

**Fung Lum Restaurant:
An Immigrant Family's Success Story**

**An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County**

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Introduction

Many people have immigrated into this great country throughout its entire history. They have come to America with the hope of finding a better life and maybe a small fortune.

Fung Lum Restaurant was started by one of those immigrant families. They came, not so much to get rich, but to get away from the terrible life they left behind in their country, China.

This report will inform you of the history of the now proud restaurant, Fung Lum. But it will also tell of a San Jose immigrant family's success story.

The Fung Lum Restaurants have an interesting story behind them. The name of the restaurant comes from a small village in the southern part of China. The name of this village was Fung Lum. Fung Lum meant "maple grove" in the native language.

Many of the occupants of the Fung Lum village were of the Pang family. The situation of the village was somewhat backwards. There was not all the modern conveniences we enjoy today. It was a strenuous life, but the people got by.

In the mid-forties, China had a hostile invasion. It was taken over by the communist party. Life after the takeover became worse than before. Often there would be little food on the table and little money in the pocket. The occupants of Fung Lum village, along with thousands of other Chinese people, wanted to leave the country.

Slowly the Pang family, including others in the village, started sneaking out of the country. Most of the people went to Hong Kong. This was not as easy as it sounds. Many people were caught or just flat out couldn't make it. The Pang family never gave up because they couldn't stand the life there anymore.

Eventually, most of the family made it out, although there are still friends and relatives back in "red" China.

When the members of the Pang family got to Hong Kong, it was amid a rush of thousands of people fleeing China. They all knew that they needed to start a new life. To do that, they needed money.

Everyone one worked as hard as possible to earn some money. When they finally did, they decided to open a buisness of their own. A family buisness. Family members agreed quickly to this idea.

The doors opened in the year 1950. The restaurant was situated in Shatin, which was a small hamlet in the New Territories of the Kowloon peninsula. The Pang family named it Fung Lum, in remembrance of their native village. The resturant only had five tables.

Looking back, the restaurant idea was not a very wise one. Hong Kong didn't exactly need another Chinese resturant. It could of been safer to enter a different field, because it has been said that the resturant buisness is the most unstable of any other. The Pang family really needed lady luck on their side if they were going to be successful.

Apparantly, she was with them because the small restaurant prospered over the

years. This allowed the former members of the Fung Lum village an easier life.

With that success, the Pang family decided to expand. They opened two new restaurants. Now they had two in Hong Kong and one in Taipei, Taiwan. These new restaurants were also quite successful over the years. Which, in turn, brought the family even more money.

During the years that followed, Fung Lum's many great chefs were always improving many authentic Chinese dishes, and they were perfecting their own. These dishes have made Fung Lums chefs world famous and have earned Fung Lum the highest recommendation in many respected guide books and popular tour magazines.

Along with wanting to move to America the Pang family also wished to expand the Fung Lum restaurants even more. In the year 1975, they opened their first restaurant in the western world. This was quite an event. It was the first any of the many family members and friends have ever been to the United States.

Of course, not everyone came at the same time. Everyone got here their own way. Some even moved to other countries before coming. They started immigrating in the late sixties and some are still trying to get in today, although most of the people got here in the early seventies.

The large new restaurant was not exactly in everybody's mind at first. That was not really why they came. All the family members found a place to live somewhere or other in northern California. Most were attending school and had their own job. They were just living their own lives out.

It was not until most were married and had their own families before several of the elder Pang family members and a few others thought to put together their life savings and open a grand restaurant. Everyone knew it would cost a lot and that they would be in debt for a while, but all were very enthusiastic and very optimistic that the new restaurant would be successful. A portion of the money came from restaurants in Hong Kong.

The building of the new Fung Lum Restaurant cost 1.5 million dollars. The land on which it was located cost nearly \$120,000. The area of the land is around 60,000 square feet. The restaurant itself is approximately 10,000 cubic feet.¹

The Pang family wanted the restaurant to be as good as possible and spared no expense. They ordered much of the actual building materials and decorations from homeland, China. This process took many, many months.

Fung Lum was designed by hired architect, Tracy Price. Most of the interior decorating was done by an elder family member, S.B. Pang. He would later do the

same for the Fung Lum located in Universal Studios. Tracy Price drew a "Chinese Palace" design for the restaurant upon special request from the Pang family. They hired the Joseph Taylor Constuction Company to build the restaurant itself.

The official ground breaking ceremonies took place in May, 1974. All the family was there to watch.

Craftsmen from China and Taiwan were hired to carve many of the intricate designs. The Pang family felt this was important because they thought that people of their own culture would understand a little more about what they wanted. The craftsmanship, along with everything else, also took several months.

The restaurant took a year to build before it was finally complete. The Pang family put the roof on themselves. They did this, not so much sybolically, but more because they believed that the roofer, they personally hired, couldn't do the job correctly and sufficiently.

Fung Lum officially opened on May 27, 1975. It was packed with the news media and many distinguished guests. All the family was there working that night. When the doors first opened to the public, there was a line of people which stretched to the sidewalk just waiting to get in. The night was extremely frantic for many reasons. For one, people never stopped coming in, there was almost to much buisness

to handle. Another contributing factor was that all the employees were new and made created much confusion and made many errors. It took several days to straighten out all the problems. Even today, Fung Lum is still learning and improving itself. There were about fifty employees working at the time.

This first Fung Lum is located in Cambell, San Jose on 1815 South Bascom Avenue. The Pang Family chose this location because they thought it would be one of the best areas in San Jose to attract buisness. This location was one of the most expensive at the time.

The restaurant is open seven days a week. The buisness hours are: Monday through Thursday, 11:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. then 5:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M., Fridays, 11:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. then 5:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M., Saturdays, 11:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. then 5:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M., and Sundays, 11:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Fung Lum is open on all holidays. It does get decorated accordingly for each. The Pang family decided that staying open as much as possible would be the most convinient for the costomer.

The yearly earnings of the restaurant vary dramitically from year to year. Fung Lum does not necesarilly always come up on the plus side in the earnings department. The buisness of the restaurant really has a lot to do with the economic

outcome of the area each year. If, for say, Silicon Valley had a good year in economics, then Fung Lum usually has more buisness. But on the flip side of the coin, if Silicon Valley had a bad fiscal year, then people would have little less money to spend freely. So, for Fung Lum, like other restaurants, would have less buisness.

Right now, there are over one-hundred dishes on the dinner menu. With the restaurants in Hong Kong, there are over five-hundred. This is mainly because that a lot of Americans wouldn't know many of the dishes, and most likely wouldn't try them. Fung Lum discovered in the past that if there is an item on the menu that someone didn't know, they didn't bother to ask about it. I think this happens for the reason that many times people don't like to ask about things that could possibly embarrass them or that they don't want to bother because they probably would like to eat and leave quick as possible. Costomers at Fung Lum, often homeland China or Hong Kong, sometimes can't find an item and ask for it anyways. The restaurant always tries to oblige, and see if it is possible to make it. Some of the most popular dishes at the Cambell restaurant is the lemon chicken, the fried rice, and the many different vieriities of sea food.

In the kitchen, there are usually about sixteen chefs working at a time. Many of the cooks come from the Fung Lums in Hong Kong. They also get most of their

training there. Several of the Chefs have won special awards.

Fung Lum has already expanded once in the western world. The Pang family opened a multi-million dollar restaurant in Los Angeles. This Fung Lums is nearly twice as large as the Cambell restaurant. It is located on the Universal Studios hill and is part of the world famous tour. When this restaurant opened, about half the family had to move. This restaurant is currently very successful.

Fung Lums has had several robbery incidents in the past. There have always been the people who "eat and, literally, run". But a few times major thefts have taken place. Once there was over ten- thousand dollars taken.

In the future, Fung Lum hopes to stay very successful. It is one of the most popular restaurants in valley and wishes to keep it up. I believe that a story like the one of this restaurant does not come along very often, and is just another example of a family finding success, not only in northern California, but all over the United States of America.

NOTES

1. Pang, Joric, interviewed by Allen Pang, Fung Lum Restaurant, San Jose, California, 9:05 P.M., March 28, 1989.

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