

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: George Fong
 Chinese Name: 郭範
 Date of Interview: 9/19/80
 Interviewer: Suellen Cheng
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Rodney H. Chow

Interview Number: 128
 Number of Tapes: 2
 Length: 1 Hour & 45 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape No.:	Side:
			<u>1</u>	<u>A</u>
1	001-010 011-032	My Chinese name is Kwo Fong (郭範). I come from Chung Shan (中山) village of Jook Kai. I came in 1909. My father also came to the United States. He was born in China. I do not know when he came to the United States. My mother stayed in China. I came to the United States with my younger brother. I was born in 1891. I came when I was 19 years old. I came because like all the Chinese, I wanted to go to another country to make money. My father sent money to me to come to the United States.		
2	033-040 041-069	I did not remember how much money my father sent back to China. I had a good life in China. I just went to school in China but did not finish high school. I did not work in China. My mother only had two sons -- my brother is three or four years younger. My father was in San Francisco. He had a store in Chinatown. The store's name was Lem Sing on Mission Street. He sold ladies goods to Caucasians. When I came I helped my father. There were other people helping.		
3	070-078 079-084 085-100	The store had sewing machines and made nightgowns, etc. for sale. I did sewing for a couple of years then moved to other places. I went to Reno. I went there on or two years. Did not make much salary. My brother went some place else. My mother never came. She did not have to take care of anyone -- my father went back a couple of times to see her.		

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	101-111	After I went to Joe Soong Geng See 公司 (National Dollar Store) in Los Angeles. I knew him in Reno.
	112-124	In Reno, I stayed there all the time. I took orders to make clothing. They had machines there and made clothing.
	125-137	The name of the company is Shui Wing. After this company closed, Joe Soong asked me to work in his store waiting on customers.
5	138-150	Some women worked and waited on customers. By then there were four or five stores in different cities. Two stores in San Francisco. The store was on Market Street.
	151-164	I worked on Market Street -- there were sewing there too in the basement. Fifteen people in basement sewing -- all Chinese men. They sewed, cut, and waited on customers. I did anything. I worked on Market Street for one year and then they sent me to other stores.
	165-183	To Los Angeles, one time, 1917-1918. Store was on Broadway Street between 5th and 6th Street. I just worked there. I was not a manager.
6	184-201	In 1934 they opened on the same block, different location. I became manager. First store in Los Angeles closed because rent was too high.
	202-214	Every place I would stay a year or two (different city). They were retail stores. They had a factory in San Francisco on Washington and Kearney. It was a big factory which hired about fifty people. They were women of all different ages -- mostly 20 to 30 years old.
7	215-245	Very few young teenagers. Did not have much pay that time. I made \$60 a month in 1917 to 1918. I came to Los Angeles in 1917. They had a house for all the workers. It was close to the store.
	246-260	
	261-273	They had five to six people working including some American lady clerks (Caucasians). There were four Chinese men from San Francisco.
8	274-287	Once in a while I went to Chinatown for dinner. I had no friends there. I stayed in Los Angeles for one year. Then they sent me to San Jose.
	288-302	Then I went to San Diego in 1919 and took over managing a store that just opened on 5th Street.
	303-325	Four or five Chinese worked there in the San Diego store. I helped start the business.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	326-331	I set up the store -- hired people. Chinese workers were sent over from the main office. I hired four or five American women. They waited on customers.
	332-351	I advertised in the paper. They sold different kinds of clothes. Most of the customers were Mexican. They all spoke English. They hired a few Mexican women. They got the same pay. Chinese got more pay -- Chinese worked longer days and nights.
	352-380	They shipped cloth from San Francisco by freight.
	381-384	Store in San Diego was 18 feet wide and 100 feet deep. Got basement.
10	385-393	First Los Angeles store had two floors in 1917. In 1934, the second store had a basement, main floor and second floor.
	394-402	They sold everything from clothes to household goods. It was like a department store.
	403-426	In 1940, I went back to San Diego. In 1934 I came back to Los Angeles. They wanted me to take care of the new store. The customers were Mexicans and some Americans in Los Angeles. That time there were eight or nine Chinese people.
11	427-458	White people and Mexican workers. No one lived in the store. In 1934 we hired local people only. They came in asking for work.
	459-472	Walter Chung worked there. Silas Chan worked there. Walter Chung was a receiving clerk.
END OF SIDE A		

TAPE 1 SIDE B

1	001-019	I was looking for their experience before hiring them. Hours were eight hours -- the Chinese sometimes worked into the night, opening boxes, etc. I lived on Figueroa Street. It was a big house, at least nine people lived there. Howard Leong also worked there. He is now a bartender at New Moon.
	020-031	Those people living there were single. When they were married, they lived in the back house.
2	032-054	I was married in 1919 in San Francisco, then went to San Diego.
	055-058	My daughter was born in 1930. Then ten years later my second daughter was born.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	059-065	In Los Angeles store between 1934 and 1940, Old Chinatown did not look too good.
	066-076	I had a friend -- the father of the owner of the General Lee Restaurant. They lived on Broadway in a house.
3	077-090	I knew the owner of 大東, Allan Lum.
4	091-111	I met my wife in San Jose. She was born in a small town near San Jose. Her father had a small farm. By that time my father went back to China, 1917-1918. I do not know what he did when he went back to China. We had no correspondence. My brother passed away about 25 years ago. He did not communicate with the family. San Francisco was where the Chinese Association was. That is why I went there to get married. I married in Yung Woh Wui Goon (陽和會館).
5	112-152	Right way after the marriage, I went to San Diego. They had a Chinatown in San Diego.
	153-168	Mrs. Fong speaks English. I learned English in night school. I studied for four to five years. My wife worked for a while in the store in San Diego. I lived in the company house.
	169-179	My wife liked Los Angeles. She had a sister in Los Angeles. She had a grocery store on Solano Street near Chinatown.
6	180-197	My wife would visit her sister.
	198-203	My brother was always in the Bay area.
	203-204	I had no other relatives in the United States. In 1940 I went back to San Diego. I retired in Los Angeles in 1963. I decided to retire in Los Angeles because my daughter is here. In 1963 I bought this house and since then I never worked. At that time, my daughter was already married. Son married in 1964. He lived in Gardena. My wife passed away in 1970. She was 70 years old. My daughter lives close. I eat there every night, I drive there.
7	205-245	All my working experience was in the National Dollar Store. I made good money. When I had more business I had bigger bonuses. Salary was very little but bonuses were good.
	246-265	The Los Angeles store was not so good because there was the 5th Street Store (department store) and the competition was hard. And we could not sell cheaper than they.

Contents (cont'd)

1 Side B
Tape: 2 Side A

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	266-277	Chinese did not shop at National Dollar Store. There were six stores -- one in Pomona, one in Manchester, Huntington Park, Whittier, First Street.
	278-297	At that time I was District Manager of all those stores. When I advertised I included all the stores. All the managers were Chinese.
	298-311	National Dollar Store was first called Chung Hing (<u>中興</u>).
	312-330	When I first moved to Sna Diego the name was then changed to National Dollar Store. In San Diego, National Dollar Store started in 1922. Started with one white man. He was the manager of Clark Dollar Store so they (National Dollar Store) hired him.
9	331-350	He was the first white hired as manager.
	351-360	1942 to 1943 they closed the Los Angeles store. The rent was raised twice. The store made close to [gross] about one million dollars a year. When I was in Los Angeles, it was not quite one million gross.
10	361-393	You had to buy the goods that were easy to sell-- did not sell too high. Goods were purchased from the East Coast. I purchased some -- I did some purchasing for the store.
	394-432	Workers got no bonus -- assistant managers sometimes got a small bonus. The job was not difficult. At that time Chinese had a hard time finding jobs.
11	433-463	They came to us looking for work. The Chinese got better pay at National Dollar Store than any other place.
	464-476	About two-thirds of the workers were Americans, one-third was Chinese.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	001-010	I prefer American women to wait on customers. They could do a better job dealing with American customers. They were happy working for Chinese. They were looking for jobs. I paid them the same as the other company. They stayed quite long. No benefits such as insurance, etc. Chinese were happy working with Caucasians.
	011-039	I had some Chinese working for me in San Diego -- same as in Los Angeles. Joe Soong trusted the manager quite well. Once in a while he came to the store to check. He associated with Chinese.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	040-063	In San Francisco I lived near the warehouse on Market Street.
3	064-090	When I came from China I took the boat to Macao then to America.
	091-093	I was anxious to come to America. My family had land in Chung Shan (中山). My mother did not have to work.
	094-102	I do not miss Chung Shan.
	103-104	I never think about China because they are all gone so I do not feel like going back. I went back three or four years ago. I tried to go but cannot go into Mainland. I speak mostly Chinese here.
4	105-119	My children all speak Chinese.
	120-128	I do not speak Sze Yup. My friends are mostly Chinese. I had no other friends. The company house was in the Caucasian neighborhood. I made some friends in the neighborhood. I feel more Chinese.
	129-145	I go to an American doctor, I do not use Chinese herbs.
5	146-157	My wife's family is all gone.
		I like both American and Chinese part time.
	158-176	I watch T.V. I did write to my mother. Someone had to read to her.
6	177-194	I go to night school at a different Church. I am not Christian -- no religion.
	195-209	My daughter did not go to college. Son went to USC. He studied architecture.
7	210-239	I do not belong to any associations. It was the custom to go to the association to get married [in the early days when George Fong got married].
	240-259	The association did not take care of me. I did not belong to any of the associations so I did not go to the dinners.
8	260-298	I do not know what kind of jobs other Chinese had before World War II.
	299-302	I know Allan Lum. Man Leu Low did pretty good.
	303-316	At that time there were not too many restaurants. I never went to Tuey Far Low because Chung Shan (中山) people went to Chung Shan people places. Tuey Far Low are Sze Yup.
	-322	Yee Mee Low are also Chung Shan people.
9	323-344	Not too many Chung Shan people in the restaurant business.
	345-358	Most people saved their money and sent it to China. I kept my money.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	359-382	I bought stocks. I am not interested in politics.
10	383-408 409-440	I was not affected too much by the Depression. I never hear about people comparing Chinese with Jewish people. My brother went back to China to get married. His wife stayed in China -- I do not know if he had children.
11	441-470	I do not see many people marry American wives.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

1	001-009	I do not feel against interracial marriages. My second daughter's son married an American.
	010-014	Most Chinese feel they should have a son. I do not want to go back to China because all my family are here. My daughter went to Chinese school one time. She did not learn very much.
	015-028	She did not care for it. I never watch movies with or about Chinese such as Charlie Chan.
2	029-047	I do not think about telling my children what to be. I let them decide.

END OF TAPE 2

END OF INTERVIEW

- Chan, Silas, 1A:11
- Children
 preference for sons, 2B:1
- China
 life-style in, 1A:2
 money sent back to, 2A:9
- Chinatown (San Diego), 1B:5
- Chinatown (San Francisco), 1A:
 2,4
- Chinese language
 dialects of, 2A:8
- Chung, Walter, 1A:11
- Chung Hing
 See National Dollar Store
- Clothing stores
 clothes made in, 1A:3,4
 competition among, 1B:7
 customers of, 1A:9,10
 language spoken in, 1A:9
 layout of, 9-10
 locations of, 5,6
 managers of, 1B:8-9
 merchandise of, 1A:10
 profitability of, 1B:9
 types of jobs in, 1A:4-5,9
 workers in
 ethnicity of, 1A:5,7,9; 2A:1
 number of, 1A:5,7
 wages earned by, 1A:7; 1B:7,
 10
 women, 1A:5,7,9; 2A:1
 working hours in, 1B:1
 See also names of individual stores
- Correspondence, 2A:5
- English language
 learning of, 1B:5
- Ethnic identity
 Chinese v. American, 2A:4
- Families and family life
 language spoken in, 2A:4
 members remaining in China, 1A:
 1,3
- Family associations
 and marriages, 1B:4; 2A:7
- Fong, George
 birth of, 1A:1
 children of, 1A:2; 2B:1,2
- courtship and marriage of, 1B:
 2,4
- education of, 1A:2; 2A:6
- emigration from China by, 1A:1,
 2; 2A:3
- employment of, 1A:2,3,4-11; 1B:
 7,8
- ethnic identity of, 2A:4
- father of, 1A:1-2
- friendships of, 2A:4
- language spoken by, 2A:3-4
- mother of, 1A:2,3; 2A:3,5
- religion of, 2A:6
- residences of, 1B:1,6; 2A:2
- retirement of, 1B:6
- return to China by, 2A:3
- siblings of, 1A:1,2,3; 1B:4,6;
 2A:10
- wife of, 1B:4,5,6
- Friendships
 among Chinese-Americans, 2A:4
 and dialect spoken, 2A:8
- Grocery stores, 1B:5
- Heung San, 2A:8
- Immigrants and immigration
 families separated by, 1A:1,3
 mode of transportation, 2A:3
 reasons for, 1A:1
- Interracial marriages, 2B:1
- Investments, 2A:9
- Jook Kai, China, 1A:1
- Lem Sing (clothing store), 1A:2-3
- Leong, Howard, 1B:1
- Lum, Allan, 1B:4; 2A:8
- Man Leu Low, 2A:8
- Marriages
 and family associations, 1B:4; 2A:
 7
 mate selection patterns in, 2A:11
- Money
 investment of, 2A:9
 sent back to China, 2A:9

National Dollar Store, 1A:4-6;
1B:7-11

Restaurants

language spoken in, 2A:8,9
number of, 2A:8

Shan Chung, China, 2A:3
Shui Wing (clothing store), 1A:4
Soong, Joe, 1A:4; 2A:1
Sze Yup, 2A:4,8

Tuey Far Low, 2A:8

Women

occupation patterns among, 1A:
5,7,9; 2A:1

Yee Mee Low, 2A:8
Yung Woh Wui Goon Association,
1B:4