

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Kim Fong Tom Interview Number: 54
 Chinese Name: 譚劍鋒 Number of Tapes: 4
 Date of Interview: 1/17/80, 2/28/80 Length: 1 Hour & 27 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Elaine Loo

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	005-011	Introduction.	
	012-013	Between 1933-43 Kim Fong Tom (KFT) lived in Los Angeles.	
	014-017	KFT went to Chapman College. Not many Chinese students there. KFT lived in a white neighborhood.	
	018-019	At the time KFT came to study in America, there were many Chinese students but not many residents in Los Angeles.	
	020-021	There were more Chinese students than there are now.	
	022-025	KFT is from Shanghai. He was born and raised in Canton.	
	026-030	Went to high school in Canton. Very few people went to elementary school because it was public and poorly run.	
2	031-032	KFT went to private school (or "classic school"). Studied confucianism and Chinese classics.	
	033-034	Father was in business.	
	035-039	After the war, KFT returned to China and served for the United Nations doing rehabilitation work.	
	040-049	KFT went to China in 1946. Returned to the United States in 1946. Returned to U.S. in 1947. KFT hoped to finish his Ph.D.	
	050-056	When KFT returned in 1947, only intended to stay to finish his Ph.D. but after the Communist take over in China, KFT decided not to return.	
	057-063	KFT was born on February 1, 1911 in Canton and speaks Cantonese.	
	064-065	KFT was a student in Canton. He didn't work.	
	066-075	KFT majored in political science in China. Studied two years of college there. After he switched to sociology because it was impractical to study political science in the U.S. when KFT planned to return to China.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	076-081	Sociology was helpful for social or welfare work. While in the U.S., KFT's purpose was to study. Aware of events in China but didn't miss it.
	082-084	Always wrote to family in China. They sent KFT money.
	085-091	KFT didn't work in the U.S., only taught Chinese part-time in Chinese school in a Presbyterian school. This was during KFT's post-graduate years, 1936-41.
	092-097	The students were Chinese.
	098-102	KFT taught junior high school level, usually aged 13-17.
	103-108	Approximately 20 students in his class (at most). The average class had 12-15 students.
	4	109-113
114-118		KFT's first impression of Los Angeles was that it was not much different from Shanghai--which was very westernized.
119-133		Main difference was daily contact with Americans rather than Chinese students. KFT in Shanghai studied two years in political science at the University of Shanghai.
134-139		Most of KFT's contacts in the U.S. were students and professors at Chapman College.
140-141		Chapman College was previously California Christian College.
142-144		KFT is a Christian.
5	145-154	KFT has three brothers and one sister. His elder brother is in the U.S. KFT is the second son. Third brother is in Canada. Fourth brother and sister are in Hong Kong.
	155-158	KFT's first impressions of Americans was positive.
	159-164	KFT had contacts with Chinese students at USC and with the Chinese Student Association of Southern California.
	165-166	KFT thought Chinese Americans were very nice.
	167-170	There was a yearly convention and elected officers. KFT participated.
	171-175	At Chapman there were three Chinese including KFT. KFT's friends had American friends too.
	176-180	There were quite a few Blacks at Chapman but few Mexicans. KFT was friends with Blacks.
	181-183	KFT has two very close Black friends.
6	184-188	At USC KFT lived in the area.
	189-193	Later KFT and two Chinese friends rented a house one block from USC. They were from Canton.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	194-199	KFT didn't participate in any American student activities at USC or Chapman.
	200-209	KFT represented Chinese students in a conference, it was the Will Rogers World Student Conference.
	210-216	KFT spoke on behalf of the Asian students. Appointed by the dean of USC.
	217-224	KFT joined in American picnics. Enjoyed watching football and basketball.
	225-237	KFT went to homecoming parties once a year. Did not bring a date. KFT would talk, have dinner, then watch basketball games.
7	238-340	When KFT lived with the Chinese students they cooked Chinese food whenever they got together.
	241-243	Had Chinese groceries delivered. Was very cheap.
	244-246	None had cars and used buses.
	247-252	Never had American guest, had Chinese guests.
	253-257	KFT spoke delicately in English when he first arrived since he seldom spoke English in China.
	258-265	If KFT got sick, he went to a doctor at the student clinic.
	266-271	KFT didn't use Chinese medicine, even when in China.
	272-273	The doctors at Shanghai University were trained in Europe.
274-284	KFT believes in Chinese herbs but a good herbalist is hard to find in the U.S. or China.	
8	285-293	KFT got along very well with students at the Presbyterian church.
	294-301	Students were very respectful of teachers.
	302-311	KFT met with the parents of students when they have problems. 90% were from China but their children were born here.
	312-342	Most of the parents were working people. A few were businessmen, eg restaurants, (cooks, waiters), produce (workers & owners), civil service.
9	343-350	Civil servants were U.S. citizens. Some were born in China some born here.
	351-356	KFT does not know what their income was.
	357-365	KFT doesn't remember how much a pound of rice was.
	366-369	Lunch was around 25¢. Dinner about 50¢--not more than \$1.
	370-380	KFT's was similar to military service. Pay was very low.
381-385	A unit was \$10 at USC.	

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	386-395	In the last years at USC, KFT received a scholarship for two years and one year scholarships from the state department.
	396-400	KFT's parents had no way of sending him after the Sino-Japanese war.
	401-409	Rent was \$30 a month, divided by three roommates.
	410-416	Landlord was sympathetic to them because they were Chinese. Rent should have been \$35 to 40. Landlord was white.
	417-419	There was much discrimination but KFT never encountered any hostility.
	420-426	KFT lived in a lodge or rented house so the Chinese students could live together.
	427-437	There were many rooms for rent around USC, but upon inquiring Chinese students would be told that it was already taken.
	438-440	People didn't have enough contact with Chinese and this caused misunderstandings.
	441-449	With Chinese, one doesn't have to worry about noise or prompt rent payment.
	11	450-455
456-465		Discrimination was due to ignorance and misunderstandings.
466-474		KFT never had names called at him. Most of the people he associated with were educated.
475-498		Perhaps if KFT was looking for a job, he might have encountered more.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 2 Side A

1	004-020	Introduction.
	021-025	KFT was recommended to go to Colorado to teach at the Navy language school at the University of Colorado.
	026-029	Taught there less than a year. After that, OSS requested KFT's service from the Navy.
	030-034	Returned to Los Angeles after he joined the OSS in 1944. He was in Los Angeles from 1944-46.
2	035-042	Not supposed to discuss OSS.
	043-046	Those born in the US Seldom go back to China to get married.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	047-053	Roosevelt changed the Exclusion Act. Since then, American citizens can return to China to marry and bring their wife to the U.S.
	054-056	That was in the end of 1942.
	057-066	Chinese men and women met each other through school. Professional matchmakers were uncommon.
	067-079	Those that returned to China have some relative or friend who used to introduce.
3	080-085	Chinese people didn't admit it but they prefer sons. Usually would like sons and daughters but given a choice of one, they would chose a son.
	086-090	KFT would prefer sons to carry on the family name. KFT has one son.
	091-092	Son was born in 1941. Speaks Chinese as good as a China-born. Went to Chinese school.
	093-102	Grandchildren don't speak Chinese.
	103-111	There were cases of Chinese marrying Blacks, Mexicans and whites.
4	112-118	Mostly Chinese men married non-Chinese women. Chinese community didn't care who they (the men) married.
	119-126	If a Chinese married a Black, their social circle became Black.
	127-132	But different if he married a white, their friends would still be half and half. Still keep Chinese friends.
	133-147	Doesn't know why but a husband usually goes with his wife's friends.
5	148-151	It was more acceptable to marry a white American.
	152-163	Chinese don't favor marrying outside their race. Koreans and Japanese are not as discriminated against for marriage.
	164-172	The Chinese family generally does not like their children to marry outside their own people.
	173-174	KFT thinks the Chinese portrayed in films are doing good work.
	175-187	Some Chinese (in China) think the true picture is not being presented.
6	188-192	Some Chinese object to being portrayed in films with a queue, but at that time Chinese did wear queues.
	193-194	Does not mind how Chinese are shown, if it is the truth.
	195-203	There are numerous cheap pictures where the director knew very little about Chinese. This includes publications.

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2 Side A

Tape: 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	204-206	Chinese used to think civil service jobs were ideal for their children because they are secure.
	207-209	Many Chinese wanted to return to China to live.
	210-213	Before World War II, many actually did return. Especially during the Depresison for those who could not survive here.
	214-221	KFT arrived in America during the worse period of the Depression.
	222-223	During the Depression, Chinese had it pretty hard. Ate a lot of fish.
	224-227	In 1925, there were more Chinese who returned to China than those who arrived. Couldn't make it here.
	7	228-231
232-244		Laundries just cut back. Hardly making a good living.
245-252		After the Depression improved some and returned to the U.S. Some stayed in China.
253-257		Students not too affected by the Depresison.
258-259		KFT's parents were not affected when the Japanese invaded China and took over the coastal cities.
260-266		Parents fled to Hong Kong when the Japanese took Canton about 1939.
267-269		Family returned to Canton after World War II.
270-280		When the Communists took over, they returned to Hong Kong.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

Tape 3 Side A

1	004-023	Introduction.
	024-025	Most of his friends are American citizens.
	026-028	Very small percentage are Blacks, Mexican or Caucasian, about 10%.
	029-033	90% of his son's friends are American. Times are changing.
2	034-037	Influenced also by son's profession (attorney).
	038-042	Business background didn't make KFT more aggressive. Makes more speeches than any other Chinese.
	043-045	Is considered a community leader.
	046-050	Began speaking in Chapman College in speech courses.
	051-053	Joined speech tournaments.
	054-061	Speaks Chinese better than English.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	062-065 066-068	Knows how to deliver and prepare speeches. Donated to 28 organizations under CCBA.
3	069-074 078-088 089-090 091-094 095-097 098-100 101-102 103-107	Also president of "Giu-Lum" Co. Explains structure of "Giu-Lum" Co. This organization is not the biggest. Second generation is not as active as the first generation in the family association. But family associations are increasing in activity. Spring banquet is still celebrated in the old Chiense way. Every organization had this banquet for its members. Community leaders are also invited to join.
4	108-111 112-113 114-117 118-125 126-130 131-132 133-134 135-145	These banquets are social functions to meet new friends and see old friends. Second generation participates in banquets, etc, but not so much in day to day activities. Perhaps because meetings are conducted in Chinese. Day to day activities include helping out own members. eg those who go into business and need money. If one needed \$50,000 the older generation would not mind contributing \$1-5000. The money might be paid back or investors might be made stockholders. Now a days there are very few disputes for the association to settle. Now a days, people running the association understand people better when the individual is having trouble. Each leader will go back to his own association membership.
5	146-148 149-153 154-159 160-162 163-174 175-181 182-187	Now a days, there isn't trouble anymore. No tong wars in KFT's time. Tong wars were caused by "interest," eg. gambling, territory. Now organizations each have own legal advisor. Family association are not involved in gambling--only mahjong played among members. Everyone liked to donate whatever he could. Family association asked their members directly to donate.
6	188-192 193-198	Work with the OSS was confidential and directly under the war department. Intercepted Japanese messages.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	199-202	Only two stations: one here and one in New York.
	203-207	Messages were coded but translated into English.
	208-211	Were Chinese messages sent by Japanese puppet government in China.
	212-213	There were fifteen in the Chinese unit of the OSS.
	214-215	Was a paying job.
	216-221	Citizenship not necessary but one had to be a citizen of an ally
7	222-228	Not all Japanese were in interment camps--were sent back from Denver and other places to do this type of work.
	229-238	Was mistaken for Japanese e.g. on public transportation. Wore a button to designate that one was Chinese for own protection.
	239-245	Protected them against violence or insults of a drunk. Japanese so cruel to Chinese in occupied territory that no one sympathized with the Japanese Americans.
	246-263	Knew Japanese were Americans and the Japanese Americans should have been treated differently from the Japanese in Japan.
	264-268	The same thing was not done to German American though we were at war with Germany.
	269-278	It was unfair to the Japanese Americans. didn't protest because it was none of their business to do so.
8	279-282	KFT's father was a businessman in Canton. Died when KFT was six.
	283-288	Family was well-to-do. Had land. Mother did not have to work.
	289-295	Land was in the countryside. Family never visited.
	296-303	Grandfather was from that village. Called "Sun-duck--gum-juk".
	304-309	"Sun-duck" is country, "gum-juk" is district.
	310-312	Village called "Gut-yun-fong."
9	313-328	There is a shrine in front of the village because of one of the ancestors was a high official (who had passed the civil service exams.)
	329-333	Village not too big. Family goes back five generations. Every son has own land and a pond.
	334-348	Pond is necessary for water storage and farming.
	349-352	Wells not large enough to farm a large piece of land.
	353-355	Drinking water was from the well.
	356-369	"Sun-duck" is very close to Cantonese (Sam-yup) dialect.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	370-374	Intended to return to China to marry while studying here, but war made it difficult.
	375-380	Married in 1940.
	381-383	Wife born in San Francisco.
10	384-387	Could not write to family to notify them of his marriage.
	388-396	Received a scholarship for research money, etc. Supported self.
	397-399	Family did not react adversely to his marriage.
	400-406	None of brothers married through matchmaking.
	407-414	Mother never expressed a preference for him to marry a girl from China rather than a girl born here.
	415-416	Attitudes towards marriage weren't objectionable as long as they were Chinese, regardless of being born here or in China.
	417-421	Wife speaks Chinese.
	422-427	In former times 90% of all American born Chinese spoke fluent Chinese as good as that spoken in Canton.
	428-433	Wife writes Chinese but not big in conversational Chinese.
	434-440	KFT speaks Chinese and English interchangeably at home to his children.
441-443	Son went to Chinese school.	
444-448	Second generation usually knows Chinese pretty good.	
11	449-457	Third generation doesn't always have the opportunity.
	458-466	Must speak English to son sometimes to be understood--some Chinese terms are too difficult.
	467-469	Son's wife speaks very little Chinese. Born in Portland.

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