

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Dick Tom Interview Number: 84
 Chinese Name: 譚石菴 Number of Tapes: 3
 Date of Interview: 2/13/80, 4/2/80 Length: 1 Hour & 51 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-005	Introduction.	
	006-013	Parents were in China when Dick Tom (DT) was born.	
	014-020	DT was born in Toishan in 1902. Came to the U.S. in 1921.	
	021-027	Father was in the laundry and restaurant businesses in Los Angeles.	
	028-029 030-032	Mother never came to the U.S. Had two brothers and one sister.	
2	033-038	Spoke Chinese with father.	
	039-049	DT went to night school in the Lutheran Church in old Chinatown for less than a year. No chance to go to school.	
	050-070	DT went to grammar school in Toishan. Then quit school to come to America.	
3	071-083	Father had a grocery store (Wing Chung Lung) in old Chinatown. When the old Chinatown was condemned, they moved to the present location on 9th Street.	
	084-086	DT worked with his father and continued the business after his father passed away.	
	087-096	Because of the immigration laws, mother was not allowed to come.	
	097-099	After World War II, it was easier to immigrate to the U.S. but DT's mother got too old and did not want to come. DT had to visit her in China.	
	100-101	Mother was a housewife.	
	102-116	DT lived in the back of a store. Father and brothers all lived in different places.	
4	117-128	The room he had in the store was about nine feet by ten feet. The store size was about 40 by 75.	

Interviewee: Dick Tom

Page: 2

1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	129-153	DT managed the store with his father and uncles. The business was started by his grandfather with 50 dollars. The rest of the capital was invested by other laundrymen, etc. Fifty or one hundred dollars each. Grandfather took care of the business. The laundrymen were cousins and relatives.
5	154-165	One half of the profits were reinvested in the store business.
	166-168	Sold Chinese groceries and some Chinese herbs.
	169-180	DT used both Chinese and American doctors. The older people drank Leong Tsa (涼茶).
	181-190	DT missed China. He went back to China after world War II several times.
6	191-194	DT got married in Los Angeles. Wife was from China.
	195-202	A lot of Chinese went back to China to get married.
	203-207	The old parents didn't like the girls who were too Americanized.
	208-216	DT's marriage was matched by both parents. DT got married in 1929.
	217-244	DT has nine children. Three or four of them were sent back to China for an education. A couple of the younger ones didn't stay and came back with their mother. Three of them stayed for an education.
7	245-249	DT hired a Chinese tutor to teach the children a couple of hours at night.
	250-264	DT felt that Chinese had very little chance to do anything in America. There were more chances to do business with Chinese.
	265-270	Most of DT's friends came from Toishan.
	271-283	DT hired ten to fifteen employees: salespersons, cooks, warehouse workers.
8	284-291	Most of the groceries came from Hong Kong.
	292-309	DT owned a produce market as well as an asparagus farm. DT had over 100 acres of farmland in Laguna Beach. Hired over 100 workers to work in the field. Grew beans and tomatoes.
	310-318	DT had his own produce market called Wah Fay. DT sold the produce market before the 1950's.
	319-325	DT started the produce business during World war II while the Japanese were in the concentration camps.

Interviewee: Dick Tom

Page: 3

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	326-337	DT worked 15 to 16 hours a day both in the store and in the market.
	338-345	DT's children felt both American and Chinese.
	346-351	Played mahjong but did not gamble.
	352-362	There used to be a lot of Chinese gambling houses for laundrymen and restaurant workers.
	363-371	DT didn't have much spare time.
	372-376	Once or twice a year went to American movies.
	377-382	DT only watched TV news.
10	383-388	DT knew the Pai Gau game but didn't play it.
	389-410	Closed the store one day for Chinese New Years. DT still worked in the store taking inventory and never had a vacation.
	411-427	Wife was a housewife. They had a cook in th store so his wife didn't have to cook.
	428-442	Giving Lai Shee (利 是) was a Chinese custom on New Years.
	443-471	After getting married, DT bought a house on 24th Street near San Pedro Street. Chinese had no chance to buy a house in a white neighborhood.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	003-016	In the white neighborhoods, when the white people looked at Chinese, they acted funny. There were Mr. Albert Quan, Mr. Louie of Louie Produce, and a few Chinese who lived in DT's neighborhood.
	017-033	When they first moved into the neighborhood, it was difficult for the whites. After a while the neighbors understood more about Chinese and it was alright.
2	034-038	Owned some commercial properties but had no problems with them.
	039-052	Didn't run into any other discriminative incident.
	053-056	DT seldom went to night clubs.
	057-065	Children never told him any discrimination against them.
	066-072	DT wrote to and sent money to his mother, as well as relatives when it was needed.
3	073-081	DT was a member of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA), and CCBA and helped the building of the CCBA new building and the Chung Wah School.

Interviewee: Dick Tom

Page: 4

1 Side B

Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	082-088	DT felt it was necessary to join CACA to fight against discriminatory laws.
	089-103	Also joined DT's Four Families Association. Tom Hom Huei Tsei families Association (譚 許 謝). The association had DT as president for many terms.
4	104-124	The association had meetings once a month and held picnics for the family members. There were also women in the club.
	125-135	DT was an American citizen because his father was an American citizen.
	136-158	It was a tough time during the Depression. DT kept all the workers but had smaller profits for about ten years.
5	159-180	Farming, restaurant working, service jobs were the major Chinese occupations. during the Depression they got less pay. DT had cut the wages of his employees.
	181-189	During the Depression, a roast beef dinner cost 35¢.
6	190-199	In the 1920's, DT started with \$50 a month. It was an ordinary income.
	200-205	DT sent most of his money to his mother.
	206-217	A loaf of bread cost about 5 to 7¢.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	001-013	All the single employees lived in one small living quarter. They sent their money to their families in China or if they wanted to gamble, they gambled with their money.
	014-016	The money was sent back to China to support the family's living.
	017-028	DT's family bought farm land. The farmers paid rice for the rent. Family owned five or six (mou 畝). The family got enough rice for supplies.
	029-054	Lew Sing Kai was a prominent person. Peter SooHoo was an engineer and president of CACA, a nice person. Thomas Wong was the president of Chung Wah. T.B. Chew was a Chinese herbal doctor. They were well-known.
2	055-064	People who wanted power tried to control two tongs in Los Angeles: Hop Sing Tong and Bing Kong Tong.
	065-080	Chinese mostly liked to stay around Chinatown. Some Chinese naturally wanted to move to a better place to live if they could afford it.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	081-084	People lived in Chinatown because of finance and sometimes because of language.
	085-100	During the Sino-Japanese War, DT and Thomas Wong and CCBA officers organized a Kong Yit Wei (抗日會) [Anti-Japanese Association].
	101-103	Most people sent money back to China.
4	104-134	Jewish people are good business people. Chinese worked longer hours in business. Jewish people are smart people. DT did a lot of business with Jews. They respected each other and got along very well.
	135-156	Most Chinese got married through a matchmaker. Most of them went back to China for marriage. Two daughters-in-law from China, one was born in America, one from Korea.
5	157-171	Interracial marriages in the 1940's wasn't popular. Children are free to choose their mates.
	172-177	DT didn't prefer having either a son or daughter. A lot of Chinese did want to have a son.
	178-185	There were not many Chinese girls in America, that's why Chinese had to go back to get married.
6	186-193	Chinese married to whites, blacks and people of other ethnic backgrounds, people didn't care.
	194-202	DT thought most parents thought it was important to have a Chinese education.
	203-206	DT didn't think about going back to China to live.
	207-211	More education the better for a person.
	212-232	A few Chinese wanted to return to China to live. Most of the time when a Chinese got old, they wanted to live in China with their family after a long separation. Never divorce.
7	233-246	Sometimes some Chinese had more than one wife. Father had two wives. Mother knew about it but what could she do?
	247-250	DT seldom watched movies.
	251-266	"In our age, we worked hard and we don't want our children to work the same way," said DT. DT's children learned commerce in USC and now helped in his grocery store and restaurant business.
	267-277	To be an engineer, a doctor can make more money and is an ideal job.

Interviewee: Dick Tom

Page: 6

Tape: 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	278-285	DT had two sons-in-laws who are doctors, two sons who are lawyers. DT thought it was better than a businessman.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

Tape 3 Side A

1	001-003 004-017 018-022 023-030 031-033	Introduction. Economically, Chinese did pretty well today. Compared to other, Chinese did better. DT is very proud of being a Chinese. Chinese always like to have their own business. Chinese give their children all the education they want.
2	033-041 042-049 050-053 054-064 065-071	Parents cannot force their children to be what they want them to be. Wing Chong Lung was a grocery store selling mostly Chinese groceries and a little American items. Has American customers too. Wing Chong Lung was originally located on 752 N. Alameda Street. Grandfather used to be in the laundry business, then organized Wing Chong Lung. Grandfather came to the U.S. about 30 years before DT was born. Grandfather came to the U.S. looking for a job.
3	072-076 077-091 092-108	Grandfather first worked for other people in the laundry. Around 1880 Wing Chong Lung was founded. DT had a butcher shop in the store. The store supplied restaurants groceries. Wing Chong Lung started the bean sprout business.
4	109-114 115-122 123-135 136-143	The store also made barbeque pork. Grandfather's partners were cousins and relatives. During the Depression the business was bad. Wing Chong Lung went bankrupt many times. Gradually, business went bad so some partners left. After DT took over, he gradually bought the other partners' shares.
5	144-155	DT started with \$50 a month. Some people got \$30 a month. DT worked fifteen to sixteen hours. No Sundays and holidays.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	156-168	When DT came over in 1921, there were about six or seven partners. Some owned one hundred dollars, some two hundred dollars.
	169-176	After grandfather passed away DT continued the business.
	177-183	The store only hired relatives in the early days.
6	184-197	The store hired butchers and a cook. The employees lived in a warehouse on the next street. Grandfather used to live in the
	198-202	Grandmother never came to the U.S.
	203-209	DT helped grandfather take care of the bean sprouts when he first arrived in Los Angeles.
	210-220	DT described how to make bean sprouts.
	221-224	DT helped in the butcher shop and in making barbecue pork.
	225-239	DT used a Chinese bookkeeping method. DT learned how to do bookkeeping himself.
7	240-245	DT felt he was a typical Chinese.
	246-258	Very few Chinese had their own business.
	259-270	DT started his produce business during the war.
	271-286	After the Japanese came back from the concentration camps, DT sold his produce business to a Japanese.
8	287-320	In the 1920's, Wing Chong Lung imported Chinese groceries.
	321-349	The store also sold restaurant food, such as water chestnuts, bamboo shoots, and soy sauce.
9	350-363	At the most, the store hired fifteen to twenty employees and had three or four trucks deliver to the restaurants.
	364-386	Ten years ago, DT's salary was \$150 a month, his employees got \$75 to \$125 a month. Maybe twenty years ago, or in 1935-1945.
10	387-400	The store now is about 80 feet by 160 feet. Today the store has more business.
	401-416	When the old Chinatown was torn down, DT chose San Pedro Street area because it was near the produce market and a large Chinese community was there. There he could get away from the competition of Chinatown.
	417-452	Now the store's hours are from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM Monday through Saturday, and 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM. In the early days, the store was opened around 8:00 AM and closed around 7:00 PM. Because of the labor laws the store adjusted the hours.

Interviewee: Dick Tom

Page: 8

3 Side A

Tape: 3 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	453-461	Now the store has a woman cashier. DT's daughter-in-law works there too. There were no women employees in the early days.
	462-470	Employees were both single and married. The married one left wife in China.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A

Tape 3 Side B

1	001-002	Most of the people had wives in China.
	003-011	If a good person, he would go back to China once every four or five years to see the family. Some people did not go back to China at all. They played and gambled their money away.
	012-026	Sometimes the employees never got paid and got money once a year. Every time they needed money they got it from the store and used credit. They didn't use a bank.
	027-031	There was a very simple income tax form in the early days. There was no problem.
	032-042	The partners paid income tax but there wasn't much income.
2	043-052	Today one has to pay income tax.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

- Agriculture
 crops, 1A:8
 Americanization, 1A:6
 Anti Japanese Association, 2A:3
 Asparagus farm, 1A:8

 Bean Sprouts business, 3A:3, 6
 Bing Kong Tong, 2A:2

 Celebrations and Holidays
 gifts given during, 1A:10
 Chew, T. B., 2A:1
 Children
 preference for sons, 2A:5
 China
 agriculture in, 2A:1
 education in, 1A:2,
 investments by Chinese Americans
 in, 2A:1
 money sent back to, 1B:2, 6;
 2A:1, 3
 return to, 1A:5; 2A:6; 3B:1
 Chinatown (Los Angeles)
 housing in, 1A:4
 leaders of, 2A:1
 Chinatown
 businesses in, 1A:3
 Chinese American Citizens Alliance
 1B:3
 and immigration laws, 1B:3
 officers of, 2A:1
 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent
 Association, 1B:3; 2A:1
 Chinese New Year
 gifts given during, 1A:10
 Chinese language
 in homes, 1A:2
 learning of, 1A:7
 importance of, 2A:6
 Chinese schools
 importance of, 2A:6
 sponsors of, 1B:3
 Chung Wah School, 1B:3
 Citizenship, 1B:4
 Correspondence
 with friends and family in
 China, 1B:2
 Cost of living, 1B:5-6

 Depression, economic (1929-1939), 1B:4
 and incomes, 1B:5

 Discrimination, 1B:2
 in housing, 1A:10; 1B:1
 Divorce, 2A:6

 Education
 children sent to China for, 1A:6
 importance of, 3A:1
 in China, 1A:2
 English language
 learning of, 1A:2
 Ethnic identity
 Chinese vs. American, 1A:9; 3A:7
 pride in, 3A:1

 Families and family life
 languages spoken in, 1A:2
 members remaining in China, 1A:3;
 1B:2
 size of, 1A:1, 6
 women's roles in, 1A:3
 Farming, 1A:8
 Friendships
 among Chinese Americans, 1A:7
 with other ethnic groups, 2A:4

 Gambling, 2A:1; 3B:1
 Gambling, popularity of, 1A:9,
 Games, 1A:9-10
 Grocery stores
 customers of, 3A:8
 ethnicity of, 3A:2
 family involvement in, 1A:3-4, 6
 investment in, 1A:4
 location of, 1A:3; 3A:2, 10
 merchandise of, 1A:5; 3A:2, 3
 partnerships in, 1A:4
 profitability of, 1A:4
 size of, 3A:10
 suppliers for, 1A:8; 3A:8
 workers in, 1A:7; 3A:6
 wages earned by, 3A:5
 working hours in, 1A:9-10; 3A:5

 Hop Sing Tong, 2A:2
 Housing patterns, 1B:1
 Chinese American clustering
 2A:2
 among bachelors, 2A:1
 and discrimination, 1A:10; 1B:1
 structure size, 1A:4

- Immigrants and immigration
 among wives, 1A:3
 arrival, 1A:1
 families separated by, 1A:3;
 3A:11; 3B:1
 reasons for, 3A:2
- Income Tax, 3B:1
- Incomes, 1B:5-6; 3A:5, 9
 expenses compared to, 1B:5-6
- Interracial marriages
 acceptance of, 2A:6
 attitudes toward, 2A:5
- Jews
 Chinese Americans compared to
 2A:4
- Kong Yit Wei, 2A:3
- Laguna Beach, California
 Chinese Americans in, 1A:8
- Lai Shee, 1A:10
- Leisure-time activities, 1A:9
- Lew, Sing Kai, 2A:1
- Lutheran Church, 1A:2
- Mahjong, 1A:9
- Marriages
 in China, 1A:6; 2A:4
- Marriages, in China, 2A:4
 mate selection patterns in
 1A:6; 2A:4
- Matchmakers, 2A:4
- Medical practices
 Chinese medicine vs. Western
 medicine, 1A:5
- Neighborhoods, 1A:10; 1B:1
- Occupation patterns, 1B:5; 2A:8
 among women, 3A:11
 and discrimination, 1A:7
 and ideal job, 2A:7
 family influence upon, 2A:7;
 3A:2
- Pai Gau, 1A:10
- Polygamy, 2A:7
- Produce business, 1A:8
- Prominent families and individuals
 2A:1
- Property ownership
 commercial, 1B:2
- Quan, Albert, 1B:1
- Recreation, 1A:9; 2A:7
- Remittance, 1B:2, 6; 2A:1
- Savings, 3B:1
- SooHoo, Peter, 2A:1
- Toishan, Canton, China, 1A:1
- Tom Hom Huei Tsei Family
 Association, 1B:3-4
- Tom, Dick
 birth of, 1A:1
 businesses owned by, 1A:8; 3A:4
 children of, 1A:6; 2A:4, 7
 courtship and marriage of, 1A:6
 education of, 1A:2
 ethnic identity of, 3A:7
 father of, 1A:1, 3; 1B:4
 friendships of, 1A:7
 grandfather of, 1A:4; 3A:2-3
 mother of, 1A:1, 4; 1B:2
 organizations involved in, 1B:3
 recreational activities of, 1A:9
 residences of, 1A:3-4, 10
 return to China by, 1A:5
 wife of, 1A:5
 working experiences of
 1A:3-4, 10; 3A:5, 6
- Tutors, 1A:7,
- University of Southern California
 2A:7
- Way Fay, 1A:8
- Wing Chong Lung, 1A:3
 customers of, 3A:8
 ethnicity of, 3A:2
 employees in, 1A:7; 3A:6, 9, 11
 wages earned by, 3A:9
 family involvement in, 3A:6
 history of, 3A:3
 location of, 3A:2, 10
 merchandise of, 1A:5; 3A:2
 partnership in, 1A:4; 3A:3, 5
 profitability of, 1A:5
 size of, 3A:10
 suppliers for, 3A:8

- Wing Chong Lung
 - women's roles in, 3A:11
 - working hours in, 3A:5, 10
- Women
 - family roles of, 1A:3, 10
 - occupation patterns among, 3A:11
 - remaining in China, 1A:3
- Wong, Thomas, 2A:1, 3
- World War II
 - occupational changes brought about by, 1A:8