

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Ralph Hum Interview Number: 120  
 Chinese Name: 譚國大 Number of Tapes: 1  
 Date of Interview: 7/26/80 Length: 1 Hour & 6 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape No.:	Side:
1	000-009	Ralph Harold Hum (RHH) was born in Butte, Montana on September 13, 1919.	<u>1</u>	<u>A</u>
	010-013	RHH used Chinese at home when young. Family was strict about not permitting English spoken in the house.		
	014-018	Mother spoke very little English.		
	019-028	Father first lived in San Francisco, then moved to Montana to serve the Chinese railroad laborers in Montana, and opened a grocery store in the late 1880's.		
2	029-034	Father imported rice from San Francisco.		
	035-039	Father's store also carried Chinese medicine, no American merchandise.		
	040-045	There were about 40,000 to 50,000 people.		
	046-049	Father hired about three or four helpers in the store.		
	050-053	Father was rather well off. He probably made money from the store.		
	054-059	RHH was 18 months of age when father died. RHH's family took father's body back to China for burial which was the custom for the well-to-do families. It was in 1921.		
	060-063	RHH has four sisters and two brothers. RHH is the youngest.		
	064-065	RHH's family went back to Toishan (台山), Bok Sui for a year of mourning.		
3	066-073	Mother sent the older children back to Montana to take care of the business while she kept the younger children in Hong Kong and Macao (澳門) for five or six years.		
	074-081	Father left about \$30,000 to \$40,000 in gold for the family plus property which the family was able to draw rent from.		
	082-088	Father owned about six or seven buildings in Butte.		
	089-093	Mother continued to operate the store until the late 1940's.		
	094-095	The relatives helped take care of the property while the		

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	094-095	family was in China. The relatives got liberal about the money, so the mother sent the older children to rescue the store.
4	096-106	RHH and family returned to the United States in 1927.
	107-112	RHH went to school in Hong Kong for about a year.
	113-117	RHH's family came back to Butte through Seattle.
	118-124	RHH graduated from Garfield Grammar School and Butte High School. Then he went to Montana School of Mine for a year. Subsequently came to USC.
	125-128	During RHH's school years, he found the climate not to be particularly hostile and not friendly either.
	129-134	Chinese customs and features are different from the others and were not understood by the others.
	135-140	RHH was not aware of the nature of the discrimination but heard the older timers' experiences of being discriminated against.
5	141-146	Chinese were chased and attacked by the majority people in the early days.
	147-160	Father was a friend of banker of the city so he was able to obtain a loan to purchase property. Therefore he was less restricted in his movements than the others.
	161-165	Father had queue when he was young.
	166-172	Father got married at the age of 40 when he had enough money. Father got married in Hong Kong.
	173-182	Men were sent the pictures of the eligible women. Then man could pick the most preferable one and the families got together and agreed upon the gifts. Both parties never saw each other until the wedding night. -- so called picture bride.
6	183-188	Father did not get married in the United States because there weren't many women around. Also at that time most men felt it was inappropriate to marry a native girl.
	189-199	Father passed away when he was 54, because he did not believe in western medical operations.
	200-203	Mother was a widow when she was 37.
	204-209	RHH graduated from USC in 1944. From 1945 to 1949 he did his graduate work at USC majoring in both geology and sociology.
	210-228	After he graduated, RHH worked in the Gulf Oil Company at the land and leasing department -- without doing much geological work for six and a half years.
		At the Gulf Oil Company, RHH was told by a Caucasian colleague that RHH might not advance anyway no matter how

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	210-228	long RHH stayed with the company. That is the reason RHH left the company and looked for administrative work in New York.
7	229-242	At the time, Los Angeles was not as sophisticated in the field as New York was. Also, RHH heard that New York was more liberal in terms of giving minority the opportunity in this field.
	243-260	He worked for Bechtel, in the New York branch. It was a Petro Chemical construction firm. RHH worked for them for two years.
8	261-281	RHH was not able to find a job for a while after Becto.
	282-283	RHH went to Chicago and helped his sister for a year and a half in his sister's curio store.
	284-287	His sister, Dr. Rose Hum Lee, was a professor of Roosevelt University for a number of years and subsequently the chairman of the Department of Sociology.
	288-294	Dr. Rose Hum Lee's accomplishment was to be the first woman to become the head of a department of a major university in the United States.
	295-298	Roosevelt University was located in downtown Chicago in the formal Congress Hotel Building.
	299-302	His sister became the chairman of the department [Sociology] around the early part of the 1950's.
	302-303	The first book Rose Hum Lee published was "The First Hundred Year History of the Chinese in the United States". The second book was on the urban sociology published in the late 1950's.
	304-312	Dr. Rose Hum Lee was appointed as a staff member in early 1945 at the Roosevelt University and left there for Phoenix to teach at the University of Arizona before she passed away in 1964.
	313-322	The oldest sister, Amy, was with the American Embassy in Shanghai as the assistant council until 1949.
9	323-332	Later Amy Hum worked for the United Nations for many years.
	333-339	Father felt that China was too restrictive and did not offer much opportunity, therefore, even if it meant a lot of denial and uprooting, he chose to come to America.
	340-353	Father probably came to the United States while he was in his midteens.
	354-359	Mother did not miss the village because she was a city girl since she was raised in Hong Kong.
	360-373	Mother died in Los Angeles when she was 67 and was buried in East Los Angeles.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	374-389	The family came back to Butte in 1927.
	390-397	Mother took over the store in 1927 and had one helper as well as the help of the children.
	398-408	Mother was a talented woman and had many liberal ideas. She enjoyed taking charge of the store.
	409-417	Being one of the leading families enabled RHH's mother to enjoy a good social standing.
	418-423	RHH's mother returned to China for retirement in the late 1940's. Mother came back to the United States in 1958, shortly after that she passed away in Los Angeles.
	424-431	She went to China to see the rest of her children and grandchildren and bought a new house in Macao for herself.
11	432-457	Mother was happy in Macao and had a maid to help her. She played mahjong games with her women friends.
	458-465	Mother came back to the United States because RHH's brothers and sisters decided to move back to the United States to educate their children here.
END OF SIDE A		

TAPE 1 SIDE B

1	000-003	Mother came back to the United States and lived with RHH's brother in Los Angeles, and no longer owned the Butte store.
	004-008	Mother passed away when she was 67.
	009-011	RHH associated mostly with non-Chinese. 60% non-Chinese and 40% Chinese. He associated with some blacks and Mexicans.
	012-018	RHH felt split in between Chinese and American and was able to associate with both Chinese and non-Chinese.
	019-029	RHH spoke Toishanese, Mandarin, and Cantonese.
	030-031	RHH never felt sorry for being a Chinese because in his upbringing he was made to believe that the Chinese came from a very deep culture.
2	032-036	Although at the time that was difficult for Chinese being in America, RHH never felt that he was at a disadvantage for he was a Chinese with a rich background.
	037-044	When RHH was young he resented being Chinese.
	045-049	RHH was aware of the fact that if the Chinese wanted to stay in America, they had to go out among the majority ground more and to reveal to them that the Chinese are not that much different, and to make the relationship better.
	050-066	Being the first generation, RHH believed that the influence of the old culture made him understand and appreciate the old culture more than the younger generation.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	067-076	From RHH's observation, the second and third generation tended to go away from the old culture while now the fourth and fifth generations try to go back to the old culture.
	077-078	When the family members got sick, most of the time Western medicine was used. Occasionally Chinese medicine was used because mother felt that the Chinese medicine was more appropriate for the mild ailment while the Western medicine was used for the major illnesses.
	079-083	RHH does not use Chinese medicine at all now.
	084-090	RHH reads books for recreation.
	091-099	RHH was trained to play musical instruments. This is one of mother's liberal ideas for all her children.
4	100-108	Mother insisted that every child should have music lessons.
	109-117	RHH also liked sports such as football. He also loves movies.
	118-121	Family still communicates with friends and distant relatives in China occasionally.
	122-126	RHH does not belong to the community organization and does not participate in Chinese community activities.
	127-139	Does not know any important Chinese families.
5	140-147	Most Chinese were engaged in laundry and restaurant businesses before World War II in Butte, Montana.
	148-150	There were about 150 to 200 Chinese in Butte, Montana before World War II.
	151-153	Does not know how much the Chinese made before World War II.
	154-160	During the Depression most Chinese were able to rely on the family establishment. Hum's family supported a couple of cousins.
	161-167	It was the family's tradition to help other relatives.
	168-169	Chinese more or less lived together in a particular area. Some people lived where their businesses were.
	170-179	Many Chinese sent a great deal of money back to their relatives in China, who heavily relied on the remittance from overseas. For example, RHH's uncle had a very prosperous store in the village in China. The uncle was very well known among the Hums in China. He therefore acted like a bank and received all remittance and converted it to Chinese money for the receivers of the money.
6	180-195	Due to RHH's prosperity, his uncle was able to come to the United States for a while and then returned to China to set up the store and became very prosperous as the result of the money transactions.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	196-206	There were some gambling houses in Chinatown. Most of the Chinese social life centered around Chinese themselves. Therefore the gambling is one outlet for the Chinese after work.
	207-218	There were both Chinese and American gambling houses. Chinese went to both gambling houses.
	219-223	RHH does not know of any Chinese involved in politics.
7	224-229	RHH thinks that Chinese have done better than others and feels that in the past 35 years Chinese as well as other Asiatic groups have done remarkably well in terms of the progress they have made.
	230-241	Both Jewish and Chinese are very strong on family ties.
	242-248	RHH is not married.
	249-259	In RHH's father's time, the son was always given more emphasis than the daughter.
	260-261	As long as people are compatible, the intermarriage does not make any difference.
	262-272	Chinese were often portrayed as the stereotypic Chinese.
8	273-285	RHH's first ten years in New York was considered the best time for RHH. He was able to expand his talents in New York.
	286-297	RHH's difficult time was at his late teens and early 20's. At that time RHH was trying to establish himself and to make contributions to bring the Chinese image more positive in different fields, so that the Chinese can break down some of the barriers.
	298-322	RHH tried to give advice to the people who were questioning about their advancement in the American society.
9	323-341	In 1958 when RHH returned to Los Angeles, he found out that the people RHH gave advice to turned out to be very well established.
	342-365	RHH has mostly relationships with Caucasians in the working environment and some social environment, but found that it is very difficult to have too close of a relationship because of family restrictions and lack of time.
	366-382	RHH feels that the ethnic background of an individual is not important and does not place too much emphasis on it.
10	383-394	RHH did not have many close Japanese friends.
	395-404	Father's Chinese name is Tom Yim (譚英), Tom Yook Choy (譚育才) is his second name (號).
	405-409	RHH's Chinese name is Tom Gouk Dai (譚國大).

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	410-420	RHH performed in Milwaukee and played the part of the father of the girl Mei Li in the Flower Drum Song. He has also performed in New York. Later he became a part of the entertainment community in Milwaukee and was with the Florentine Opera group in Milwaukee.
11	421-462	RHH auditioned for the Flower Drum Song and was chosen to perform in Milwaukee.
	463-469	RHH reduced his activities in performing in recent years, but from time to time he still enjoys performing.
	470-474	RHH sometimes sings in the Hollywood Baptist Church in Hollywood.
END OF TAPE 1		
END OF INTERVIEW		

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