

SOUTHEPN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Kenneth Ung Interview Number: 83
 Chinese Name: 吳尊鵬 Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 7/27/80 Length: 2 Hours & 9 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Ella Yee Quan

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	001-009	Kenneth Ung (KU) was born in Los Angeles.		
	010-012	KU's father was born in Canton, China; Hoi Ping, Gao Kong.		
	013-015	KU was born in 1912.		
	016-017	KU's mother was originally from China; she came over to San Francisco.		
	018-033	KU's father came to Los Angeles; he was a herbalist. He came in 1878.		
2	034-035	His father's herb store was located at 757 North Alameda Street.		
	036-040	Most of the children were born at home with midwives delivering; rarely did anyone have doctors.		
	041-042	KU's family had Dr. Billy, an American doctor, who delivered most of the family.		
	043-046	Dr. Billy, a woman doctor, named most of the children in KU's family.		
	047-049	There were four children from the first mother. Total of eight boys and four girls.		
	050-053	Mother had bound feet, she never worked outside home.		
	054-058	Spoke Cantonese, Sze Yup, at home. Brothers and sisters even now speak Sze Yup to each other.		
	059-060	KU's own children do not speak Chinese.		
	060-063	KU stayed in the herb store on Alameda until he was twenty years old.		
3	064-072	He attended Hewitt Street School near White King Soap factory. Few Chinese, mostly Spanish/Mexicans and Japanese.		
	073-078	He attended Chinese school after American school. He played with Japanese and Mexicans on his way home.		
	079-082	Few Blacks around, did not dare come by, stayed in their own area.		

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	083-093	KU's house was filthy, dirty -- ants, flies, rats, cockroaches; no exterminators in those days.
	094-099	No rat poison. Neighbor trapped rats in wire cages and killed them with boiling water.
4	100-114	KU played baseball and basketball. In 1916 a building burned down and left bricks only. The boys cleaned the area for playing.
	115-119	Mrs. Cook, the woodshop teacher at Macy Grammar School, got the Board of Education to help clean the area. It developed into the Apablasa Playground.
	120-126	Had swings, merry-go-rounds, in those days. Playground was at the end of Apablasa Street.
	127-129	KU saw many Tong wars. Last one was in 1930 when KU was in high school.
	130-136	KU heard a shot at 5:00 a.m. He saw the cook from Tuey Far Low crossing the street when someone shot him. The cook lost his hat, went back to retrieve it, and was shot again.
5	137-138	The cook had four shots in his body. Laid down on pavement. KU asked the victim (Mr. Quon) what had happened. Mr. Quon said, "Nothing." Mr. Quon died years later.
	138-150	Some of Mr. Quon's bullets were removed, not all. In those days, Americans did not care about Chinese people. Chinese took care of themselves.
	151-154	No Chinese medical doctors at that time. Peter Soo Hoo was the only one with a good job. He worked for the Department of Water and Power.
	155-156	Americans did not hire Chinese then.
	156-162	Tongs protected individual members from being cheated in gambling by others.
	163-171	Tongs were not family associations; anyone could join. Tongs were more like clubs.
	172-177	A father and son joined different Tongs. When the two Tongs fought each other, the father and son would hide so they would not kill each other.
6	178-184	Tong wars began long time ago. Policemen turned their backs. "One less Chinaman is enough."
	185-195	Drunk cowboys hung nineteen Chinese by the pigtailed just for the fun of it -- supposedly the Chinese had molested their women.
	196-201	Tongs could not help, could not fight White people.
	202-207	Dangerous environment, but nothing could be done. People did not think of danger. Ran to see shootings.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	208-215	Chinese neighborhood had about 150 Chinese. Those who could afford better homes lived downtown.
	216-222	KU meant 150 families, not 150 individuals. Chinese did not visit other people.
7	223-228	Chinese women had home and family to care for, no time to go visiting.
	229-236	KU had pigtaails just before World War I.
	237-246	World War I made little difference to KU. He saved peach seeds for planting.
	247-257	KU attended Central Junior High, originally Los Angeles High, on top of Fort Moore.
	258-260	KU attended Lincoln High School.
	261-263	Throughout his childhood, KU associated with half Chinese and half Japanese children.
	264-272	Japanese had rice stores, drug stores, etc. on First Street.
8	273-281	KU attended Chinese school until he was fifteen years old -- Ning Dank School (Modern Chinese School) on Los Angeles Street.
	282-290	Chinese school had about twenty students on different levels. KU resented having to attend school. He wanted to play ball.
	291-303	When at grammar school, KU attended Chinese school from 4 to 8:00 p.m. When in junior high, KU attended Chinese school from 4 to 9:00 p.m. with a break to eat from 5 to 6:00 p.m. When in high school, KU attended Chinese school from 5 to 9 p.m.
	304-309	Chinese school on Saturdays and Sundays for grammar and junior high students.
	310-316	KU did not help his father at the store. He took odd jobs selling ice cream, shining shoes. Gave his earnings to his parents.
9	317-325	Sold ice cream at eight years old; shined shoes at twelve years old; packed peaches in the market and delivered papers at fifteen years.
	326-344	After high school, KU applied for a job as a linotypist at a newspaper. He did not get the job. Boy below him in class got the job.
	345-358	KU went to work at a market owned by White people.
	359-367	KU worked for Standard Produce for \$7.50 a week in 1927.
	368-373	KU graduated from high school at the age of nineteen.
10	374-385	Only the poorer Chinese boys worked.
	386-388	KU worked for promotion.
	389-392	KU had route selling produce during World War II.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	393-398 399-404 405-440	Gasoline and tire rationing made KU give up delivery route. KU also washed dishes before and after high school. During good seasons, KU worked at Produce Market; off season he washed dishes and was busboy for \$10.50 a week, six hours a day.
11	441-447 448-END	After high school, KU delivered Chinese newspaper. Then went to work at Produce Market for a Japanese store. He started as a swamper (delivery boy) from \$7.50 to \$15.00 a week, then became jobber, receiver.
END OF SIDE A		
<u>TAPE 1 SIDE B</u>		
1	001-011 012-015 016-018 019-021 022-025 026-028 029-030 031-033	KU earned from \$7.50 to \$25.00. There were no unions then. The 1936 Union school was from \$85 to \$250 a week. KU was a receiver up to World War II. He also helped his brother with his ranch sometimes. Union Station took over his father's herb store property. Herb store property was owned by land company. Father was ousted with a thirty day notice. Father died before the property was taken. KU's brother had taken over the store but saw no future in keeping an herb store. His family moved to 16th and Maple Street until everyone got married and left home. KU was married in 1940. 16th and Maple was a residential area with Whites, Japanese. KU's family rented the house; there was no money to buy then.
2	034-041 042-045 046-052 053-054 055-061	KU bought first house in 1944 on 12th Avenue, westside of town near Jefferson Boulevard. No Blacks then, just Jewish. Neighbors did not want Orientals in. Years later, neighbors wanted to sell to Orientals. Still air of prejudice in the 40's. KU felt no hostility towards himself. Drunk White people used to go to Chinatown and create disturbances.
3	062-071 072-076 077-082	Chinese celebrated Chinese New Year, Moon Festival, gave Lay See to new babies. Continued old traditions while in Chinatown. Closed stores for two weeks, celebrated New Years for thirty days, then opened the New Year. Three big curio stores, herbs, grocery stores.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	083-089	Stores closed for two weeks, but can buy from back door during that time. Front doors were closed.
	090-099	Looked forward to firecrackers imported from San Francisco; everything brought from San Francisco was via Wells Fargo Express.
4	100-107	Father came to Los Angeles through San Francisco. His friends were working on the railroad for a dollar a day.
	108-111	Mother was fifteen years old when she married.
	112-135	Parents never returned to China. Three brothers went for Chinese education between 1926-1929.
	136-141	KU was athletically active.
5	142-149	Lo Wah basketball team started with seven people. KU was seventeen years old. Lo Wah lasted eight to ten years. Baseball team lasted for four years.
	150-152	KU played semi-pro baseball.
	153-155	Mother died three years after father.
	156-165	First wife was Korean, second wife was Japanese. Inter-racial marriages were uncommon then.
	166-167	All KU's brothers and sisters married Chinese.
	168-174	KU divorced Korean in 1960. He was a bachelor for five years, and remarried in 1965. Japanese wife died in 1976.
	175-178	KU made frequent visits to Japan and Hong Kong.
	179-182	KU had no interest in traveling prior to World War II.
6	183-201	KU felt that he was a Chinese in an American way.
	202-215	Father wanted KU to date Chinese girls rather than Japanese girls.
7	216-233	KU wanted to raise children as Chinese, they resisted learning Chinese, speaking Chinese. Spoke English.
	234-245	KU took Chinese medicine as a youngster; he had his first American doctor when he was in junior high. Father took care of the family when they got sick.
	246-268	Father's customers were Chinese, but many did not pay their bills.
	269-270	Father never joined any Tongs, etc.
8	271-278	Many gamblers in those days.
	279-285	Mother attended Presbyterian Church; prayed at Buddhist church when family got sick.
	286-293	KU attended Sunday School.
	294-305	Mother enjoyed Chinese opera from China. KU appreciated them, too.
	306-313	Chinese rented Japanese Theatre on Jackson Street twice a year for three months.

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	314-315	KU's parents never played mahjong; they were opposed to gambling.
	316-317	Parents never attended ball games. They did not want KU to play.
9	318-327	Parents understood some English, but spoke Chinese. They never had to deal with Americans. Father bought shoes in Japanese town.
	328-338	Father measured children's feet with string and bought shoes that way. Americans would serve Chinese but really did not want to.
	339-352	KU ate only ice cream from Mexican wagons; he loved tamales, tacos, and sweet bread.
	353-369	Never went into American community except to movies at 5th and 6th on Main Street. Some bigger theatres would not allow Orientals. No one protested in those days.
	370-379	KU was raised in the typical Chinese way. He was taught to respect school teachers first, and then parents.
10	380-385	KU never joined any Chinese associations.
	386-398	Peter Soo Hoo was the only one to have a good job. Water and Power not open to Chinese, but Peter had connections.
	399-409	Peter Soo Hoo was important only because he got a white collar job.
	410-429	Peter Soo Hoo used to teach musical instruments after work. Had a Chinese band called Funeral Band. Played for funerals.
11	430-449	Professional criers were hired to cry at funerals then.
	450-457	Evergreen Cemetery was the only one for Japanese and Chinese; later had a Chinese Cemetery.
	458-467	Eastern and First Street only cemetery for Chinese after Evergreen.
	468-END	Most Chinese returned to China to die. Those buried here had their bones sent back to China.

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	001-011	Prior to World War II, most Chinese waited on tables, worked in retail markets.
	012-017	Most Chinese were employees; 10% were owners.
	018-029	Average income was \$75 to \$100 a month in restaurants; \$75 to \$100 a week if working for Americans; Chinese gave room and board.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	030-034	Chinese were scattered; Chinatown, 9th Street, uptown, Western Avenue, San Pedro Street.
	035-048	Chinese were free to move to unrestricted areas; restrictions were by owners rather than by law until World War II.
	049-060	Saved more money prior to World War II; after World War II, hard to save money.
	061-067	Smarter Chinese invested money. Older ones sent money to China, others spent money.
3	068-081	Chinese gambling was allowed up to 1932, then the police clamped down and many "runners" were unemployed.
	082-087	70% of the stores were gambling places in the late 1920's and early 1930's -- gambling is back.
	088-094	Palyed Keno-like game, Pai Gow, Fan Tan.
	095-097	Tong wars in the 20's. Fighting resulted from one person cheating another.
4	098-105	Marchassault, Ferguson Alley, Alameda, were all sites of Tong wars.
	106-116	City settle down so Tong wars were down. Everyone was affected by the Depression; those who had side businesses continued with business. Those with gambling houses only, closed up.
	117-126	Racial prejudice was apparent until World War II; some mistaken identity hostility during World War II.
	127-131	Some still hostile with those wearing "I am a Chinese" button.
	132-135	Chinese stayed away from troublesome places.
	136-142	Consulate General did not care about hostility.
5	143-154	Some Chiense were for the Mongolians, others for Communist.
	155-167	Chinese felt anti-Japanese due to the Chinese-Japanese War; anti feelings were present in produce market.
	168-171	Anti feelings mostly Chinese toward Japanese.
	172-182	KU's Japanese friends never discussed politics.
6	183-194	Those who had money may have donated some to China.
	195-206	Some believed donations went into individual pockets of Sung family rather than for the cause.
	207-222	1939-1940 Moon Festival to raise money for China. Parade brought 50,000 to 100,000 spectators.
7	223-228	Chinese not involved in American politics.
	229-238	Lots of Chinese who were citizens were registered voters before World War II.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	239-245	Heard that Chinese were better businessmen than Jews, but KU felt opposite is true.
	246-255	Chinese did not segregate Jews from other White people.
	256-268	Some Chinese brought wives from China; citizens sent sons to China to marry and then bring wives over.
	269-274	Fathers preferred sons marrying from abroad.
8	275-290	KU married a Korean after parents died; KU's brothers and sisters and Korean wife's folks were not against the marriage. Wife was well accepted.
	291-298	KU had no language barrier in marriage. Both spoke English.
	299-304	Many mixed marriages before World War II between Orientals.
	305-315	KU married in 1940; did not particularly prefer son over daughter.
	316-320	KU wanted children to attend Chinese school, but would not force them.
9	321-328	No Korean language or culture forced on children; emphasis on learning English.
	329-335	Most parents wanted children to learn Chinese and stay off the streets:
	336-356	Crime rate was low among youths prior to World War II.
	357-364	Few prostitution houses in the 30's; more in the 20's.
	365-373	Laura Alley, Nigger Alley, were where prostitutes operated.
	374-377	Prostitutes served anyone, but mostly Chinese.
10	378-387	Prostitutes brought from China by White people to support them.
	388-393	Prostitute houses owned by Whites and Chinese.
	394-407	Number of prostitutes decreased in 30's because of economy.
	408-434	First group from China preferred dying in China.
11	435-446	20's and 30's many Chinese returned to China to die.
	447-END	Many American born went to China for education and marriage and then returned to the United States.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

1	001-019	KU saw no objection to Chinese roles in movies if depictions were actually true of the times.
	020-030	1920 -- community objected to studios showing Chinese with queues.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	031-035	Chinese more as extras in movies without dialogue.
	036-041	Anna May Wong and Setsue Hayakawa were the only Oriental stars.
	042-048	Anna May Wong had big roles with small speaking parts; played mostly maid parts.
	049-058	Ideal job were waiters and laundry men; nothing else was available.
	059-061	Chinese wanted jobs at Water and Power such as Peter Soo Hoo's, but could not get in.
3	062-071	Peter Soo Hoo was one of the few who had a college education. He did not help anyone get into Water and Power, but he did form a youth band.
	072-087	In 1920's, only about one thousand Chinese were here and most with little education; did not apply for better jobs.
	088-089	KU wanted better jobs for children.
	089-099	KU contented if children had type of work they enjoyed.
4	100-111	Prior to World War II, ten Chinese owned stores in City Produce Market out of one hundred, not counting outside stalls runned mostly by Japanese.
	112-122	Stores opened early, sold to second jobbers who took goods back to their own smaller stores.
	123-126	Mr. Fleming owned most of the shares of the entire City Market; Chinese leased/rented spaces.
	127-131	About one hundred Chinese (laborers, etc.) worked in the City Market.
5	132-150	In the 30's, working hours were 16 to 18 hours a day, mostly start at 5 a.m. and work for 16 to 18 hours.
	151-160	KU had to look for produce job himself; job did not come looking for him. He did not want jobs as waiter or in laundry, could not get anything else other than produce jobs.
	161-172	In the 30's, KU was a swamper (loaded/unloaded trucks, delivered). In the 40's, KU was a receiver (received merchandise and got them ready for salesmen). In 1945, KU became a salesman and stayed a salesman (set price for merchandise, found buyers, had to be a good hustler).
	173-176	Worked at above jobs at 9th and San Pedro Street whole-sale market.
6	177-191	City Market is a wholesale market which has individual stores to store merchandise.
	192-201	KU began working at fifteen years of age for \$7.50 per week packing peaches, loading trucks, and delivering.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	202-210	KU worked part time (35 hours a week) for market after graduating from high school. He also delivered Chinese newspaper.
	211-218	Sometimes KU earned \$10 per week at wholesale market without any benefits.
7	219-233	KU joined the Union in 1946; most Chinese houses were non-Union.
	234-245	He joined the Union for decent wages; no health benefits until 70's.
	246-261	Chinese laborers hired by other than Chinese in 30's.
	262-270	Sundays, workers played baseball in the late 20's; group called Los Angeles Chinese.
8	271-281	Chinese hired Chinese because of language.
	282-284	Owners did not provide living quarters for workers.
	285-293	In the 30's, swampers earned \$7.50 to \$10.00 a week.
	294-301	Los Angeles Chinese consisted of all Chinese, many from produce market.
	302-310	KU repacked lettuce in lugs before selling -- sorted out spoiled lettuce.
	311-319	Larger stores got supplies from farmers. Smaller stores got own produce from own farms.
	320-323	KU lived as comfortably on salary in early years as he does now on current salary.
9	324-329	Early 30's, lunch in restaurant cost 35¢ to 50¢; late 30's it cost 75¢ to \$1.25.
	330-350	KU could not save large amounts of money then.
	351-365	As salesman, KU worked for one store; boss brings in different kinds of vegetables, KU sells, some bosses gave percentage.
	366-380	Full-fledged salesmen can make own deal on farms and bring in merchandise for 3%.
10	381-394	Out of job for two weeks in 1937, Chinese stores closed due to lack of business.
	395-407	KU's first wife was a seamstress at home; did not work when pregnant; lived comfortably on incomes.
	408-413	KU's membership only with Union, no others.
	414-419	KU did not hold any positions in Union, only voted.
	420-425	Japanese officers in Union; no Chinese officers; Chinese did not run for office.
	426-427	Union officers were paid positions.
	428-END	In general, KU feels Chinese are doing good for themselves.

END OF TAPE 2

END OF INTERVIEW

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