

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Ying Wong Kwan Interview Number: 13
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 4
 Date of Interview: 5/16/79, 5/22/79 Length: 2 Hours
 Interviewer: Jean Wong
 Other Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Elaine Lou

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape 1 Side A
1	006-014	Introduction	
	015-029	Parents from Toishan, came in early 1900's or late 1870's. Father came as gold miner in Southern California. Returned to China to marry. Met wife-to-be in San Francisco though from China also.	
	030-037	After gold mining father worked in businesses dealt with Chinese, e.g. produce, market, grocery.	
2	038-042	Parents didn't know English very well. Ying Wong Kwan (YWK) was born in Los Angeles.	
	043-058	Parents came to Los Angeles to start new life. Were thankful to be alive. Came 4 years before big earthquake of 1906.	
	059-068	Lived near Bunker Hill Towers. Mother in laundry too. Mother had 8 children, 4 girls and 4 boys. Children all pitched in to help parents. YWK was the oldest.	
3	069-082	Mother had most children at home with help of Chinese midwife. Mother took wonderful care of all the children.	
	083--97	Father preferred sons to daughter. Mother adapted to American way quicker--loved all the children.	
	098-109	Laundry--all work done by hand. No machines. Hand wash; hand ironed. All children helped in laundry.	
4	110-119	WYK's chores: pick up clothes from peoples homes. Some people brought laundry to do. Father was very protective. Hired 10 men to help.	
	120-139	Mother cooked meals for everyone. After collection in morning, children would go to school. Then to Chinese school till 9 pm. Mother had dinner ready.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	140-155	Went to Chinese school about 5 years.
	156-159	All 8 children went to Chinese school, regardless the expense. None rebelled against Chinese school.
	160-171	Because of racial restrictions, they didn't have much companionship as in Chinese school. Hence, YWK enjoyed Chinese school.
	172-176	Presbyterian Church.
	177-180	After 5 years had to quit; too much work at home; outside.
6	181-191	The schools YWK attended: California and 6th St. school and Liberty High School.
	192-205	Studied business administration, accounting, home economy, etc. in college. Dropped out from college. Kids too much work and problems.
	206-213	Born in 1902.
	214-229	Lived longest on Figueroa Street. Last place they lived was near Temple Street amongst Mexican and Jews.
7	230-235	Racial prejudice and unemployment made it necessary for Chinese to live near other Chinese.
	236-243	Everyone was very kind to them.
	244-274	Children in school would pull her hair and call her names though YWK didn't do anything to them. YWK didn't say anything back to retort. If you talk back to them in the same way you're as uneducated as they are. Parents told her not to worry about them.
8	275-297	First job was as a stock girl in a department store. New York's Women's apparel store. YWK was 16. No difficulty with the job.
	298-312	If customer decided he didn't want something, YWK would have to put it back on the rack where it belonged. Many Chinese girls were stock girls.
9	313-337	Pay was very low. \$10 a week at most. 8 hours day.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	9	This was in 1918 during WWI. Making about \$40 a month. Out of that to pay for carfare, upkeep for Chinese cheongsam (dress) and lunch.
	338-348	YWK had to go to work in a Chinese outfit everyday. Some were bought, others made by a (tailor).
	349-363	YWK worked there 5 years. Part of the income used to help support family. Bought necessary things for siblings (school, clothing). YWK didn't mind sharing her money, felt it was part of her general responsibility.
	364-386	Parents encouraged YWK to get married to a wealthy man.
10	387-414	YWK was one of first Chinese liberated women. Many wealthy families used matchmakers. YWK refused them all.
	415-425	Parents wanted YWK to get married to a rich man from the same village in order to support family. At same time have more in-laws, relatives to call on one another; know that they were one big family.
	426-430	YWK felt she was too young to get married. Parents started encouraging her at 16 with these ideas.
	431-445	YWK: In America, there was much schooling to be had yet. Schools were plentiful. They were encouraged to go to school. Truant officer would come around and get them. YWK liked school and friends she had made, western culture, etc. which YWK understood much better now.
11	446-465	Many of YWK's classmates got married early due to encouragement of parents and matchmakers. At that time during WWI and Depression, too many mouths to feed, was expensive, clothing, etc. Naturally, wanted them to get married as soon as possible and take care of themselves.
	466-481	YWK considers herself one of first Chinese woman liberators because she didn't give in to parents. YWK saw what her mother had gone thru.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11		Mother got married at 15. Always did hard work. Soon after that YWK was born and then all the brothers and sisters.
	482	End of Tape 1 Side A
Tape 2 Side A		
1	001-015	Introduction
	016-022	1935 YWK moved from laundry into a house. House was near the civic center.
	023-32	Family used ordinary herbs.
2	033-044	Sometimes went to Chinese doctor when had aches and pains. Drank herb tea. Chinese doctors were very reasonable in price; about one dollar in 1920's. Mother used Chinese herbs for cooking.
	045-057	YWK used western medicine all along: e.g. rubbing alcohol, etc. when brothers and sisters born, used help of a western female doctor.
	058-068	Father once had a hernia. Western doctor operated on it. Father was 70 years at time of operation.
3	069-077	YWK used less of Eastern medicine cause of difficulty in obtaining, import problems, etc.
	079-090	YWK relies mostly on Western medicine. Uses a bit of chinese medicine.
	091-114	Most of YWK's friends from school to work were all nationalities. YWK is not prejudiced. Didn't feel more comfortable with Chinese--either nationalities was okay.
4	115-121	Bought herself an alarm clock to help herself be on time. Still has clock.
	122-134	Does not feel more Chinese or American. Being born here, feels equal. Opportunity is golden here.
	135-145	In the 20's and 30's felt the racial restrictions, felt lost then. Not many priviledges.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	146-154	Applied for government position in post office. Past on test but never heard from them.
	155-167	Felt discrimination in Western/American restaurants and in buying homes. Only permitted to buy in certain districts. Restricts were not very nice. Things improved after WWII.
	168-182	Discrimination from color--being of the yellow race. Never protested ill treatment.
6	183-187	Treatment didn't make YWK angry.
	188-201	For recreation YWK had baseball, tennis, YWCA, YMCA (good to all nationalities), swimming, basketball, sewing and other activities for boys and girls.
	202-209	Many Chinese in the YMCA and YWCA.
	210-222	Often too busy working and studying to play. If did, was a game of tag--"You're it."
7	223-239	Father was very proud of Chinese culture. Children told to do the best they knew how. Strive to do bigger and better things, improve themselves. Mother worked hard to improve relationships with family and surrounding neighbors of all nationalities--specially Hispanics.
	240-292	Bad recording.
8	293-295	Harvesting celebration.
	296-308	Dues were whatever one could afford.
	309-316	Parents of YWK donated cash and contributed things grown in their garden.
	307-322	Garden on side of house.
9	323-365	Donated squash, cucumber, greenery to Family Association: spinich, parsely, bok choy, loquat. In all several bushes donated a year. Father donated about \$5 a year.
	366-399	Family and district associations were discussed.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	400-414	Wongs, Lees and Chans were most important families in the 30's. They were ones YWK was most acquainted with--heard much about them.
	415	End of Tape 2 Side A
Tape 3 Side A		
1	004-012	1934 YWK went to Southern Asia in Canton, Toishan, to visit father's village. Went with father. Mother had died already.
	013-022	Father went back to China to retire. Never intended to return to America. But after 2 years got American homesick. Returned to America in 1936-37. Lived to 91.
2	023-044	YWK stayed in Canton and Coast, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanking, Fukien, Macao, Hong Kong, off and on for 5 years. Mostly visiting. Travel was very money reasonable. Travelled alone. Was 25 years then. Stayed in China even after father returned to States. Friends she met there showed her around.
	045-050	Made one trip in 1936 during the five years to return to States to take care of father.
	051-059	Returned in 1937, then went to China again. Outbreak of WWII.
	060-069	15 years later went to Hong Kong with husband. It was husband's first visit in forty years.
3	070-076	American Chinese felt like tourist going back to China. Like an American going to Europe to see how other countries live and carry on.
	077-083	First trip to China was father's idea to visit ancestral home, relatives, friends, but most had died.
	084-092	Wonderful to see how those in ancestral home survived in uncle's buildings, interior furnishings--countryside was beautiful. Plenty of food. Not a lot of fresh meat to go around, yet every one survived and looked healthy.
	093-108	Studied a little mandarin from a girl from Peking.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	109-131	YWK lived in laundry. Ample living quarters. Father employed over 10 people. Sunday was day of rest. There was space for everyone. In 1910, a home separate from laundry. Father started laundry business in 1905.
	132-140	Lived 5 years in laundry. In 1910 moved to a bigger house. House and laundry in same building, but partitioned.
5	141-150	1934 moved into separate quarters away from laundry in civic center.
	151-160	Family used herbs sometimes--used it like Westerners. Used for laxatives. Used milk of Magnesia, Exedrin for colds....etc.
	161-170	Sometimes saw Chinese doctor for aches and pains. One dollar per visit. Herbs also another dollar. That was in the 20's.
	171-185	Mother used herbs for cooking--like Western way of using spices. Western medicines were used all along--e.g. in school with cuts and scrapes, nurses used Western medicine.
6	186-190	American woman helped when brothers and sisters were born.
	191-200	Father had hernia operation from a Western doctor when he was over 70.
	210-214	Parents didn't use Eastern medicine as frequently. Impossible to buy--no more exports from China. Used more Western medicine. Tried to eat intelligently without too many additions which helped maintain good health.
	215-227	YWK relies mostly on Western medicine. Chinese medicine was still used.
7	228-242	School days and working days had all nationalities of friends. America is melting pot of world.
	243-262	Felt equally comfortable with Chinese and Americans. Chinese school was very social. Further linked one with Chinese culture. Work was a bread and butter issue.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	263-269	Bought an alarm clock to get to work on time. "Big Ben" clock. Still works.
8	270-269	Does not feel more Chinese or American. Being born here, feels both. America is a wonderful country-- opportunity is golden here.
	285-298	Racial restrictions of 20's and 30's made YWK feel lost. Not many priviledges. Tried to be as agreeable as possible to exist.
	299-308	Applied for government position in the Post Office. YWK past the exam but never heard from them.
	309-329	Was discriminated in Western restaurants and buying homes. Only allowed to buy in certain areas. Districts not too nice. Things had to be tolerated. Things improved after W.W.II.
9	330-348	Was discriminated from restaurant. "It was an exclusive restaurant, no table for you." Because of her color; yellow race. Didn't protest; accepted their word and left. Had her cultural upbringing.
	349-356	Didn't make YWK angry. Can go to other places.
	357-383	For recreation had baseball, tennis, swimming, basketball, sewing...Went to YWCA and YMCA. They were good to all nationalities. On Boyle Ave. Many Chinese boys and girls there.
10	384-397	At home was busy working for parents, watching brothers and sisters, studying for both schools-- so only play was "tag". "You're it."
	398-429	Never had disagreements of being Chinese. Father very proud of being Chinges. Encouraged children to strive for best and improve. Mother worked hard to improve relations with neighbors and family of all nationalities especially Hispanics.
	430-438	Being open to all nationalities was typical for all Chinese. Others who lived away from Chinatown did the same, mingled with neighbors and learned from other nationalities.
	439	End of Tape 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	004-013	Family joined Wong Family Association. That's why Chinese aren't on welfare like other nationalities. Usually meet on holidays, like Chinese New Year to exchange gifts, like Christmas. Acknowledged people who have past on.
	014-019	Donations made to help elders.
	020-029	In addition to banquets, other festivities. Also paid respect to deceased. "May Festival", a season for planting. "Harvesting" celebration.
	030-036	Dues were whatever one could afford. Money or produce from gardens.
2	037-044	YWK's parents gave cash and contributed things grown in their garden.
	045-047	Things grew plentiful. Days of horse carriage--fertilizer plentiful.
	048-070	Donated: cucumbers, squashes, greenery, spinach, parsley, bok choy, gai-lan, gew choy, etc. Several bushels donated a year to Association. About \$5 a year donated to Association.
3	071-077	Family joined district association to take care of monetary expenses of elders back in China. Village was Toishan.
	078-092	After parents passed on, YWK's participation decreased due to communistic ruling, lessening of trade, etc. Being born in America, lived according to American standard of living.
	093-112	Most important families are Wong's, Lee's and Chan's which YWK heard about. Most contact with these families--necessary to make best and most to handle problems and look out for each other.
4	113-119	Most prominent Chinese in past were those in produce. YWK remembers the Wongs.
	120-132	Most Chinese were in farming household work. Women took care of family affairs.
	133-139	Americans spoke of Chinese being the best and honest and thorough in their work.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	140-149	During W.W.II most Chinese lived close together. If racial restrictions weren't so strict, Chinese would have moved when neighborhood changed.
	150-161	Chinese people lived from hand to mouth. Didn't have much to save. Parents saved in bank.
	162-170	Bankers were thoughtful and helpful, especially to those not fluent in English. Banked in Italian Bank. Bankers were foreigners and therefore more sympathetic to other foreigners.
	171-179	Banked in Bank of Italy. (10% to Chinatown.) Many Chinese banked there and as well as many other foreigners.
6	180-195	YWK doesn't know of Chinese being supportive of China movements. Being American, wanted peace through world and didn't pay much attention to foreign politics.
	196-203	YWK voted as an American citizen for Americans. Began voting when 21 age.
	204-211	Prominent families sent money back to China to aid families.
7	212-235	There were feelings of obligations when people came to America. Spent savings to send one person abroad. Been taught to honor and respect elders and return all sacrifices they made.
	236-253	Chinese were affected greatly by Depression, especially in employment, oriental goods and working tools.
	254-267	Chinese resourcefulness kept them from starving. Make use of everything, e.g. extra food, clothing, ...recycling.
	268-277	The common sense of Chinese made the Depression easier for them. Look at millions in China who have survived.
8	278-285	Chinese have done very well--not better or worse. Culture helped them to be at peace and happy.
	286-306	Haven't heard comparisons of Jews and Chinese.

Interviewee: _

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