

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Victor S. Yung Interview Number: 97  
 Chinese Name: 洗耀昌 Number of Tapes: 2  
 Date of Interview: 5/13/80 Length: 1 Hour & 42 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-009	Introduction.	
	010-016	Victor San Yung (VSY) lives at 5522 Cahuenga, North Hollywood. VSY was born in San Francisco in the year 1915. VSY will be 65 years old in October. VSY was born on October 18, 1915.	
	017-022	VSY's father came to the U.S. around 1886. He was 14 years old. When he arrived, he worked several years at the San Rafael Military Academy in Marine County as a kitchen helper.	
	023-028	VSY's father came with his older brother. They sought the opportunities here and thought of the possibility of making a new life.	
	029-037	VSY's grandfather was very well know in Fat San as a cultivator of goldfish. Fat San is part of Canton. It is close to Nam Hoi.	
2	038-042	VSY's father stayed in the United States for the rest of his life. He went to the St. Louis World's Fair in 1900 and ended up working in a restaurant in New York. He got a job as a waiter because by then he could speak good English.	
	043-047	VSY's father then returned to San Francisco and got together with the Lang Ting Fot Wa Company. A few years after that he opened his own company called the Mandarin Importing Company.	
	048-051	In 1913, VSY's father brought his wife over from China. VSY's sister was born one year after VSY. Unfortunately, VSY's mother died during an epidemic in 1918.	
	052-058	VSY continued in the Mandarin Importing Company and he worked until the crash of 1929. He then joined the City of Hangchow Tamsel Company for 15 years. He then moved to the China Emporium. Thus, VSY's father has been on Grand Avenue in the import-export business for almost 60 years.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	059-060	VSY lived in San Francisco until 1938. He graduated from college in 1937 and then came to Los Angeles.
	061-064	VSY got the part as the son in the Charlie Chan series. VSY thus started a career in the motion picture business and has remained in it until the present time.
	065-068	VSY's father made about four or five trips back to China. He died at the age of 97.
3	069-072	When VSY was young, they spoke English at home. When VSY's mother passed away, VSY and his sister were placed in an American children's home in San Francisco. They spoke English before they spoke Chinese.
	073-078	The house was called the San Francisco Children's Home near the Presidio. VSY stayed there for about three years. He was about 5 years old.
	079-082	VSY was then placed in the Chung Mei Home for Chinese boys in Berkeley which was run by the Baptist mission. He was there for one year and then returned to San Francisco and worked as a houseboy.
	083-091	VSY enjoyed the Chung Mei Home. He was treated well. It was a two-story building. The rooms were converted into dormitories. They had a wonderful cook. They went to grammar school down the street, at the Hawthorne Grammar School.
	092-096	There were about 50 boys living at that home. They ranged in age from 6 to 18 years old. Dr. Charles Shephard was the head of the home. VSY was at Chung Mei for a year and a half.
	097-106	In San Francisco, VSY enrolled at the Commodore Stockton Grammar School. It is on Washington Street in Chinatown between Powell and Stockton. All the students were Chinese. The teachers were all Caucasians except for Alice Fong Yu, who was assigned as a teacher there later. She was the first Chinese school teacher in the public school system in San Francisco.
4	107-119	The Chung Mei Home was run like a military academy. VSY remembers the fellowships and fights with the boys. The best fun for VSY was going to summer camp at Surbastapole to pick loganberries. They pitched tents and had their own swimming hole in the creek.
	120-132	VSY picked loganberries. They got 6¢ a tray or a penny a pound. On a good day, VSY would pick ten trays and make 60¢.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	133-141	At the Commodore Stockton School, VSY had his first experience with all Chinese. They spoke a lot of Chinese and VSY did not speak any--he only spoke English. VSY learned how to speak by ear.
	142-144	The other children teased VSY for not being able to speak Chinese.
5	145-152	In those days, VSY attended Sunday School at the Chinese Baptist Church. He would play with his school friends there.
	153-158	The Caucasian teachers were very understanding of the students and very devoted to their work.
	159-164	VSY graduated from Commodore and then went to Francisco Junior High School in North Beach, in the Italian section. There was a mixture of Chinese and Italians at the school.
	165-180	The situation between the Chinese and the Italians were fine in the classroom because it was intellectual competition. They would sometimes run into difficulty in physical education. They would go to a public swimming pool and fight for the diving board and other things. Yet, VSY has some very close friends who are now prominent businessmen in San Francisco. Sebastian Pacenese was a great quarterback for USF. Joseph Zerga was a big insurance man.
	181-184	After junior high school, VSY would hear about what his friends were up to.
6	185-190	VSY's art teacher, Miss Heddish used to take the kids up to Telegraph Hill to sketch the view from up there. Coit Tower was not there yet.
	191-197	Miss Riley, their civics teacher, got the students interested in public affairs.
	198-203	The junior high class graduated in 1930. VSY then went to the High School of Commerce at the foot of Veness Avenue and Market Street.
	204-210	VSY always had good associations with all of his classmates. VSY was more concerned with getting an education than working as a houseboy for a family on Knobb Hill.
	211-217	VSY's science teacher, Mrs. Robin, in grammar school, was very influential in VSY's thinking. VSY's French teacher was Mrs. Straun and his mathematic teacher was Miss Gasengay.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	218-223	VSY's father kept drilling VSY to respect his teachers. As a result, VSY learned a lot and appreciated the contributions his teachers made.
	224-230	VSY never had any problems at school because he was Chinese. This was mainly because he spoke English as well as anybody else. He was also more out-going.
7	231-239	VSY worked as a houseboy for seven years. After high school, he worked one more year with them. He commuted to the University of California at Berkeley by ferryboat.
	240-244	For the last three years of college, VSY worked for different families at Berkeley. He was also a waiter during the lunch hour at a restaurant called the Canton Village.
	245-269	When VSY was 12 years old, he joined the Boy Scouts, Troop 3, which is now the oldest troop in the United States. There were about 25 to 30 of them and they all stuck close together for a long time. They had a wonderful scout master named Chin Hua Lee. Out of this group, there were five or six doctors, dentists, lawyers, mostly all became professionals. A few were in business and VSY was the only renegade who became an actor.
	270-274	VSY was an economics major in college. He did not encounter any hostility because he was Chinese.
	275-287	During his last year in college, VSY organized an International Week on campus, sponsored by the Association of Students of the University of California and International House. There was a week of activities which ended with a pageant and ball.
8	288-294	VSY also had a job working as a student secretary at the International House. VSY got room and board.
	295-303	VSY's main source of income was made during the summers of 1935 and 1936. VSY came to Los Angeles and worked as an extra in motion pictures.
	304-318	VSY went to work for Tom Gubbins, who owned the Asiatic Costumes Company. He was English from Hong Kong. He knew VSY's father very well. Thus VSY's father arranged to have VSY work for Tom Gubbins over the summer. VSY worked in the store without pay but would pocket the money he made as an extra.
	319-324	The store was located on Los Angeles Street by the Plaza in Old Chinatown. It was all torn down to make room for the Union Station.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	325-331	Tom Gubbins passed away quite a few years ago. He spoke beautiful Chinese.
9	332-344	After college, VSY got a screen test for the Charlie Chan series. He was selling chemicals at the time. He came to Los Angeles and saw the article in the paper.
	345-354	VSY was going to 20th Century Fox to sell chemicals originally. When they saw VSY, they decided to give him a screen test. The screen test was successful and VSY worked in his first picture, "Charlie Chan in Honolulu" the following Monday. This was in 1938.
	355-367	VSY was on contract for three years and the war came along. The Charlie Chan series was very popular in those days all over the world. They lost the foreign market during the war and so they discontinued the series. They reactivated the series shortly before the war was over and VSY went back into the series.
	368-380	Sidney Toller died--he was number two Chan and they signed Roland Winters to do the series. He was the third Charlie Chan. They did about four shows and they discontinued the series in 1947.
	381-384	VSY got married on VJ day in San Francisco.
10	385-405	VSY went into the service in 1943. During the war, VSY was assigned to the first motion picture unit. He was reassigned to the subdepot and then to the 22nd Field Hospital Unit. They shipped out to New York and VSY was assigned to the transportation corps. VSY wound up on the Win Victory Show in New York, which was an Army Air Force show.
	406-419	VSY applied for Officers Candidate School while playing at the 44th Street Theater in New York. He then came to Los Angeles to do the picture which was when VSY got orders to go to Officers Candidate School in San Antonio, Texas.
	420-427	VSY was then reassigned to the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and VSY got his degree and signed up as a statistical controller officer with the Air Transport Command in Memphis, Tennessee.
	428-448	VSY was then reassigned to Intelligence. He was then assigned to the language school to learn how to speak Mandarin at the University of California at Berkeley. That is when VSY met his wife, Maria. They got married at the end of the war.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	449-451	VSY met his wife in San Francisco. She was working for her uncle in a restaurant.
	452-461	VSY did not think of going to China to get married but he wanted to go to China. That is why he kept making these transfers through the years in the service in hopes of getting into units that were going to China.
	462-474	VSY has one son, Brent. He is now teaching at the Cleveland Art Institute in Cleveland, Ohio. He is in charge of the glass design program there. He has a Masters of Fine Arts from Afra College in upstate New York. He got his bachelor's degree in ceramics.
	475-484	VSY has been a bachelor since 1953. He has freedom but at times he does not know what to do with himself except to watch television.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	003-011	VSY misses San Francisco very much. VSY is only in Los Angeles because of the motion picture business is centered there. VSY has strong feelings for San Francisco.
	012-024	VSY has more Caucasian associates in the motion picture industry. VSY's identity as an American Chinese is beneficial because he is more easily identified. VSY's background in motion pictures has been a great help because he is identified with his two major series--"Charlie Chan" and "Bonanza."
	025-043	VSY has very few friends of Black origin. He made friends with them through work. VSY does not have any close friends that are Chicanos--he only has business relationships. VSY has very few non-Chinese Asian friends because his activities control the people that he associates with.
2	044-053	VSY first went to 20th Century Fox to sell a moth and flame proof liquid to mix with paints. It turned out to be a dud. The company folded after 1½ years.
	054-064	VSY feels more American than Chinese in terms of his activities. He is still very Chinese in terms of his respect for elders, his respect and admiration for China and the Chinese people. VSY feels very much a part of the Chinese continuum.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	065-073	VSY can converse in Chinese. He went to Hong Kong for the first time in 1973 with a tour. VSY was able to converse in simple things.
3	074-084	VSY has never felt sorry for being Chinese. He has accepted what he is. This was drilled into him by his father.
	085-089	VSY did not get to know his mother because she passed away when he was four years old.
	090-102	When VSY was young, they used some Chinese medicine. They used "yuee yau" which was a medicinal oil. They did not have bak fa yau in those days. They also used Tiger Balm. They had eng see cha for upset stomach.
	103-112	They had tan loh yok and wai san which were herbs in Chinese dishes.
4	113-137	VSY still uses bak fa yau a lot for surface itches and for sore muscles. About 75% of the cooking VSY does for himself is Chinese type cooking. VSY likes to improvise. VSY likes to use spices. He loves soups. Most of the condiments he uses are imported from China. He learned these as a kid--while watching his father cook.
	138-152	VSY wrote a book on Chinese cooking which sold about 20,000 copies. VSY would like to eliminate MSG or "mei gin" ( ) from recipes. He would like to include in the prologue the nonbenefits of MSG.
5	153-165	In 1972, VSY was shot in the back during a sky jacking in San Francisco. He was laid up in the hospital. He and his sisters gathered up some recipes for the grandchildren. There were so many that VSY decided to write a cookbook. The book came out in 1973.
	166-180	For recreation, VSY used to play a lot of golf. After the hijacking, VSY became more concerned about the value of time. VSY decided to become more productive.
	181-192	VSY used to sing a lot. He used to study voice with Nina Koshek. VSY sang at a night club called Forbidden City for two years. He MCed the shows.
6	193-202	In the last six or seven months, VSY has been working on fixing up his house.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	<u>Tape 2 Side A</u>
1	001-003	Introduction.	
	004-007	VSY reads a lot when he has the time. He keeps up with current events.	
	008-014	During VSY's first two years at 20th Century Fox, he took graduate courses in cinematography, film production, and motion picture production at USC.	
	015-020	VSY also went to a design school for two years after the service. He went to Lipton School of Costume Design. VSY is more interested in sales and public relations.	
	021-027	VSY has a strong desire to go to Fat San which is VSY's father's place of origin. The Seng Family is a small clan.	
	028-032	There is a prominent attorney in Hong Kong by the name of Seng. There was a singer named Seng Gam Lai.	
2	033-044	VSY knows a lot of people in Chinatown but because of economic necessity, and because his work takes him all over the country, he doesn't find time to go to Chinatown and mingle with the people. A lot of the people VSY used to associate with are no longer there.	
	045-054	VSY first came to Los Angeles in 1934. Chinatown was very old. There was one main street called Marchessault Street, which was on the east side of Alameda. There were old American-type buildings. Chinatown was torn down to build the Union Station.	
	055-059	A man named Frank Wilson used to play at a piano bar there.	
	060-064	In 1938, they began to build the Union Station. Peter Soo Hoo headed an organization to build a New Chinatown on North Broadway.	
	065-075	Another faction of businessmen including Tom Gubbins, and a woman named Hill from the Los Angeles Times, built an area called China City. That was across from Olvera Street on Spring and Ord.	
3	076-078	A few of the stores of China City still remain but the area is now identified as part of Chinatown.	
	079-088	Another Chinese section was down on San Pedro, by the market on Ninth Street. In the earlier days, the produce business was dominated by Chinese and Japanese so there was a thriving Oriental population in that area.	
	089-090	There are four areas where Chinatown has been.	
	091-097	VSY goes to Chinatown at least every other week to shop and buy groceries and condiments. The vegetables and meat in Chinatown are the best available.	



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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	098-103	In Los Angeles, Y.C. Hong was a prominent figure in the Chinese community. There was Peter Soo Hoo. Tom Gubbins was very prominent.
4	104-110	Y.C. Hong was also instrumental in organizing New Chinatown, along with Peter Soo Hoo.
	111-116	Before the second World War, most Chinese worked in the produce market. Some were involved in canning foods and dried foods.
	117-125	In Los Angeles, the Chinese were scattered and held a variety of jobs. There are Chinese architects, doctors, orthodontists, real estate people.
	126-136	Before the war, some were supermarket owners. some were picked for sales in an automobile company, for instance, in hopes that they would bring in business from Chinatown.
	137-140	VSY does not know what the average income in Chinatown was before the war.
	141-144	A lot of people gambled their money. A lot of them saved it and put it in real estate. A lot of them sent money home.
5	145-147	Not many of the Chinese returned to China because of the political situation in China.
	148-156	A man named Tong was the Secretary General that went to the United Nations from China. VSY was his roommate in college during his sophomore year.
	157-171	Most of the Chinese in Southern California were scattered all over. In San Francisco and New York, the Chinese were confined.
	172-175	VSY was going to school during the Depression.
	176-191	VSY has not personally felt any hostility for being Chinese. VSY has been pretty compatible with the people he works with. He is respected as an actor on the set.
6	192-202	According to VSY, the Chinese do not have the support the Blacks have to improve their situation.
	203-212	Generally speaking, the Chinese have gone much further economically and politically than other groups. It was the older generation that directed and guided the younger people to pursue these professions.
	213-221	The family influence is very important.
	222-233	VSY feels that the Chinese are doing just as well if not better than the Jewish people. Yet the Jewish people control so much and have a greater population in the United States.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	234-247	The Chinese may be a smaller percentage of the population but they have made greater contributions and have suffered more. There is a pride in the Chinese heritage.
	248-256	There is no difference between having sons and having daughters for VSY. VSY's father did not prefer having sons or daughters.
	257-269	VSY's father's closest friends were Caucasians.
	270-284	In VSY's time, he did not think interracial marriages were very good. VSY felt that the Chinese were the best in the world. But being brought up in the United States, VSY thinks of everyone as being Americans. Marriage is a choice of the youngsters with the correct guidance of their parents.
8	285-290	VSY thinks that those planning on an interracial marriage should be more cautious. The concern is on the children they bring into the world.
	291-295	VSY's daughter-in-law is American of English descent.
	296-299	VSY's sister's daughter is married to an Italian who is American born.
	300-309	What is tragic is that the younger generations are not bilingual even if they can be.
	310-314	VSY attended Chinese school for one year. He then got a job working as a houseboy and could not afford to go to school.
	315-320	VSY would like for his grandchildren to go to Chinese school.
	321-337	VSY does not know of anyone who would like to go back to China to live. VSY would like to go to China but he does not know if he would like to retire there because he has never been there.
9	338-350	VSY will try to go to China in the fall or in midsummer. VSY would like to take a trip to Hong Kong for a few days and then cross the border to go to Kwang Chow only.
	351-362	There is presently a controversy on the filming of the movie "Charlie Chan and the Dragon Lady."
	363-365	VSY felt that the "Charlie Chan" series was very entertaining.
	366-377	VSY does not feel that the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese in movies is right for this day and age--unless it is a satire.
	378-414	VSY believes in true characterizations, unless it is being done for theatrical productions. Charlie Chan is a caricature whereas other detectives in motion pictures are human beings.

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2 Side A

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	415-422	In the old days, that is what sold a picture but this is a different generation and a different world of understanding.
	423-439	The "Bonanza" series took place in the late 1800s. The Chinese in those days wore those costumes, they wore a queue, and so it was true to history.
	440-467	The movie studios want to be authentic. Pigeon English is humorous but it is loving and not ridiculed on the "Bonanza" series. Thus, the Chinese portrayal depends on when the show was made and how they interpreted it.
11	468-480	The Chinese always looked up to the professional occupations -- doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Business was also desirable.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

Tape 2 Side B

1	003-011	Nowadays, parents want their children to get into computers. All that matters is that they love their work. The job must have respect and it must be capable of supporting you.
	012-022	In the old days, the actors were put on contracts. VSY started at \$250 a week in 1938 when he did the "Charlie Chan" series. The contract guaranteed 40 out of the 52 weeks of the year.
	023-024	Today, things are different.
	025-027	The length depends on the show.
	028-032	During the "Charlie Chan" series, they worked 35 to 40 days a show. It was a six day week. Those shows ran about an hour.
2	033-049	For "Bonanza" the show runs 50 minutes but it takes only six days to shoot. It has a lot to do with the studio organization which has improved a lot. The production schedules today save time. They used to shoot in continuity but now everything at one scene would be shot at the same time.
	050-051	The camera crew also works a lot faster.
	052-059	VSY thinks that the majority of the actors are getting less pay today. The average actor is lucky to make \$2000 a year. VSY made good money while working as an actor.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	060-066	In those days, there was a star system. Lana Turner was placed on a contract. They would be given singing lessons and dancing lessons. They would then be given small parts in the movies.
	067-072	Stars like Lana Turner and Marilyn Monroe became known all over the world all of a sudden. They wanted more money so they broke their contracts.
3	073-081	Usually, when an actor started, he would have a contract with the studio for a 40 week guarantee. The studio was then able to use that actor in any show.
	082-087	VSY was put in two other shows. He was a Chinese cadet in the air force. In the other, VSY was loaned out to Warner Brothers.
	088-092	Nowadays, television negates identity. They do not want to use familiar faces because they want to create new shows.
	093-112	The problem today is they do not want to take the time to make you up to fit the character. They simply interview people to find the right one for the part.
4	113-120	If VSY made enough money, he would have liked to have gone to law school after college. In those days, it was not very practical for Chinese to go into law. VSY was interested in international law and trade.
	121-124	VSY's father could not help VSY financially because times were too tough in those days.
	125-132	VSY would have liked to get into aviation law.
	133-140	VSY is not actively involved in politics and campaigns but he was at one time. In the days of Stevenson in 1956 or 1957, VSY worked hard in the campaign when Governor Brown was running.
5	141-156	VSY thinks it is important for the Chinese to participate in politics to see what it involves. There are so many problems that need to be solved and a lot of them need political action.
	157-170	VSY is not presently involved in helping to improve the conditions of Chinatown. Yet, VSY can speak up and explain the Chinese position and way of life. VSY is trying to teach the American people some Chinese culture, such as cooking with a wok.
	171-172	One must be aware of where he or she comes from first of all.
	173-182	March Fong Eu, the Secretary of State of California, is a very strong politician. There are many Chinese and Japanese that hold public office.

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5	183-195	VSU keeps in touch with the happenings of Chinatown. He sees the problems of Chinatown. VSU goes to Chinatown about once a week--he goes to enjoy the hustle and bustle of the Chinese.
6	196-204	The Chinese community has changed a lot. It has grown, for one. There is more of a mixture of Asians.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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