects to learn more about health care, services, and insurance. We are now preparing to carry out a big project and these other events, such as the Dragon Boat Festival in May. We are ready to arrange how to do the Dragon Boat Festival as well as this blind date event. How about this Blind Date event? If there is Mother's day and Father's day, Mother's day and Father's day are combined together, and the combination becomes a blind date event. This blind date event is the first blind date event organized by our Chinese association. This one and then other organizations know that's how blind date events happen, and it is not the only way to celebrate Mother's day and Father's day. If we do it together, it is a blind date. We have these three events. The current project is an initiative of NYC Speaks that will do this community survey. At that time, we will hold some on-site lectures and online lectures to teach people how to do this questionnaire. This questionnaire will go directly to the [city] government. What do they need? If there is anything that the community wants to know, via this questionnaire, the Mayor's Office will know how to allocate these resources. This is also one of the important projects. Another important project is the Stop Asian Hate project. We want to stop some people in the community from harassing Asians and racist attacks. We will all work with the NYPD precinct of the New York City Police Department to do some lectures or teach people how to prevent some crimes, or if you really feel like a victim of hate, you will learn how do you report the incident or how do you handle this event; this one is our large-scale project. So why are we establishing the organization in Sheepshead Bay? The main thing is that we want to know about these Chinese communities. If they are discriminated against and attacked, they don't know how to report it to the police and how to deal with it. It is best to report to our association or other non-profit organizations because our community service centers are mainly to help everyone, especially Asians who are hated because of this COVID problem, so we Asians, we Chinese, and our compatriots will all be discriminated against and attacked. We want to protect our people and communities in this way.

(00:37:09-00:37:20) **Xiao Yu:** How has COVID-19 impacted your UCAOB organization and program over the past two years?

(00:37:21-00:40:16) **Ansen:** On March 20, 2020, the government officially ordered all businesses and organizations to close, and schools were not allowing students to go back in the event of an emergency. During that time, everyone was working from home. Because of the impact of COVID-19, there was a big impact on our organization, such as the elderly, who came to our meetings every day, our services, or came for recreation and to play mahjong. Since we have a senior center (because of COVID-19), they cannot play or eat, and that's what affects

them. They cannot go out on the street. For us, we have less communication with people and face-to-face communication. During that time, we have to organize how to donate money and donate some materials to government departments, such as this one or the hospital, so we have that time. Although our Chinese Association has closed down, our employees are everywhere collecting materials for the elderly and donating money to the hospital to buy better medical supplies. Police stations and fire stations all need masks. We will go to our members or the public to gather them, and then our employees will go to our members' homes to continue to collect money because they donate money, they donate some of the materials that come out. In those one or two years, we kept doing some distribution activities. We've done more during the pandemic than before the pandemic in offices, senior centers, and community centers. We are doing more things during COVID-19. We did eight to ten events a year ago. However, since the pandemic, it has more than doubled, like twice. The events we do, the activities we do, and the online lectures we do, are more than we did before the pandemic.

(00:40:15-00:40:17) **Xiao Yu:** Thank you very much for sharing.

(00:40:17-00:40:20) **Ansen:** Thank you so much for inviting me to participate in today's interview.