

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: James Chan Interview Number: 79
 Chinese Name: 陳元富 Number of Tapes: 1
 Date of Interview: 1/12/80 Length: 36 Minutes
 Interviewer: George Yee
 Others Present: none
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	004-013	Introduction.	
	014-015	James Chan (JC) lives in Los Angeles.	
	016-021	JC's parents were born in san Francisco. JC was born in Old Chinatown in Los Angeles where t'he Union Station is located now.	
	022-023	JC was born on May 23, 1910.	
	024-025	JC lived with his parents in Los Angeles. He does not know when his parents came to Los Angeles.	
	026-027	JC's family spoke mostly Chinese at home. JC's father spoke a little English.	
	028-032	JC's father worked as a vegetable peddler. He had a horse and buggy. He peddled around the city of Los Angeles.	
2	033-035	JC's father got the vegetables at the Ninth Street market. There were all types of people working there not only Chinese.	
	036-039	JC's father bought a horse and buggy and would peddle the vegetables to different places. JC would accompany his father at times.	
	040-042	The vegetable peddlers started the day at two o'clock in the morning. They would pick up their vegetables and peddle them all day.	
	043-046	JC's father owned his own horse and buggy. They kept the horses on Apablasa Street in a horse barn. The barn later became a baseball field.	
	047-052	There were about 50 horses kept there. the horses had disappeared and the place became a vacant lot before it was a baseball field.	
	053-059	Chinatown was very small in the 1920's--there were about 2 or 3 thousand people there at the most.	
	060-066	In the 1920's, Chinatown was five blocks long. It was about 100 feet wide. It was basically one street and a few alley ways.	
	067-070	There was a railroad track running right through the center of Chinatown. The tracks divided Chinatown into its east and west side.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	
3	071-073	The Chinese did not do much in the 1920's. A lot of Chinese were in the vegetable peddling business in order to make a living.	
	074-078	There were quite a few laundries at that time around town. There were also quite a few restaurants in Chinatown. JC was too young to know what was going on outside.	
	079-086	Chinatown was stagnant from the 1920's to the 1930's. There was a lot of prejudice at that time so the Chinese did not go and work in the American community. One would be lucky to get a job outside Chinatown.	
	087-088	During the 1930's there were no jobs and there were bread lines. The Chinese were just as bad off as the Americans were.	
	089-094	JC attended Hewitt Street Grammar School. He also went to Jefferson High School.	
	095-097	There was a mixture of Mexicans and Chinese at these schools. The two ethnic groups would get along sometimes.	
	098-102	Most of the Chinese would stay together in Chinatown. Most of JC's friends were Chinese. JC would play with everyone at school.	
	103-110	During the 1920's and 1930's, JC's mother would go and get Chinese herbs when JC was sick. JC's family did not visit any American doctors at that time because money was scarce. Most of the Chinese in Chinatown were the same way at that time.	
	4	111-119	JC's father delivered all his own children. JC has one brother and one sister. JC's brother is Allen and his sister is Jennie. JC's sister is older than he is while his brother is younger than he is.
		120-121	JC does not know how the other Chinese families delivered their babies.
122-124		JC does not know if his father had birth certificates made up for his children.	
125-130		JC's family would drink Chinese herb tea.	
131-141		JC played baseball in 1927. Some of the other Chinese children also played baseball--they did not have many players. They were mostly American born children. The China born Chinese did not care for baseball.	
142-147		The Chinese did not listen to music as a form of recreation at that time. The Chinese did not have anything in those days. There was no money and no celebrations.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	148-153	Some of the Chinese would send money back to China in order to help their relatives.
	154-163	Most of the Chinese before World War II worked in Chinatown. JC applied for a job in the American community and the employer asked him why he should hire JC if there were so many white Americans out of work. He also told JC to go find a job with the Chinese. The white Americans discouraged the Chinese from working for them. Not many Chinese worked for white Americans.
	164-167	Things did not open up for the Chinese until after World War II. There was a lot of prejudice before that.
	168-178	In the 1930's, \$65 a month was considered good money. \$10 a week was considered pretty good. In those days, you were lucky if you had a job for 25 cents an hour.
	179-185	Some of the Chinese went to work in the defense plants during World War II but most of them were in the service.
6	186-198	JC was a boys scout master from 1935 to 1941 when the war started. There were about twenty kids in his troop. JC does not know how he got involved in boy scouts. When JC went into the service, his brother, Allen, took over, and after that Dr. Edward Lee took over and that was the end of that.
	199-205	The Chinese boy scouts did everything a boy scout should do. There was no girl scouts because there were not that many girls around.
	206-229	There were three churches in Chinatown that JC remembers--the Methodist, Presbyterian, and another church. The minister was Miss Early who was a Caucasian lady that would come to Chinatown and bring the kids to Church. The Church was a small two by four. The preaching was done in English although the Church was in Chinatown. It was more like a house or store. About ten or fifteen people would attend the Sunday services. This was in the 1920's--the church did not last very long.
7	230-238	The Chinese at that time would save their money since money was hard to come by in those days. Some of them would gamble but people with families would save their money.
	239-241	The gambling houses were wide open in Chinatown at that time.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	242-251	In 1925 JC's family moved to 21st and San Pedro. It was more of an American neighborhood. They moved out of Chinatown because they wanted their privacy.
	252-254	At that time, the Chinese were starting to move out of Chinatown.
	255-265	That was considered quite a way from Chinatown. In those days, the Chinese were not allowed to buy houses so when the opportunity came around, they would take it. JC got that house through a Caucasian friend. After moving in that house, they changed the name to their own name.
	266-269	The neighbors did not get mad at them for moving in. Some of the other Chinese may have done the same thing.
	270-276	JC did not know of any Chinese that were involved in politics in China in the 1930's.
8	277-286	In the 1920's and the 1930's, the older generation in Chinatown felt an obligation to their family in China. The children did not know the relatives in China.
	287-301	JC did not know of any Chinese on the breadlines. The Chinese would just save whatever money they had and eat less during the Depression. The Chinese were very close together and took care of each other.
	302-315	In the 1920's and 1930's, the Chinese did not mix with the Caucasians. The Caucasians never came down to Chinatown to make trouble. The Americans would come and celebrate Chinese New Years. There was a crowd at that time but such a crowd was no comparison to the crowds there are today.
	316-319	The Caucasians would also go to Chinatown on the weekends to eat.
	320-334	There would be dragon dances during Chinese New Years. There would also be firecrackers. There were no bands in those days. The Mei Wah drum corp came into being in the late 1930's.
9	335-341	When JC's family moved to 21st Street the Caucasian kids did not pick on them. They minded their own business and JC's family minded their own business too.
	342-345	Some Chinese may have experienced difficulties with the American community depending on where they lived.
	346-354	If you want to meet people you have to show them your friendship. The neighbors became friendly once they got used to JC's family.
	355-370	After high school, JC was a bellhop at the Wilshire Hotel at Wilshire and Park View. It was a classy place. JC worked there in the 1930's. There were three other Chinese bellshops that worked in the apartment house.

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1 Side A

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	371-373	That was the only hotel that hired Chinese bellhops at that time.
	374-382	JC worked there for a few years. He then looked for another job. By then the war came along and JC went into the service. JC was in the Navy.
10	383-384	JC served in the Pacific.
	385-393	After the war, JC worked in the market and then worked for the county. He then worked for the city. he then worked for Kaiser. He ended up working for the Department of Water and Power. JC is now retired.
	394-399	JC thinks that the Chinese have done a lot better than the general population in Los Angeles. The Chinese are more intelligent and ambitious.
	400-409	There is a similarity between the Chinese and the Jewish people. Both know how to make money in business.
	410-433	In the 1920's the Chinese men would return to China to get married because there were no Chinese women in the United States. The American born Chinese were too young to get married at that time. The American born Chinese would return to China to get married if he could not find a wife here. There were quite a few Chinese women in San Francisco but much less in Los Angeles.
	434-449	There were not too many children in Chinatown in the 1920's and 1930's. They were mostly single men. There were a lot of Chinese families at that time too.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

1	017-023	In the 1920's and 1930's the Chinese preferred sons rather than daughters even if they were American born.
	024-028	The Chinese did not think much about interracial marriages. They felt that the Chinese were for Chinese. Attitudes towards interracial marriages changed after World War II.
	029-035	JC attended Chinese school for two years. The child had to be very intelligent in order to absorb Chinese and English at the same time.
2	036-039	There were about 30 or 40 kids in the Chinese schools in the 1920's and 1930's.
	040-043	The kids attended Chinese school from about the age of 12 to 15.
	044-048	The teacher at the Chinese school was Lo Leong. JC does not know if he was American born.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	049-054	JC attended Chinese school after American school. The Chinese classes went from four to five o'clock every day. JC was able to read and write some Chinese.
	055-061	Chinese school was fine for those that could absorb it and were interested in learning Chinese. At that time, JC did not think he had much use for it so he did not have much interest. Some students were also disinterested but others learned quite a lot.
	062-070	In the 1920's and 1930's, the older Chinese generation would talk about returning to China. The American born Chinese did not talk about going to China because they did not have anything to do with China.
3	071-079	When JC was young, he did go and watch American movies. In those days, a job was a job for the Chinese regardless of what kind of roles they were told to do in the movies.
	080-081	In those days, the Chinese did not protest against the Chinese portrayals in American movies. The Chinese were solely interested in the money they could make in those movies.
	082-085	There were no movie theaters in Chinatown in those days. JC went to Fifth and Main in order to see the movies. That was the center of town in those days.
	086-094	In the 1920's, the Chinese did not have many employment opportunities. Even by the 1930's, the professional jobs were closed to the Chinese.
	095-100	The American born Chinese did go to college in those days. Some of them would study medicine and dentistry. Some of them did get into those fields. The Chinese would look up to those that had professional jobs.
	101-108	JC's father delivered his own children with the help of a midwife. The children were delivered at home.
4	109-116	JC also tried to go to the Forum on Pico Street way out. When JC went there, they said, "No dogs, Orientals, or Blacks allowed."
	117-121	There was also a lot of prejudice in the American restaurants. They did not let the Chinese in. The Chinese decided that if those restaurants did not want their money, they would go somewhere that did want their money. The Chinese would enjoy themselves more at restaurants where the owners did not discriminate. This was in the 1920's.
	122-126	Discrimination against the Chinese continued through the 1930's and did not end until after World War II.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	127-129	The Chinese did not try to get into big theaters.
	130-133	Anyone was allowed to go to the baseball parks. The Chinese were also allowed in parks.
	134-145	During the war, JC also encountered racial discrimination. He was in uniform when he took a train in Washington D.C. and they refused to let JC sit in the white section. JC was forced to go to the colored section. The trains, bathrooms, and drinking fountains were all racially segregated.
5	146-150	During the war, JC was stationed in Miami and then transferred to Washington D.C. JC was in the navy during the war. He was stationed in the Pacific Coast.
	151-155	JC never saw any underground tunnels in Old Chinatown.
	156-159	There were gambling houses in Old Chinatown. JC did not see any opium dens or prostitution houses because he was too young.
	160-170	JC heard that a Chinese man by the name of Lee engineered the Second Street Tunnel. JC was very young at that time. The tunnel is located at Second and Hill..
	171-179	JC's sister, Jennie Lee, may know more about the engineer by the name of Lee, who built the Second Street tunnel. She is a relative of the engineer.

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