

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Paul Wong  
 Chinese Name: 黃蔭詒  
 Date of Interview: 5/10/80  
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Interview Number: 99  
 Number of Tapes: 2  
 Length: 1 Hour & 27 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	018-022	Introduction.	
	023-027	Parents came from Toishan, China.	
	028-034	Father came to the U.S. in 1908 right after Paul Wong (PW) was born in 1908.	
2	035-042	PW was brought to the U.S. in 1923 by his father.	
	043-048	Father ran the restaurant in South Dakota with his partner.	
	049-055	PW was born in Mun Min Li (文明里) village, Chiu King (潮境) Region, Toishan County. PW's Chinese name is Wong Yang Yee (黃蔭詒).	
	056-059	PW speaks Toishan dialect.	
	060-063	Came to Los Angeles in 1938.	
3	064-071	PW went to primary school in China.	
	072-076	PW went to high school in South Dakota.	
	077-088	After he graduated from high school, PW went back to China due to a family problem and got sick. Because of poor medication and poor financial situation, PW was laid off for a few years and got married.	
	089-097	He came back to the U.S. in 1938. first stayed in San Francisco for a few months, then came to Los Angeles.	
4	098-109	Uncle and cousin were in Los Angeles so PW decided to visit them and go back to the midwest.	
	110-115	PW found a job in a laundry house so he stayed in Los Angeles.	
	116-123	Opened a laundry house in Sunset area of Hollywood, because his cousin had a laundry house in Hollywood.	
	124-128	There was no competition between PW and his cousin because one can only do so much.	
	129-140	The laundry charged by the piece. For example, in 1938 a shirt for cleaning cost 8¢ and washing and ironing a pair of slacks cost less than 25¢. PW used to hand iron.	

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	141-147	All the clients were Caucasian. Chinese laundries were spreading around the city.
5	148-156	Chinese do hand laundry while they sent out the washing package to the bigger laundries.
	157-164	There were about three big Chinese laundries handling the washing.
	165-179	An average laundry worker can produce \$70 to \$80 business a week.
	180-182	Long hours are put into the job.
	183-186	It was a low income job. PW did not have to pay income tax.
6	187-190	There was no profits but it was merely for bread money.
	191-204	The laundry house netted around \$50 a week. PW guessed he would probably get \$120 to \$150 a month if he worked for other people.
	205-211	\$100 was the average income in the 30's for a Chinese who worked in the laundries.
	212-215	PW was never happy in the laundry business.
	216-226	The breaking point for Chinese was during World War II, when the Japanese were sent to the concentration camps. Chinese had a chance to buy businesses at a cheaper price. PW as well as other Chinese took advantage and went into the grocery business.
7	227-240	PW quit the laundry business and worked for the American Produce Market in 1940.
	241-265	In 1942, PW and his partner invested less than \$200 in a grocery store which was owned by a Japanese person before World War II on South Main and 104th Street.
	266-276	The grocery store was located in a white blue-collar neighborhood.
8	277-281	PW kept the grocery until he retired.
	282-286	It was a very popular business in the 40's.
	287-303	PW got the goods from Spartan Grocers, a wholesale corporation, and the produce from the Chinese produce market.
	304-319	Working hours were Monday through Saturday 8 am to 7 pm. PW went to the produce market three times a week before 8 am.
	320-342	In the 1940s there was about 50% of the produce markets at Ninth Street which were run by Chinese. About 300-400 Chinese worked there. Other produce workers were Caucasians.

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1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	343-364	PW worked 80-85 hours a week when he worked in the laundry. He described himself as a slow worker.
	365-387	PW's wife was in China and could not come although PW was an American citizen. The laws only admitted merchants and missionaries wives to the U.S.
10	388-392	PW's wife came to the U.S. in 1949.
	393-398	There were a lot of Chinese bachelors around.
	399-405	The only change was to find a wife in China.
	406-409	If you walked on the street with a Caucasian girl, there would be strange eyes looking at you.
	410-420	Occasionally, there were interracial marriages between Chinese and Caucasians but it was rare.
	421-432	There was not much discrimination against interracial marriages between Chinese and Mexican.
11	433-456	Socially, the Chinese accepted the marriage. It was the outsiders who looked down on the Chinese.
	457-467	Chinese would consider a Chinese who married a Caucasian woman a smarter person, therefore he would be looked up to.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	013-048	Chinese did not necessarily like the idea of interracial marriages but treated the marriage between Chinese and Caucasians with respect.
2	049-051	Most Chinese went back to China to get married.
	052-067	Chinese also worked hard, therefore they had very limited social lives and had very few friends. PW associated mostly with the working people from China.
3	068-072	PW had no contact with Blacks or Mexicans and had very few contacts with other Asians.
	073-081	When in the grocery business, he then associated more with Caucasian friends and started getting away from Chinese society in 1942.
	082-085	PW had no brothers or sisters.
	086-093	PW had to support the old family (mother) in China. It was a child's duty.
	094-100	Father lost his life in an automobile accident in Dakota so PW had to quit school.

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Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	101-127	PW did not have time to think of the family back in China during the day time because of his busy schedule. But subconsciously, PW missed home and talked about it while asleep. After his family came he stopped talking in his dreams.
4	128-134	PW had a wife, mother and two children in China before 1949.
	135-162	PW is loyal to both China and America and still feels more Chinese. PW enjoyed reading Chinese books rather than English books.
5	163-172	When running the laundry, PW hated America because all the doors were closed to the Chinese. The only occupations available for the Chinese were laundry work, restaurants, housework and farming. Outside of that, no other opportunities existed.
	173-192	There were no legal restriction on job discrimination, it was a social and financial restriction. The jokes about it was: "You can find four Ph.D.s washing dishes in the kitchen." During World War II Chinese could not go back to the old country and could not find a job in the U.S.
6	193-198	There were only a very few working in the banks to serve the Chinese community.
	199-202	During the war time, there was a shortage of manpower. Chinese began to have opportunities to show what they could do.
	203-209	Chinese were poor but always proud of themselves.
	210-222	PW hated America but chose to stay because it was worse in China both politically and economically. The little man had no chance at all, they couldn't even sell their labor.
	223-239	PW did not hate the American people, it was the system at the time that caused his hatred.
7	240-256	PW experienced hostility while at a basketball tournament. A Caucasian lady left her seat because PW chose to sit next to her.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	<u>Tape 2 Side A</u>
1	014-022	During the war, Chinese were looked upon because China was one of the allies.	
	023-036	Chinese were mostly manual laborers but not in the low classes. A lot of Chinese made a lot of money in the restaurant business.	
2	037-047	Couldn't afford to get sick in the early days. If PW got sick he went to Chinese herbs first.	
	048-052	There were three and four Chinese herb stores in Chinatown in the early days.	
	053-062	There were Americans who went for Chinese herbs. There were a few Chinese herbalists who did business in Los Angeles City. Among the Chinese community, the older generation still go for Chinese herbs, even today.	
	063-066	Never got sick enough to go to an American doctor.	
	067-070	If you worked 70 hours a week, you don't have much energy to go out and play ball.	
3	071-074	Maybe watched movies once a week or twice a week.	
	075-086	PW belonged to the family associations and paid dues but never took part in any kind of activities.	
	087-106	In 1939, \$70 or \$80 a week in wages was considered a good wage for a laundry worker. But after 1942, there were more jobs opening up. During the war to earn \$100 or \$200 a week wasn't a big deal.	
4	107-114	PW lived in the back house of the grocery store	
	115-121	He lived right in the shop when running the laundry, which had a little kitchen but no bath.	
	122-130	When his wife came, they bought a house right across the street of the store. PW paid 10% down for the house which cost \$8000 at that time.	
	131-145	A clerk earned about \$300-\$350 a month in 1945.	
5	146-150	The price of the house was considered a medium price.	
	151-163	Some sessions west of his grocery store did not allow Chinese to move into the area.	
	164-169	Chinese who lived nearby Chinatown lived close to each other but Chinese who lived outside of Chinatown did not. They had to mix with other people.	
	170-174	Chinese were spread around the city.	
	175-185	Before Chinese families arrived, gambling was more popular. It was the only recreation for some. When the families came over the life style became more normal, so the gambling habits were dropped.	

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	186-200	The Chinese laundry business gradually died out because when Chinese once got a chance to go out, they dropped the business.
	201-217	Chinese are a little more sensible and live within the average life. They don't enjoy luxuries as much.
	218-230	The rich Chinese were always considered as Chinese Jews.
7	231-250	Chinese politicians came to the Chinese community to raise funds for the war, for opening schools and building roads.
	251-272	In the old days, Chinese wanted the younger generation and their old country to be better off than before. Whenever there was a fundraiser, Chinese contributed quite willingly. Until they found out some of them were phony, they felt bad about it.
	273-281	The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association mostly was involved in politics.
8	282-308	Chinese Americans' attitudes are different from the people in the old country in terms of having a son or daughter. PW does not have any preference.
	309-328	PW would like to send his children to Chinese school because he lived too far away from Chinatown. PW regreted that he did not send them to Chinese school.
9	329-334	All of his children speak Chinese.
	335-357	PW went to China last year. In the old days, he didn't think of going back to China to live, because it was during the war. Back in the good old days, the old folks always talked about and dreamed about returning to China.
	158-382	Old people went back to China and wanted to be buried in China in the 1920s.
10	383-398	Father talked about going back to China to retire. That was the only chance to get a little leisure and respect. In the old days, nobody talked to you when you retired. Naturally they wanted to go back to their family.
	399-401	PW thinks America is his home since his family is here.
	402-417	PW used to dream about doing some kind of jobs. Right now, as an old man he does not believe in those dreams any more.

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2 Side A

Tape: 2 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	418-432	PW always believes in whatever the children do within the boundaries of the law. PW didn't tell them what to do. They can do what they want as long as it is lawful.
	433-491	PW didn't think much of the Chinese characters portrayed in the American movies. They didn't fit the Chinese at all. They didn't bring any glory to the Chinese.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

Tape 2 Side B

1	014-023	PW didn't make any protests against those American movies. Chinese were timid to do any public protesting.
	024-027	Today the younger generation would protest. The younger generation gave the older men the hope for the future.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

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