

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: May Wong Interview Number: 33
 Chinese Name: 李雙珍 Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 10/27/79 Length: 1 Hour & 45 Minutes
 Interviewer: Suellen Cheng & Munson Kwok
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Elmo Gambarana

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	022-027 030-033	Introduction Parents came from Toisan, both father and mother. Have to look up the year when they came over.
2	034-042 043-048 049-053 054-056 057-060 061-068	When my father came to the United States he tried many things. At one time he went up near Colusa in north California. He tried many things and finally he went to San Francisco and met someone. He was a self-educated herbalist. He came to Long Beach in 1922, approximately. He was there between 10-12 years and then moved to Los Angeles. He never lived in Chinatown but lived in the southwest part of Los Angeles, at 4624 South Figueroa. He opened an office in Long Beach and also two in Los Angeles, one at South Figueroa Street and the other on Vermont. Eight of the children were born in San Francisco, two born in Long Beach. Father had a dream that all these children would come into his business, consequently it was called SPV and Sons.
3	069-070 071-073 074-076	He had six sons; they're all doctors of some kind. Three of the elder sons tried to combine western medicine with herbalism but it didn't work. May Wong (MW) grew up in Long Beach through elementary school, not high school. Then the family moved to Los Angeles.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	077-080	In Long Beach her father worked hard. Naturally there was a big gap in the childrens' ages. The elder ones had already moved out of the house.
	081-085	Father believed that all his children should have an education in Chinese, so all the boys were sent to China for schooling. David went to Vietnam, two of the boys went to Kucing.
	086-088	They woke up very early, always at dawn.
	089-090	In Long Beach, the living quarters and store were separate.
	091-093	Mother was strictly busy with the children, didn't help out at the store but always took care of the home.
	094-097	MW was born in 1924. We never lived in a Chinese neighborhood, always the only Chinese in the neighborhood.
	098-100	So we never played with Chinese kids.
4	101-114	In Long Beach MW's father hired a tutor from Los Angeles for four or five of us. MW studied with the tutor from about eight years of age and then moved to Los Angeles around the time MW started junior high school. Then MW went to an independent Chinese school. Seems like I went to (Jung Wah), every school there was, to the one on Adams, on 10th Street, 23rd Street. After junior high school I would walk over to the Chinese school and would never get home until after dark.
	116-120	In the whole junior high school I think there were at least 50 students. I remember the little house we were in.
	121-130	In Long Beach I don't remember other Chinese students. I was used to non-Chinese students at school. I never knew anything else.
	131-137	MW spoke Chinese at home only to her mother and father. Spoke to kids in English. Most of the time only got orders from her mother and father. MW spoke and still speaks Toisan village dialect at home.
	138-156	In Los Angeles used to visit Chinatown to eat and buy groceries. Shopped every week. Father ordered medicines from China. He formed his own formulas into a powder form instead of herbs itself. Many of the kids learned to do the job that's called jiobyak (抓藥) i.e., filled out the prescription.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	157-160	When in Los Angeles we had a home-office, an office downstairs and home upstairs.
	161-165	We had to know Chinese to fill the prescriptions, it was easy for us to pick up.
	166-175	In Long Beach the patients were all Caucasians. They came through word of mouth recommendations. Also father had a booklet called "Nature's Way to Health," through testimonials, i.e., patients who were healed would write him.
	176-179	In Los Angeles, patients were also all Caucasians. He never visited patients in Chinatown. Patients came to him. He didn't make house calls.
	180-194	He charged \$7 to \$10 for a week's supply of herbs, which would include a little bag with a variety of herbs. You would boil the herbs in water. This was back in the 1930s.
6	195-212	The herbs came all prepared from China and didn't need to be cut up. Patients would come in for a consultation and he'd diagnose what it was, write the prescription, bring it out to us and we'd fill it and he'd deliver it to the patient. Later, because the herbs were so bulky and hard to get, he'd buy certain ones and have them made into powder. These we'd put in a little envelope and removed it by a teaspoon. Also different powders were mixed together. Either the bulk concentrated form. He would make powders in a special machine outside of the home. Later on he made tablets too, outside.
	213-220	Don't know what first inspired father to settle and come to open an office in Long Beach in the first place.
	221-246	All the 10 children graduated from schools in Long Beach and Los Angeles. The eldest one went to chiropractic school, second one to become an osteopath and surgeon. Three of the children became surgeons. One brother went to Loma Linda, Stanford - after the war. MW went to USC and received her master's also. the other two sisters went to Los Angeles Community College - called Los Angeles Junior College in those days.
7	247-264	Sons probably learned some medicine by watching or working with father at work. The three older ones all knew it and went into medicine. Father taught the daughters only how to fill prescriptions.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	265-272	When one of the children got sick, had an upset stomach, father treated them. They were afraid to get sick because they didn't want to take that bitter medicine. Never asked for American medicine like aspirin.
	273-300	In cooking, mother used to use herbs for certain conditions like after you have a baby. Don't remember the ingredients now. Mother used wine more than herbs. Herbs were usually used in soups.
8	301-326	Going to school in Long Beach, MW was probably discriminated against by the other kids and probably didn't know it. MW was very quiet and felt ashamed whenever she used to do well in school and the others (boys) would tease her for being so smart. Just felt that it would be nice to be blond and blue eyed or something but just too dumb to notice. She just wished to be more like them yet felt different.
	327-330	Other kids seemed to let MW participate in their games. Probably didn't discriminate against her. With the kids, if they do discriminate, it is not intentional.
9	331-345	In Long Beach, did feel left out with the other kids there at school. Was automatically eliminated from after school activities because she had to go directly to Chinese school, so she never had a chance.
	346-354	With MW remembering father just giving orders to the kids. We weren't suppose to just talk only talk when spoken to.
	355-360	Never felt close to either father or mother.
	361-373	Doesn't remember if her parents put a strong emphasis on all the kids getting a strong education, all the kids just wanted to go to school.
374-400	Father made out well in his business. The kids didn't suffer, they usually got sweets. Slept three in a bed. They didn't know any better so they didn't suffer. Mother being uneducated and did not speak English. She raised the children plus chickens and a vegetable garden. She was too busy to suffer.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	401-414	The kids didn't have to help her (mother). She was a typical Chinese mother. Mother never helped in her husband's business, a typical Chinese wife. She didn't teach MW how to become a Chinese wife as such but she knew what her feelings were like on things. In going out, we had to be in by midnight.
	415-426	Mother didn't go out for recreation like movies. She didn't understand them because of the language and had absolutely no form of recreation.
	427-446	She didn't have any other Chinese women come over for a visit.
	447-451	Father never went out to meetings. We made visits to the park but had no time for those things. Later on he took up things like shuffle board. Later on he traveled a little.
11	452-455	We kids played tennis. I was a tomboy and did all the things most American kids do. We didn't know any "Chinese games," didn't go to any Chinese operas and such because we didn't understand them. We spoke a village dialect. We tried to understand when we went to church but couldn't understand the Chinese church when the parents occasionally brought them.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A		
1	001-010	Introduction
	011-018	The church the parents brought MW to was a Presbyterian one on Olive. There was a large attendance, all Chinese and conducted usually in Chinese. MW didn't get involved in Sunday School.
	019-022	As far as MW knows, her mother was never involved in any ancestor worship.
	023-030	MW associated mostly with American neighbor children, who would go over and play at her house. In high school and college she also associated with American children but weren't very close with them.
	031-038	There was talk about sending money back to China while MW was going up but she's not sure. There was talk in the family about the old days, China, some of the courship conditions they used to live under and how the marriages used to be arranged, how you never saw one another until you were married, and the poor conditions in the village.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	039-042	Back in China they kept the pigs in the houses with them.
	043-046	Parents were married through introductions. They were married in China.
	047-050	All the children married the American way, they picked their own spouse.
	051-056	Elder brothers didn't marry in any special celebrations or ceremonies, everything was done the American way. They didn't get married in the right order. The oldest was not first and was almost the last one to get married.
	057-066	All the weddings were American in church. In some of them there were banquets afterwards, receptions Chinese and American style.
	067-076	In MW's case, the reception was left up to the groom's family because MW's brothers and sisters were a little young to help. She didn't recall very much.
3	077-084	MW attended many Chinese weddings outside of the family, though not very traditional ones. There were western weddings and Chinese banquets.
	085-090	MW doesn't remember what the best Chinese restaurants were where some of the banquets were held in the early days, only that they were in Chinatown.
	091-100	In the early days, MW can remember when the family went to Chinatown by Union Station, the only one there was in those days. It was spooky. When you were upstairs and the trains went by, the whole building would shake. MW can still remember the engines, locomotives, they'd practically come right up next to you chugging away. That was scary.
	101-104	There were mostly stores in that area. MW imagines it was pretty run down no homes there.
4	105-110	MW's dad moved to go to visit friends down there. It was dingy, like the back quarter of a store or upstairs a whole family lived in one room, It was scary. Very different compared to where she lived.
	111-114	The family of friends there wore western clothing.
	115-120	MW went along down there with her parents. It was sort of exciting for her, like an outing.
	121-130	Family didn't celebrate Chinese holidays very much. Every little, even Chinese New Years. Possibly brought down to Chinatown to watch the parades. She didn't look forwards to New Years because she didn't like firecrackers. Not familiar with Chinese traditions.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	131-138	The most Chinese thing MW saw her mother prepare was little white flour balls at certain times.
	139-146	Father probably never joined any associations in Chinatown, neither did any members of the family, that she knows of. May be the family may have joined Jungwah or family association but did not speak about it though.
5	147-154	Among the most prominent persons in Chinatown I remember was the owner of the National Dollar Stores. I heard father talk about him.
	155-160	I don't know if he was of the same family as us, I don't remember his name.
	161-166	In those days, Chinese businesses were mostly restaurants or laundries. Father knew a few other herbalist friends.
	167-176	There was Frank Lee, his father only I remember. His father was a Lee also.
	177-186	Father owned the house we lived in. He had some difficult times keeping it. In father's day you weren't allowed to own property.
6	187-190	Owning the home must've come later, this was Figueroa Street which was much later.
	191-210	Not clear - tape trouble
	211-214	In the early days everyone thought about returning to China, so did MW's mother.
	215-226	Her three brothers actually went back to China to study. Sister went to (暨南) not the university in Canton, I think a lower school, probably a high school or something.
227-234	Many American Chinese kids here went back, quite a few. Only boys went back. Sister went back because she was the eldest and wanted to go and talked my father into letting her go.	
7	235-246	Don't know how long the boys stayed there, maybe a couple of years, until the war broke out. Also father thought the girl should go because of health reasons; there were any proper facilities there.
	247-255	When the sons came back they still spoke English but the Chinese probably had an influence. They didn't say much about their experiences there, sent a few letters and pictures.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	256-272	MW went to Manual Arts High School and the University of Southern California. Had difficulty trying to get into USC and felt bad about it. Never entertained joining any sorority, it was out of the question and really didn't wish to. I felt I was left out. I lived at home and didn't live on campus.
	273-276	Joined the Chinese Student Association.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	001-015 016-038	Introduction Most of the members of the Chinese Association were a mixture of Chinese from China, Hong Kong, native born. We used to speak English. Activities were mostly social. Went to USC during the war years, most social life was entertainment for servicemen. We had a canteen down at Chinatown. Sometimes they'd call at your home through a mutual friend and visit on an informal basis. These were Chinese Air Force servicemen from China. We just met informally, no shows were put on. Actually we didn't have a club serving, only later on. Few Chinese students then, only four Fs, special students.
2	039-044 045-050 051-058 059-072	On the whole, most Chinese are pretty quiet, not many outdoor activities like ball games. Think most Chinese American students do better than Americans in their living and incomes. Compared to Jewish people in ways of doing business, they're very similar. Chinese get along very well with Jewish people. MW does have some Jewish friends. Easier to get along with certain ones, those who are more business minded, as certain Chinese are. Southern Chinese are good businessmen. Their wives are astute businesswomen. What they lack is "public relatives," depending on what business they go into. Most of them are confined to restaurants. We have found that Chinese here copy the successful ones. They do the same things rather than start out, like if they see a successful restaurant, they open one next to it rather than going on their own and starting something else, or going into another area.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	073-084	Father's investment in real estate wasn't common in his day. He would have been considered an adventurer. Did so because it was hard to buy property. He was interested in real estate because he had only a limited amount of land.
	085-086	He was interested in real estate, mainly in the city.
	087-090	Chinese moved into businesses mainly because they followed other Chinese.
	091-098	Being from a large family, MW noticed very definite differences between the girls and boys. Her mother often expressed that once you're married you belong to the boy's side.
	099-104	MW's father was more Americanized in what he believed in. He felt equal opportunity for both the boys and girls.
4	105-114	American-born Chinese didn't feel they preferred to have sons more than daughters. In fact, probably the opposite was true.
	115-124	On sons versus daughter favoritism - Mother believed she should leave all of her inheritance to the boys. We were all independent once we married and never came back or asked for anything. We knew that was the way she thought and accepted it. We didn't follow it.
	125-136	The way most Chinese felt on interracial marriages is that they thought it was strictly taboo. Didn't enter their minds, probably this comes down from her parents. Even though they were in contact with many non-Chinese.
	137-150	Parents did warn them about going out with non-Chinese. MW had never entertained the thought about going out with non-Chinese. Mother would not take a personal check from Japanese or Korean, she was suspicious about everyone. MW's father didn't care. He was a little more understanding of western ways of thinking because he knew English. Her mother lacked education.
5	151-154	As it turned out, the children all married Chinese.
	155-160	On the way Chinese were portrayed in American movies, MW didn't get to see them, probably had to be a reflection of that time. Didn't know anything other than what they portrayed.
	161-164	MW saw some of the things they had in those days, like "Good Earth" and "Charlie Chan."
	165-190	Before MW went to college, she helped her dad and did a little typing for the War Department - the Motor Pool. They were supposed to train her for the job but MW wasn't very good and lost the job. She found a job by writing a letter through a lab. Worked because she thought she'd try the outside world, try working. Her sisters were probably working for her dad at the time. Found time

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	165-190	only during the summer to help dad. Didn't do any other work while attending USC.
6	191-202	Started working again after graduating from USC. Majored in physical education. She chose it because she couldn't go into medicine, didn't do very well in chemistry and sort of dropped out. She went to work for a while.
	203-208	She then thought about becoming a teacher, which was unusual. She was the first Chinese teacher in the Los Angeles school district. She was a second grade teacher.
	209-212	After graduating she didn't become a teacher right away. She had a little difficulty which she thinks because of prejudice.
	213-224	She thinks it was during the objective test part of the Los Angeles City exam that she didn't do very well, based from her personal interview. Also when at USC a professor told her that it would be futile for her to try to teach in Los Angeles. She didn't think so but he tried to steer her away. She applied anyway.
	225-230	She got a job right away, in fact, in the school she just graduated from.
7	231-240	There weren't very many Chinese attending at that time. No problem with the students she taught. Most of them thought MW was another student because she was so young.
	241-246	She enjoyed it, being a physical education teacher for three years. After she got married she had to quit. She married in Canada and left the country.
	247-262	Met her husband on a trip with her father to Montreal, not through mutual friends. She didn't decide to marry and stay with him then. She lived in Canada for a year then moved down to Los Angeles in 1949. She lived in the southwest area.
	263-267	She came down in her ninth month of pregnancy. She had the baby immediately. She wanted the baby to be born in the United States because of immigration problems and her husband was unemployed at the time.
	268-296	Her husband wasn't a native Canadian. He was a native of China. He had a very difficult time entering this country. He decided to settle here. Her husband actually was an industrial engineer but wasn't able to

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	268-296	get a job in defense then because it was an economically bad year one wasn't an American citizen. (Her husband was a communist, so he needed clearance. This was about 1949 and everybody was out of a job.
8	297-300	Didn't return to work after children grew up. She was a housewife all those years.
	301-320	She didn't go down to Chinatown often. Sort of because she was Americanized but bought Chinese food in Chinatown. Didn't speak Chinese at home with her children. Husband spoke Cantonese too, like MW. Didn't send her children to Chinese school, there weren't any in Anaheim.
	321-326	MW has two children.
9	327-340	Learned to cook Chinese food just by observation. She learned after she left home, not from her mother. She helped her mother very little in the kitchen.
	341-350	There was no problem raising her children in American surroundings.
	351-360	Moved down to Los Angeles in 1953 or 1954.
	361-364	Probably one of the first Chinese in Anaheim.
	365-386	Owned a business in Los Angeles but had a difficult time. They (whites) wouldn't show the house MW wanted because they said it could be shown only to a Caucasian. MW had to resort to getting a Caucasian lady to go with her to see the house. Then MW had another trusted Caucasian friend buy the house in her name for them. Her husband never saw the house before they moved in. They had to negotiate a double escrow in order for them to have a house in Long Beach. It was their first home.
10	387-392	MW ran into similar problems. Originally bought acreage in Orange County and had a home built. When she wanted to move into a better area, she started looking for a lot again. Every time she started to try getting information they (whites) heard the name - Wong - and MW wouldn't get the information. Consequently, she decided that since her husband was going through citizenship proceeding to change their name from Wong to Wonn. Her husband was very proud and didn't want to resort to this.
	393-450	One was allowed to change one's name without benefit of going through a court hearing, if one was in court at the time. So MW's husband finally consented and they did change their name on all papers. MW wanted a western name. But they still use the name Wong.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	451-460	After the name change, they didn't buy any more property. The change hadn't made any difference. In fact, you're the only ones who know about it. I don't think the children even know. They use Wong.
	461-474	When we moved here, we were among the first Chinese in the area. It was a custom lot and subdivided. It was stipulated that if we moved not to sell to anyone who wasn't desirable, which probably meant nothing but Caucasians.
END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A		
1	010-014	Never had any problem with Caucasians later. Aren't any Chinese in this particular tract of homes but they are in the general area. They've moved in here in later years.
	015-018	Heard about abandonment, trouble about getting top of bank land ? though not recently, right after they moved in.
	019-033	We were one of the first Chinese. There weren't any Chinese organizations. Missed our Chinese friends. When we heard about a Chinese moving into the area, we'd call them up, have them over for dinner and so we always felt more comfortable then. As years passed, finally we decided to organize Chinese in the area. That's how organizing Chinese Women's Church of Orange County came about. Plus men felt they were too busy to participate and so delegated their wives to participate. Most of them had young children so someone had to stay home.
2	036-048	It started out slowly, about fifty of us, decided that we did want a club. Found the only thing that held us together was we all liked to eat Chinese food. We started out with pot luck dinners. When it came to the meals the husbands already "ready and willing and able to come." Women would have little get togethers periodically and we'd have something for the families.
	049-058	The club was founded in 1961. It started with 50 members. Now it has developed into the Chinese Association of Orange County, as of about two years ago, when men decided they wanted to participate. We started a Chinese school which is quite successful now. Has a regular classroom every Saturday, two classes, quite extensive.
	059-062	Don't have our own building so we use a school.
	063-070	In the early days, it was very difficult to get the children to go, so they had to use different incentives

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	063-070	to keep up their interest. The kids hated to give up their Saturday. Now there is a whole general program for adults and children, as well as Chinese cultural subjects.
3	071-074	They tried to program anything that is Chinese, like music, opera, anything that comes along they try to participate.
	075-078	Now there is a mixture of Chinese, more from Vietnam, have intermarried. In fact more overseas Chinese than American born Chinese are in the area. The American-born Chinese are a little more independent. The whole thing that brings them together I think is the children. Most of them want their children to meet other Oriental children. They have a hard time participating in the western activities and have a hard time fitting in. A lot of the children still don't realize the value of learning their own language yet. They're a little young yet. They'll appreciate that later on, when it'll be handy.
	090-104	That was one of MW's main objectives, to upgrade the children's education. Even if they are just getting a smattering of Chinese, only a few words. MW's philosophy is it's best for the parents to decide for their children. "This is best for you now, you may not see it now but give it a try and if you still feel you don't want to continue, then all right."
4	105-108	Language taught in the school is Mandarin and Cantonese for adults and children, as well as art.
	109-112	It is run on Saturday from nine to twelve.
	113-116	Besides Chinese organizations, I joined other things. I take art and still belong to the Chinese Art Club. I also participated in the PTA when my children were little.
	117-120	We feel we've integrated into the community. I still feel I'm Chinese.
	121-124	I've always felt pro-Chinese and will admit that when I was young that I was ashamed to be Chinese. But now I feel I'm very proud to be a Chinese. I have a special heritage. I feel one should be proud of their heritage and should try to maintain it. Being as Americanized as we can be, I feel the whole problem of integration is that you've got to be yourself, each one of us. People

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	121-124	who know one Chinese judge them all by the one they know. If they don't know of any, they're influenced by what they hear, like in the movies. But if they know and they like you, then they'll consider all Chinese are good. If you're a bad Chinese, it reflects on the rest. To me person to person relationships are the best way to get the rest of the world to know who we are. With the opening of China, now their eyes are opening they're saying "gee, a country that is really rich in culture."
5	125-156	I feel that a higher education is the only thing no one can ever taken away from you. It is very important for children. You need some tool.
	157-162	With my children, we just automatically resolved them. Inheritors have their opportunity.
	163-168	My two children both went to college. Stephan and Deborah are their names. One is an attorney, the other is a business major, but they both developed nicely.
	169-180	They didn't associate much with Chinese. In Orange County there weren't many. They felt, and didn't realize it then, left out because they were in a minority. But when they were ready to go to a university, both chose to go to Los Angeles, I think because they were going to meet other Orientals. They felt they were in an all-white community and were not able to participate in it.
	181-194	They both went to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and felt they could find more Chinese there. Lived at the university. Did send them to Taiwan in the exchange program. That was the turning point when they came back they both felt closer to the Chinese. They felt they wanted to and had to learn Chinese. They felt more comfortable.
6	195-198	It was just a summer program, four to six weeks. When they returned, they both asked me why I hadn't taught them Chinese.
	199-206	Since then, they're not that involved in Chinese affairs and don't go down to Chinatown.

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