

Questions for Cai

Kindness of Ting

April 13, 1992

1. What are your earliest memories of growing up in China?
2. Your own family, brothers, sisters, parents.
3. When did you meet T. Y. and where were you married?
4. What was your life like before you moved to Beijing in 1946? Where (in what cities) were you living? What was the position of women in China at this time?
5. What was your life like in Beijing from 1946 onwards? Working in the library. Did you work outside your home apart from the library? What did you do for a social life, e.g., parties, theatre, music etc. Was the cost of living high?
6. What was it like to be the wife of a well-known professor at Peking University?
7. What happened to you during the Cultural Revolution?
8. What are the major differences between the life you lived as a girl and the lives of your daughters as they were growing up in Beijing?
9. Can you describe an average day in your life in Beijing during the 1980s?
10. What are the main ways in which life has changed for you and Professor Wang since 1946?

**INTERVIEW WITH CAI**  
**Toronto, Monday, April 13, 1992**

RM: O.K. Ting, this is Monday, April 13, 1992, and we're going to do the interview with Cai and you're going to do the translating.

TING: Yes.

RM: O.K. Cai, the first question is, "What were your earliest memories of growing up in China?"

TING: (Speaking for Cai). She was born into a traditionally big and feudal Chinese family. She was born in Beijing and her family was really big; and there were a lot of people there, her parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, sisters and brothers.

RM: How many members?

TING: About fifteen. They were all living together.

RM: In the same house?

TING: Yes. Her grandparents were very rich, so her childhood was really, really happy and comfortable and rich.

RM: In which part of Beijing?

TING: The west - west of Beijing. She went to elementary school and secondary school in Beijing.

RM: A girl's school, or mixed, girls and boys?

TING: Mixed.

RM: Now we go on to the second question, which is about Cai's family, her brothers and her sisters, and her parents.

TING: After her grandparents died, her parents went to Hankow.

RM: In what year?

TING: Perhaps 1934 or 1935.

RM: O.K.

TING: Her father was a manager of a factory there in Hankow. She finished her high school in Hanyan - did you finish? - she went to Hanyan for her high school. In 1937 the War of Resistance against Japan started. Her school was burned. So she discontinued her studies. The next year she went to Chun Ching herself. She continued her studies in high school in Chun Ching. In 1939 she went to Jin Ling College and studied there.

RM: In the North?

TING: In Chung Do. She had to study Sociology for two years. In 1941 the Pacific war started. In that year the remittance was stopped so she could not get any financial support from her family. In that same year she took examination and got a job at Ching Chun Bank. In that same year, 1941, she married my father, her husband.

RM Where about's in...?

TING: In Chung Do. Ching Chun Bank. She has four sisters and one brother. She is the eldest. The all are living in Beijing. They all are teachers - some of them teach in the University; some of them teach in high school. In 1975 her parents died.

RM: It was an intellectual family.

TING: I think so.

RM: Now for Question 3. When did you meet your husband and where were you married?

TING: She met her husband in 1941. In 1942 she got married with her husband in U Han University Chia Ping.

RM: Should we go on to Question No. 4? What was life like before you moved to Beijing in 1946 and in what cities were you living? And something about the position of women in China.

TING: After they got married, T.Y. left U Han University for Chun Ching University, so she moved from Chin Chung Bank in Chung Do to U Han Bank - No? I'm sorry, she moved from Chin Chung in Chung Do to the Chin Chung in Chung Chi.

RM: Correction by Ting.

TING: O.K., actually Chun Ching University should be the Central University. She was living in the teacher's dormitory of the Central University.

RM: And where was T.Y.?

TING: She was living with her husband.

RM: So they were both living together?

TING: Yes.

RM: O.K.

TING: The dormitory was very simple and small.

RM: How many people were in that dormitory? One room for each couple?

TING: Yes, one couple one room. Her home was quite far from her working place, so she could not go by home every day. At that time, she was living in the dormitory of the Chin Chung Bank. She went home twice a week. In 1944 she got her first child and so she stayed at home to look after the baby.

RM: At one point then, Cai was living in the dormitory of the Bank and going back to the dormitory of the University twice a week? Is that right?

TING: Yes.

RM: What was it like?

TING: She shared a room with another three persons at the bank dormitory. She took a bus to go back home.

RM: Was the job well paid?

TING: The bus was open at the top and the tickets were cheap. Their life was poor and hard, but they were confident because they believed in the future, they believed that their life would be better.

RM: That's important.

TING: They believed that the War of Resistance against Japan would be over soon and that it would be successful. They believed that China would win. So, emotionally they felt happy. Regarding the state of women at that time, most of the urban women had already gone to work. And these women usually were educated.

RM: So they were working outside their homes?

TING: Yes. However, women in the countryside at that time had no opportunity to be educated; they had to rely on their husbands; so they were treated unequally.

RM: These were the rural women?

TING: In the countryside.

RM: Now we go to Question No. 5, your life in Beijing from 1946 onward.

TING: After War of Resistance against Japan, they left Chun Ching for Beijing. T.Y. started teaching in Peking University. At that time they were living in the dormitory of Peking University, a dormitory reserved for professors. They had a lot of social activities such as dancing parties. So sometimes they went to dancing parties and sometimes they were with each other. In 1948, she got the second daughter. In 1949, the PRC was founded. At that time, T.Y. was working very hard. In 1952, she started her job again. She was working in the library of Peking University.

RM: In the main library?

TING: Yes. Besides going to the dancing parties, she also liked to go to the theatre for the Peking Opera.

RM: Yes, of course, yes.

TING: Sometimes she went to the theatre and had a performance for Peking Opera on the stage. At that time, their life was better than it was before. But in 1957 their life changed.

RM: Coming back to the Opera. I know your mother is musically inclined, and sings herself. So she would go to the Opera with your father. Would the children go with them, or would it be mostly the parents?

TING: Sometimes she went there with her husband, sometimes she went there with her friend, sometimes she went there by herself.

RM: And you said it wasn't very expensive?

TING: No it was not expensive.

RM: Where was it located? Downtown? Your mother is very musically inclined. I know that she loves the Peking Opera.

TING: Oh, yeah. My Dad likes the Peking Opera too.

RM: So he would often go too.

TING: My father liked to dance very much.

RM: To dance, or to watch dancing?

TING: To dance himself. He can dance very well.

RM: You take after him. That's why you like to dance, Ting. So at that point there were many social activities: visiting friends, going to the theatre, dancing parties, going to the opera, seeing people.

TING: Actually, my mother and father went to dancing parties at least once a week. That's a lot.

RM: Going back to the working in the library for a moment: was it an eight hour day for your mother?

TING: Yes, an eight hour day.

RM: O.K., lets go on to the question of the cost of living at this stage. Your mother was raising the children. Looking after three young girls, she was working in the library, she was looking after your father, and he was busy with his lectures and those kinds of things. Was it expensive living in Beijing at that time?

TING: No, it was not expensive.

RM: I am surprised to hear that. No major financial problems?

TING: No financial problems.

RM: Well, that will bring us to 1957 and the anti-rightist campaign.

TING: Yes, they had no major financial problems until 1957.

RM: What happened in 1957? The anti-rightist campaign and your father was condemned as a rightist?

TING: Yes.

RM: So how did that effect the family life?

TING: My father and mother lost all their friends and my father's salary was reduced. My father was not allowed to teach. Their life became a life of suffering.

RM: And they were isolated? No friends.

TING: No friends. No friends.

RM: And what about you and your sisters?

TING: We were always looked down upon by others, in school.

RM: Do you remember that yourself?

TING: Yes, I remember. Because, for example, some young people took my things, just robbed my things. And they said very bad things to me.

RM: So not pleasant in school?



TING: Not pleasant. For example, they said your parents are enemies so you are the daughter of enemies. You are the enemy too. My mom's family was O.K.

RM: There was contact with them?

TING: Yes, some contact with them. But my father's niece didn't want any contact with us.

RM: They were not friendly?

TING: No, not friendly.

RM: For you and your sisters it was not friendly at school?

TING: No, not comfortable at all.

RM: And so, no social life?

TING: No. Even the neighbours would not talk to us.

RM: They never even talked.

TING: Terrible.

RM: How long did that go on?

TING: That miserable life continued for us until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

RM: People might say hello but no real contact?

TING: No real contact, just hello but no more.

RM: O.K. that brings us to Question No. 6. Cai, what was it like to be the wife of a well-known professor at Peking University? From the woman's point of view.

TING: She was really happy to be T.Y.'s wife. She didn't know how intelligent he was until after she married him.

RM: Nice!

TING: After she got married in almost 50 years she realized my father loves international law career very much. So she thinks she wants to try her best to look after him and make him healthy. To support him to make a bigger contribution to international law.

RM: That's splendid.

TING: T.Y. is very grateful for what my mother has already done for him and my mother is very happy for what she has been able to do for T.Y.

RM: Of course, it is a wonderful and beautiful marriage, isn't it? They have had a beautiful life together for half a century, I believe, fifty years. And I think it was a real love match from the beginning.

TING: Yes, I think so. Their marriage is going to be fifty years this year.

RM: That's lovely. O.K., now for the terrible events of the Cultural Revolution. What happened to you during the Cultural Revolution?

TING: During the Cultural Revolution, our life was really, really hard. No one was helping us from outside our family. My mother was maintaining her own family inside and trying to bring happiness and contentment to everybody in the family. Actually, she had two apartments, the ones you have seen, but when the Cultural Revolution came the leaders asked my family to give up one apartment to others and to give up one of our

rooms in the other apartment; in the other apartment there are two rooms, and one of those rooms was taken from us.

RM: You had to give up one of your apartments, and then you were confined to only one room in the second one. So already it was very hard. And your two sisters were with you?

TING: Yes. At that time the Red Guard came to our family, to our home, to take things out and disturb us.

RM: Did they just arrive and demand?

TING: They just arrived, knocked on the door very hard, just came in and took things, as many as they wanted. In 1969 to 1971, my parents were sent by the governor to the countryside, to work there as labourers.

RM: What kind of work was it?

TING: Farm job. I was born in 1965, so at that time I was only five years old.

RM: Did you go with your parents to the countryside?

TING: No I did not. I stayed in Beijing with my second sister. Two of us remained in Beijing. The older sister had already gone for ?

RM: And where were you and your sister, the two who stayed at home. Were you in school?

TING: At the beginning I went to school, but later I quit school.

RM: Were you living with relatives?

TING: It's really complicated because sometimes I lived with my friends, with my sister's friends, sometimes we lived with our babysitter. The babysitter actually at that time, is not our babysitter, because when I was really young she used to be my babysitter. So at that time we were living with her. She was a nice lady from countryside.

RM: And she was able to look after you?

TING: Oh yeah, she never think to register, sort of a thing. She just treated people equally. The reason we came to the countryside lady's home is because before that we went to our relatives, that means the house of my mother's brothers and sisters and also my mother's mom and dad, in the city of Dingtun of Beijing. But later they threw us out; they didn't care for us at all. My mother was working in the countryside at that time too.

RM: It was hard physical work I understand?

TING: Very hard. They had to get up early and go to bed late.

RM: How were they treated?

TING: At that time, when my mother had me and my second sister to stay with them, every month my mother and dad paid them for food. The money come from the countryside but they still didn't want to keep us there.

RM: That's not good. No.

TING: And also, my relatives tried their best to push my second sister to go to the countryside; they made a report.

RM: A report to the government?

TING: To the leader.

RM: O.K. so now we go to Question No. 8. What are the major differences between the life you lived as a girl and the lives your daughters are living?

TING: My mother was born into a big and rich family, so her childhood was comfortable and rich. Her daughters were born after the founding of the PRC. They should have had a happier life but because of T.Y.'s twenty year's misfortune his daughters had a very hurtful experience. All three daughters. On the other hand, for the same reason, their daughters become very independent and learned from society to deal with all kinds of difficult things.

RM: And of course it would have been difficult for Cai herself. Could you ask your mother, this is a rather personal question, but it must have been difficult for her coming from a family that was comfortable and very well to do in Beijing, to go through the experiences that she had to face. And to live on a meager salary, and so on?

TING: Everybody was poor at that time, so she didn't feel she was poor; but she feel pressure from the outside.

RM: Coming back to that main difference, what are some of the contrasts between the days of your mother's youth and your own younger days? Do you want to comment on that?

TING: I think my mother's life is, how can I say, the people at that time, of that age, were more conservative, more obedient; in my generation the young people are more active, they have more freedom, and life is more colourful.

RM: And more things to do?

TING: Yes, more things to do and the characteristics, character of the people are stronger.

RM: Is there more liberty for female students today?

TING: Definitely. They have open minds. More social activities, even some of the women are stronger than the men.

RM: As we said a minute ago, the standard of health is probably better today?

TING: Yes, much better, and people are much stronger.

RM: That's good. Let us continue with the then and now.

TING: The young people now have more opportunities to travel and to meet foreigners, much more than before.

RM: They can travel much more within China and outside China than during your mother's time. And there's more contact with foreign people?

TING: Yes.

RM: Has that pretty well exhausted Question No. 8? Anything more on the standard of living?

TING: I think the new generation's standard of living is much higher than before. Better than all previous generations.

RM: More clothing, better health, better food, more opportunities, just generally better.

TING: Yes, generally better.

RM: So let us come to Question No. 9, "an average day in the life of".

TING: After the Gang of Four was thrown out, T.Y. was restored: his reputation was restored and his work resumed; he was rehabilitated.

RM: This is at the end of the Cultural Revolution?

TING: Yes, end of the Cultural Revolution. After throwing out the Gang of Four. At this time my parents had many, many social activities. Things picked up for them.

RM: Life was getting back to normal.

TING: Yes. Different kinds of persons visited our home. My parents had connections with foreigners and with Chinese.

RM: A lot of Westerners began to visit.

TING: Lots of Westerners. In 1980, there was a special event which they never will forget, they met Professor Macdonald.

RM: That was a special event for us, very special.

TING: Since they first met Professor Macdonald and Mairi, they think both of them are very respectable and good and close friends.

RM: Thank you. Thank you very much.

TING: In 1975, my mother retired.

RM: From the Library?

TING: From Library. So she had a lot of spare time to look after the family, look after friends, and look after everything.

RM: And also to go to the Peking Opera?

TING: Their life became better and they were happy again.

RM: That was a good period.

TING: A very good period. Besides doing the housework, my mother spends her spare time reading, watching T.V., sometimes reading some simple English stories. From that time until the present our life has always been happy and very comfortable.

RM: That's lovely, and also of course travelling with T.Y.

TING: Oh, yes, many times.

RM: O.K. Ting, the last question for today: ask Cai, what were the worst periods and the best periods of her life?

TING: The best periods of her life were from 1946 to 1957, and then from 1980 till now. From 1977 to now.

RM: And the worst periods?

TING: The worst periods were from 1957 to 1976.

RM: Twenty very difficult years.

TING: Yes, twenty years, starting 1957.

RM: Would we say that the years before 1946 were difficult but nevertheless happy?

TING: Difficult, but happy.

RM: Because you were together and the family was with you, the children were alright, and although the war was on you knew it was going to have a successful outcome, and so on. Cai, yes it is a wonderful life though; three wonderful daughters, a distinguished lovely husband, a nice family of your own, a double apartment in the capital city, and these later years, very, very pleasant, very successful, lots of travelling, a little easier than before. So looking back, would you say that life has



not been so bad after all? Yes, Cai, there is another thing that Ting was just reminding me of, that during the Cultural Revolution there was a high divorce rate, people married recklessly and separated quickly and so on. But you had none of that in your experience. You were able to avoid it and stick out the difficulties. Yes, yes. It's been a, I don't want to say wonderful life, because of those twenty years, but all in all it has been a, rather...yes, well Ting, yes dear, you comment, you are in a better position than I to do so.

TING: I think that at that time no matter what happened outside, my mother always felt that my father was a very honest person and was kind, because she could understand him very deep.

RM: Well, that's the most important thing.

TING: No matter what somebody else said or did, no matter, she always thought he was good.

RM: Well your father was pretty lucky to have found Cai.

TING: At that time, many people divorced; when they met problems they just separated. Then they were alone.

RM: We have one last point for today, and that is Cai's attitude to Beijing. She's a Beijing lady. Has she got warm feelings towards Beijing, does she like the city, does she feel proud of it, and so on?

TING: Yes, she likes Beijing very much because it is a big city, the capital of China, and there are many, many big and famous parks there and different kinds of food and different kinds of places she can go.

RM: There is diversity.

TING: Oh, lots of activities.

RM: Its her town.

TING: Yes, her town.

RM: And her parents' town as well. She's really a Beijing girl.

TING: Yes, she is a Beijing girl.

RM: Thank you very much for this, Ting, and please thank Cai on my behalf,  
in Mandarin.