

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Ruth Kim Wong Interview Number: 61  
 Chinese Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tapes: 3  
 Date of Interview: 3/21/83 Length: 2 Hours & 21 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Suellen Cheng  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-007 008-042	Introduction. Ruth Kim Wong (RKW) was born in Bakersfield, California. Father came from San Francisco. Mother came from a small village in China in 1873. RKW's grandfather was a wood carver for temples and could not find any jobs during the famine. Mother remembered that one night her father took her for a long, long walk (several days and nights), to a harbor. He told her that an auntie would take care of her and she would have rice every day.	
2	043-060	Mother talked about when she arrived in San Francisco she was with a lot of other women. She always remembered that her father told her to remember where she came from. She always remembered that she was from Lung On, Shong Ping.	
3	061-087  086-100  101-110	Mother was very frightened when she arrived in San Francisco. She heard people saying "She was too small, we cannot use her." So she was taken to an American house to be the house help. She had never seen any American lady before and thought that she saw a ghost and cried. Then she was taken back to Cameron House where she learned needle work and other things. She stayed there until she got married. Mrs. Cameron saw a Chinese street preacher and liked him. she asked if RKW's mother would like to meet her future husband. Mother approved and got married. At Cameron House mother would do sewing and some embroidery. She also learned English there.	
4	111-123	Father did know English and did interpreting for people who hired Chinese laborers. Later on he became very religious and conducted services in Chinatown.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	124-140	The family moved to Santa Barbara on a wagon from San Francisco after the earthquake. Then they moved to Bakersfield. Father decided to become a farmer.
5	141-153	Father was 34 when he got married. He was older than RKW's mother (17 at the time).
	154-176	RKW was born in 1909. As soon as her father got married, he lost interest in being a preacher.
	177-202	There were two Chinatowns in Bakersfield. Father was very busy on the farm. There was a time when California had a lot of tong wars. Father was a member of a tong. He was supposed to post an announcement of his leaving. Father left San Francisco without such an announcement and this later caused his death. One morning he was shot on the way to the market.
6	203-214	RKW had an older brother who took care of the ranch. Mother took care of their friends' babies. RKW was about seven years old at the time.
	215-223	There were seven children in the family. At the time of her father's death, her brother was just finishing high school and was ready to go to college. He had to stop his education and take care of the family.
	224-229	The family ranch was about ten acres or so. Brother took care of everything at home.
7	230-239	Mother also worked on the vegetable farm. They had Mexican help working on the farm.
	240-251	RKW remembers that they used to have dinner outside in the summer. A Mexican worker was upset with her father and hurt him.
	252-270	The family had four Mexican workers who lived in the farm house on the ranch. There were some Chinese workers too. The Chinese were much cleaner than the Mexican workers.
	271-284	The farm was no more than a couple of miles away from home. They had Caucasian neighbors. One neighbor, Mrs. Stevenson, would visit and tell them how to cook.
8	285-294	Mother was able to get along well with her neighbors.
	295-304	RKW had three sisters and all the other brothers ahead of her.
	305-320	They actually had two separate houses on the farm. The older brother slept in one house where the kitchen was. The rest of the children slept in the other house.
	321-338	RKW went to a segregated school. They went to a school for all Chinese.

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1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	339-341	Delbert Wong went to the same school. When he was there the school was less segregated than when RKW was there.
	342-361	All the Chinese in town went to the same school. When RKW was in the third grade, her best friend stopped talking to her. Her sister told her because she was Chinese.
	362-395	Teachers were very nice at school. In high school her classmates always talked about things that RKW would not think about. Mother told her that she should not do something like that, so she just did not think about it.
10	396-408	RKW went to Chinese school only for one term. Brother was the only one in the family making money, so they didn't have extra money for Chinese school.
	409-420	It was too bad that her father was killed. Her brother was already accepted by Stanford and would have been in college.
	421-447	RKW's oldest sister was married and had children. The other sisters would come to Los Angeles to work. One sister worked at I. Magnin in the 1920's. Mother and brother worked on the farm.
	448-465	RKW went to Kern County Junior High School which was not a segregated school.
11	466-474	RKW had American friends. She was never asked to go to their home or parties.
	475-479	Mother was very active in the church. Ms. Buss had a church.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A		
1	001-006	Blank.
	007-014	Mother used to go around town and visit families to invite them to church. She helped Ms. Buss run the church.
	015-026	Father used to visit different families also. The main Congregational church people would visit the Chinese church and the people from the Chinese Mission Church.
	027-035	RKW taught Sunday school for years. Mother would run the church. RKW would teach the children even when she was in elementary school.
2	036-041	Mother's Chinese name was Ah Mui. People called her Gum Mou, Mrs. Kim.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	042-045	Father's name was Ng Kim.
	046-054	Ms. Buss was very strict about going to church. It happened a lot of time that nobody would come to the church. Ms. Buss and RKW and her mother would be there.
	055-063	Some Chinese were not Christian but would let their children come to the church because they believed that the church was doing good things for the children.
	064-066	Children's parents were in a different occupation such as a dry good store, etc.
3	067-078	Mother enjoyed visiting people. RKW always went with her mother.
	079-094	When visiting families RKW's mother did not talk much about religion. Mainly just housewife chit chat. Mother liked it because she could tell them about the Christian ways of living.
	095-100	Chinese used to live right in the store or next to the store.
	101-110	There must have been over 50 Chinese families in Bakersfield at the time. Mary Ming's family lived in Chinatown while RKW lived on the farm.
4	111-120	There were two Chinatowns in Bakersfield. Each had two streets.
	121-128	There were mostly men in Chinatown. There were not too many Chinese women.
	129-141	RKW liked to go back to China to teach English while she was in college.
	142-145	In high school, RKW wanted to be a writer so she picked up English as her major.
5	146-161	Mother thought it was fine for RKW to go to college if the family had family. The family was not able to afford her college education. RKW went to college on her own.
	162-173	RKW worked in the restaurant and supported herself while studying at UCLA. It was inexpensive to attend UCLA.
	174-181	One of RKW's sister majored in education and became a kindergarten teacher.
	182-187	RKW was working all the time so she never took part in school activities.
6	188-194	RKW stayed with her sister while going to school.
	195-204	RKW worked at a little tea room in Hollywood. She used to go to school in the morning and work in the afternoon.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	205-211	She came to Los Angeles because there were so many opportunities to go to school.
	212-218	Sometimes she went to school, sometimes she did not. It all depended on how much money she had.
	219-229	RKW went to Chapman College first because her cousin was there.
7	230-236	RKW always took the bus to school.
	237-242	She didn't make too much money but enough to pay for her own education. Brother took care of mother so RKW didn't have to send money to her mother.
	243-248	RKW quit school the last semester.
	249-271	RKW worked at the same tea room for a long time. Later she worked for the Dragon's Den in Old Chinatown. She met her husband, Tyrus Wong, at the restaurant, where Tyrus did a lot of painting.
	272-289	The tea room was on Vine Street in Hollywood. There were several Chinese girls from San Francisco who worked there.
8	290-295	The tea room was a restaurant that served about seventy-five customers.
	296-309	There was no problem for RKW to find a job at that time. The owner of the tea room liked Chinese women because they were honest.
	310-324	When RKW met her husband, he was at school and did painting in Chinatown to make a living. He painted the interior of the restaurant which was owned by Florence Leong's brother. Florence worked there too. That's how RKW met Florence.
	325-334	The Dragon Den Restaurant could serve about 50 to 60 people, mainly Caucasian customers.
9	335-352	Because the Dragon Den paid a little more money to RKW so she took the job there.
	353-357	RKW did not live in Chinatown.
	358-364	One sister lived in Los Angeles. Another sister is married in Hawaii.
	365-376	Sister lived on Pico Boulevard and Normandie area. RKW rented a room from her sister.
	377-383	RKW heard hat a lot of people were not able to rent a house because they were Chinese. Sine her sister was already there, RKW did not have to worry about renting in that area.
	384-398	RKW had another sister who also lived in the same area.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	399-407	For most of the people from Bakersfield, Los Angeles was the closest big city that could offer job opportunities to them.
	408-411	Chinese in Bakersfield were mostly in family businesses.
	412-422	RKW's family had a farm and a little house. Mother stayed there and kept herself busy.
	423-435	Mother helped a lot in the church.
	436-458	RKW got married in Bakersfield because she liked the place and all her family friends were there.
11	459-476	In a small town everybody knew everybody else, so they all attended RKW's wedding.
	477-487	After the wedding, they had a reception in the church. Family had a little dinner afterwards.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	001-014	Introduction.
	015-021	RKW worked for Mr. Y.C. Hong as a secretary. He was the first Chinese lawyer accepted by the Bar. It was a small office on Alameda Street.
	022-032	He had many immigration cases. She helped typing some cases.
2	033-049	He helped people who wanted to stay in America. She remembered one case which involved one family which ran into immigration problems on the boarder.
	050-055	Mr. Hong was a very kind person. There was some discrimination against him. So he was very sympathetic to other people.
	056-058	RKW knew his wife very well. She was a member of the Chinese Women's Club.
	059-062	Because Mr. Hong's own physical condition, he ran into a lot of discrimination too.
3	063-071	Mr. Hong did not actively talk about his experiences infighting against discrimination laws. RKW learned a lot.
	072-087	RKW learned a lot about discrimination. She learned that one could fight against discrimination by doing it a more diplomatic way. One can do things by doing it in a soft way. When you do it in a diplomatic way, you make other people think that he is doing it for you when you are directing him.
	088-089	By using a legal way is also one way of doing things.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	090-095 096-102 103-107 108-110	RKW worked for Mr. Hong for a couple of years. After that she got married and became pregnant and stopped working. She thought that she was going back to work again when the baby arrived. She didn't. RKW helped her husband in his work a little bit, but not too much.
4	111-120 121-152	RKW has three daughters. She encouraged her children to become independent at a young age. They are all still working. RKW now is licensed to do accupressure and has been for ten years. She learned it from a Japanese instructor after she got treatment from her. Later she started treating other people.
5	153-163 164-174 175-178 178-182	Her oldest daughter is married and has two boys. She is a teacher. RKW did a lot of community work for the American Cancer Society in raising funds for the group. RKW worked for the camp fire girls until her daughters got out from camp. RKW was also active in PTA and raising funds for different organizations in the Sunland area.
6	183-192 193-199 200-209 210-227	Even in the Caucasian community, they welcomed any kind of volunteer offers. RKW and family went to a Presbyterian Church. She used to be very active in the church. The family used to live in the Hollywood area and rented a house there. They moved to Sunland when the youngest was one year old. They lived in the Hollywood area because the rent was cheap. It was a mixed neighborhood. They got in due to a good recommendation from their good Caucasian friends.
7	228-248 249-262	Tyrus Wong was working in the studio and the children needed a house. One of their friends was a real estate agent and found the house for them. The ex-owner went around to ask her neighbors' opinion about having a Chinese family moving in the area. The response was rather favorable. RKW's friend had a difficult time moving into a white neighborhood.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	263-269	After they moved in, RKW made sure that her children would go to church. The church people seemed to be more open to the other people.
	270-275	RKW was also active in the community's activities. That's how they knew the community.
	276-283	Florence Leong introduced RKW to the Chinese Women's Club.
8	284-307	Mrs. Y.C. Hong was a member of the Chinese Women's Club. Mrs. Hong and Mrs. Lily Quan were founders. The Club federated with the American Federation of Women's Clubs. It's purpose was mainly to promote friendship and promote Chinese and American communities.
	308-314	RKW joined the group at least ten years after it was formed.
	315-354	The Club's activities were mainly raising funds and setting scholarships for the high school children. RKW helped the Club publish a Chinese cookbook. It was republished this year again. It was a very popular book.
9	355-381	Now the Club has about 100 active members. When RKW joined the group it was after World War II. The membership was very strong then. The Club meets once a month.
	382-405	When the children were young, RKW was very active in the school community. Now RKW is a member of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.
10	406-417	Tyrus Wong belonged to the American Watercolor Society, California Watercolor Society. But he did not go to the meetings.
	418-438	Since her friend had a difficult time in the American community, RKW felt that she ought to get busy in the American community and to show the American community that Chinese were not difficult to live with. RKW also encouraged children in different kinds of activities.
	439-467	Daughters have more opportunities now. She had to keep on reminding them that they are Chinese, that they had to do better and do certain things.
11	468-470	One of her daughters said that she had to look at the mirror and told herself that she was a Chinese, because she always thought herself just like the rest of her friends.



## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	001-008 009-032	Blank. RKW thought it was important to give daughters a Chinese education. They also belonged to a Family Fellowship group which consisted of families of Chinese background. The purpose of the organization was to give children an opportunity to meet other Chinese children. Many activities were held.
2	033-047 049-057 058-063	The members of the group came from different areas such as Van Nuys. They were friends of one another. RKW still belongs to the group but is not active any more. In the church group and in school RKW's daughters had plenty of opportunities to mingle with Caucasians. RKW wanted her children to have more opportunity to be with Chinese. RKW met a lot of friends from joining community activities.
3	064-081 082-100 101-114	RKW did not think that a woman's place should be at home. She brought up her children and told them that they should be productive. Chinese women always worked. When RKW was a little girls none of the Chinese had an easy life, they all had to work. Sister and her husband had a produce market. Her second sister had a farm so she always worked on the farm. The other sister worked in a library.
4	115-135 136-144	Mother was a midwife in the community. She always took care of the babies at home for Chinese women who had to work. When mother was in her 60's she helped her son at home. Since the church was torn down mother was not as active as before.
5	145-157 158-161 162-174 175-185	Mother grew up in Cameron House and did not know much about Chinese traditions and holiday celebrations. The family eats Chinese food all the time. Husband's recreational activity is fishing. RKW went along. She also helped her husband fly kites. RKW used to play tennis in the Chinese church. The minister, Mr. Shou Kwong Lau helped to build a tennis court and taught them how to play tennis.
6	186-189 190-199	RKW still played tennis when she came to Los Angeles. After she had the family she did not play it anymore. One daughter loved tennis. The other daughters were not much into sports.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	200-206	Mother's activities were mainly in the Chinese Mission Church.
	207-222	Husband came to America as a little boy. Shortly after they got married, husband's father passed away. Some of his family were in China.
	223-230	Husband helped her sometimes in what she did. Most of the time, she helped him, such as writing letters for him, etc.
7	231-234	Husband was an artist and did a lot of card designs. He worked at the Disneyland and Warner Brothers studios up until he retired.
	235-240	RKW spoke Cantonese when she was growing up.
	241-247	Before they had children RKW and her husband spoke a lot of Chinese but after they had children they did not use much Chinese in their conversation.
	248-263	Chinatown was mainly made up by Chinese population. Most of them spoke Chinese.
	264-270 271-280	There were parades in Chinatown. Usually they went to Chinatown to eat and to shop.
8	281-298	They took their daughters to the Chinese Congregational Church on 9th Street. When they grew up they gradually lost their Chinese identity.
	299-305	Because she was working, she seldom went to church when she first came to Los Angeles.
	306-333	Tyrus Wong had a little show in China City. The fire burned down all of his collection. The gallery's name was called G. Him Wong.
9	334-362	China City was built from a movie set, it was really a natural Chinatown. It was an interesting place to take children to. There were antique shops, small stores and night clubs. Not so many Chinese went there.
	363-378	The new Chinatown was built mainly for tourists. Mr. Thomas Wong and Mr. Hong and some other people were the people who built the new Chinatown.
	379-409	Tyrus Wong painted a picture of a dragon on one of the buildings. Mr. Hong paid him to do the job.
10	410-428	Most of the Chinese were busy working and did not think of going back to China.
	429-440	Most of the Chinese met their husbands or wives in church.
	441-460	Because of the immigration problem, it cost a lot of money to make a marriage arrangement.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	461-481	A lot of Chinese churches were the places for the young people to meet their friends. Among Chinese, church seemed to be a natural place to have a wedding.
END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B		
1	001-007	Introduction.
	008-017	Mrs. Thomas Wong (Maye Wong) and her family were very involved in the Church in Los Angeles.
	018-027	RKW did not know much about the Chinese Congregational Church in Los Angeles, because at that time she was going to school and working at the same time.
	028-035	RKW associated mostly with American people in the church. But when she was in Bakersfield she associated more with Chinese.
2	036-040	RKW associated with some blacks and Mexican people in the church but not socially.
	041-049	RKW would not approve of interracial marriages. Now people have to accept it.
	050-053	It is up to her children's wish in terms of whom they should marry.
	054-061	Some Chinese just like to get a job in acting. Sometimes they did think about discrimination, such as the Caucasian would get the jobs that belonged to the Chinese.
3	062-078	RKW would like to be more active in speaking up against the negative way Chinese were portrayed. In those days she did not know anybody protest against it.
	079-083	Getting married was a very exciting thing to RKW.
	084-094	RKW thinks that life for Chinese now is easier than before. The way our parents brought us up is good. We should struggle to be the best.
	095-103	Chinese women have been working hard all their life. Women have more opportunities now. If the industry opens up and employs more Chinese women according to their ability rather than to just fill up the quota, Chinese women will come up more than to our expectation.
4	104-121	Chinese men had less opportunity in comparison to Caucasian people in the past. One of her Chinese male schoolmates in elementary school was smart but was discriminated against.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	122-137	Chinese women had even less opportunities than Chinese men.
	138-145	Husband's work is dealing with Chinese feelings, so he has a place of his own. People came to him for his work.
5	146-153	RKW thinks that there should be more places for Chinese artists, especially if they have ability.
	154-168	RKW thinks if young people have ability and are diligent enough they should be encouraged to do whatever fields they want to be in.
	169-173	RKW did go out socially with husband's colleague whenever they were invited.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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