



Shanghai 2014

Paul Cheng

Paul Cheng was born in Guangzhou, China and lived for seven years in Hong Kong before immigrating in 1956 at age 9 to New York under auspices of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. He went to public schools in White Plains, N.Y. and earned his BA in political science and an MAT in social sciences/secondary education from Harpur College/SUNY-Binghamton. Paul attended college during the late 1960s, a period of immense political and social upheaval in America that greatly influenced his outlook and career choice. He worked two summers as an intern with the Urban Corps' anti-poverty programs in New York City and changed his views on the Vietnam War after attending a peace rally featuring civil rights leader Julian Bond. In November 1969, Paul rode an overnight bus with fellow classmates to Washington, D.C. to take part in the largest anti-war demonstration in U.S. history. Upon graduation, he served as a VISTA Volunteer in San Diego. In later years, Paul settled in the Bay Area and earned his second MA in educational administration from San Francisco State University.

Paul is currently a part-time consulting administrator and was an associate superintendent of administrative services with the Fremont Union High School District (FUHSD) headquartered in Sunnyvale, California. Prior to working for FUHSD, he served 34 years with the San Francisco Unified School District in various school site and central office capacities—classroom/resource teacher, department chair, curriculum specialist, planning specialist, project manager, assistant principal, and principal. For 9 years, Paul was principal of Newcomer High School, which provided a unique model program for immigrant and refugee students that received much media attention in the 1980s. After Newcomer, he became the first principal of Chinese American descent at Lowell High School (founded in 1856—the oldest public high school west of the Mississippi). During his 16-year tenure, Lowell was recognized as a California Distinguished School three times as well as a National Blue Ribbon School twice. After Lowell, he went to Thurgood Marshall Academic High School for a year as a principal-on-special assignment helping the school to ward off impending state sanctions, strengthen its academic/student support programs, and restore faith among its constituent groups.

Throughout his 41-year career, Paul has been active in numerous professional, community, civic, and educational organizations. In 2012-2013, he served on the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury (SFCGJ) that annually investigates the efficiency and effectiveness of city government. In 2014 and 2015, he and former SFCGJ members mentored Balboa High School's Law Academy students in their investigation of city/school district issues as part of an 8-week program supported by pro bono attorneys. He has been an alumni volunteer-advisor for the Graduate College of Education at San Francisco State University and serves on the Board of Directors of the 1990 Institute. He was a co-coordinator and chaperone in the student exchange program between Lowell High School and Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School (summer 2012 and 2014).

One of Paul's passions is researching his family roots in 19th/20th century Guangdong Province. On a trip to China in 2012, he discovered that his maternal grandfather Li Sai Kuei, a Qing military officer, was once put in charge of collecting gambling taxes in Guangzhou by statesman Li Hung Chang (not related), then Viceroy of "Liangguang" (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces). Li Hung Chang abruptly left this post in June 1900 for Peking in midst of the Boxer Rebellion to represent the Qing government in negotiations with foreign powers occupying the capital. Through further research of this tumultuous period in China's history, Paul hopes to uncover greater details about his maternal grandfather's life, fate, and legacy.

In fall 2015, Paul will visit the ancestral home of his father (Cheng Mo) in Lianjiang, Guangdong as a participant in "Roots Plus," a genealogy research program sponsored by the Him Mark Lai Family History Project. Cheng Mo was recruited from Lianjiang at age 16 by the KMT army where he served for 22 years under various military commanders. He took part in the 2nd and 3rd Northern Expeditions (1927-1928) against regional warlords and was a frontline infantry officer who fought and was wounded during the early battles of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).