

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Maye Wong Interview Number: 34
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 3
 Date of Interview: 2/13/79, 5/8/82 Length: 2 Hours & 24 Minutes
 Interviewer: Jean Wong & Emma Louie
 Others Present: Barbara & Jean Wong Lee
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-015 016-020 021-023 024-030 031-038	Introduction. Maye Wong (MW) was born in 1900. Father came from China in 1870s. Mother was born in Santa Barbara. Father first came to San Francisco, and soon after he came to Los Angeles and opened a cigar store. Later he went into the Chinese grocery business. Parents got married in Los Angeles. Father had his grocery store in Old Chinatown until the 1940s.	
2	039-042 043-051 052-056 057-069	The store was on Apablasa Street. After the old Chinatown was torn down, father moved to Spring Street. From there they moved to new Chinatown in 1938. Father did most of the work himself. He hired one or two helpers. There was no store hours for Chinese tores in those days. MW helped in the store when she was old enough. MW has nine brothers and sisters. The oldest brother graduated from USC and worked for the Department of Water and Power for twenty years until he passed away. He was the founder of the new Chinatown. He passed away in 1945.	
3	070-072 073-083 084-093	Peter SooHoo's wife was the Chinese vice consul. All of MW's other brothers and sisters went to school and got married. One sister worked as a cashier for a produce house for twenty years. One sister worked for a school. All the other sisters married and owned restaurants. MW lived in Chinatown until she was married in 1920. She went to the old Los Angeles High School. She quit school after two years of high school and helped her father.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	094-103	MW wanted to go to college but her father could not afford it. MW was the only one who helped her father in the store.
	104-110	MW married Thomas Wong who owned a produce house in the wholesale produce market. In those days the produce market was considered a good business.
4	111-113	MW has one daughter who is a school teacher. MW has four granddaughters.
	114-117	MW did not have to work because her husband did very well in business.
	118-122	MW joined clubs and went to lunches.
	123-133	One of her brothers decided to open a florist shop in Chinatown with MW. MW enjoyed the work.
	134-137	Most of MW's customers were Chinese.
	138-148	MW spoke Chinese at home. MW went to an American school and did not go to Chinese school. Daughter spoke Chinese but not the granddaughters.
5	149-153	MW lived in Chinatown so associated mostly with Chinese students.
	154-161	MW got along very well with non-Chinese.
	162-173	MW never felt sorry for being Chinese.
	174-184	MW's family used Chinese herbs in cooking. The family used a western doctor.
6	185-199	When young, MW played with balls and dolls. Mother was born in America and was quite Americanized. MW still believed in Chinese culture.
	200-204	MW was in China last year on a tour.
	205-208	MW never went to Chinese school, but her brothers did.
	209-214	Father wrote to China.
	215-227	In the early days, there were only gift shops, restaurants, and meat shops.
	228-249	MW belonged to the Wong Family Association. Women don't pay dues. Men pay five dollars for dues. People join the family association to get to know their own people. The Wong Family Association was one of the largest family associations. The association held a banquet once a year or so.
7	250-274	In the old days, the family association used to provide meals for the new comers or old people, usually men.
	275-287	When father came as a 12 year old boy, he used to go to the SocHoo Family Association to get acquainted with the people and also ate there.

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1 Side A
Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	288-313	Brother Peter SooHoo was the most prominent person in Los Angeles Chinatown. He was the founder of the New Chinatown, the past secretary of CCBA, and the past president of CACA.
	314-321	Chinese engaged in owning gift shops, restaurants, groceries, laundries, and produce businesses.
	322-328	The laundry business was a predominant Chinese business.
9	329-349	MW's husband had his own business, MW didn't remember his income. His produce business was a big business before World War II.
	350-361	Chinese lived in Chinatown. Just right before World War II, some Chinese moved out to the San Pedro area. Later, Chinese moved all over the city.
	362-387	In the old days people wouldn't talk about how much they made. MW and her husband were one of the first Chinese to move out of Chinatown. They have lived in Hollywood since the 1940s.
10	388-398	The younger Chinese live all over the city, while the old Chinese like to stay close to other Chinese.
	399-404	In the old days, Chinese saved money to return to China. After the Communists took over, they knew they could not go back and started settling in America.
	405-411	Chinese would send money to their relatives in China.
	412-418	The younger generation had no desire to go back to China.
	419-427	MW didn't know anyone who was involved in politics.
	428-440	A big reception was held for Madame Chiang Kai-shek when she came to Los Angeles.
11	441-463	Around twenty-five percent of the Chinese population used a paper name
	464-469	Chinese had an obligation to their families and relatives in China.
	470-477	Chinese were not affected by the Depression, because Chinese always had their own small businesses and did not buy stocks.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A		
1	001-017	Blank.
	018-035	MW's family business was not affected by the Depression. There was not enough work in the movie industry. Chinese who worked in the movie industry always had to take on extra work other than acting.

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1 Side B
Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	036-050	MW never felt any hostility toward her because she never applied for any job. MW's brother had no problem getting a job.
	051-059	MW thinks that Chinese have done rather well in general.
	060-068	MW never knew any comparison made between Chinese and Jewish people.
3	069-080	Some Chinese found their wives through a matchmaker. The American born Chinese found their own wives.
	081-090	Some China born Chinese married American born Chinese, some went back to China to marry there.
	091-094	Everyone would like to have a son.
	095-111	In the old days, people didn't think much of interracial marriages. Interracial marriages have become more common. MW knew a lot of interracial married cases.
4	112-124	Most Chinese liked to have their children learn Chinese. Daughter went to Chinese school for a short time because the family lived quite far away from Chinatown.
	125-133	All the old people wanted to go back to China if they could make enough money.
	134-152	The way Chinese were portrayed in American movies was partially correct. There was no protest against the way Chinese were portrayed.
5	153-161	MW didn't think Chinese should be embarrassed by being Chinese.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	001-006	Introduction.
	007-021	MW was born in Los Angeles. Father's name was SooHoo Leung. Mother's name was Yee Oi. Father was born in Huiping, Canton, China. Mother was born in Santa Barbara. They got married through a matchmaker.
	022-025	MW was born in 1901 and was the third child in a family of nine.
	026-037	Father had a dry goods store. He came to America in 1872. He stayed in San Francisco. A few years later he came to Los Angeles.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	038-050	Father married at the age of 34. His store was on Apablasa Street. The family lived in another house on the same street.
	051-058	The Long family next door moved to San Diego. The Gospel Mission was next door to the SooHoo's residence.
	059-069	The SooHoo children went to the Chinese Presbyterian Church English school on Juan Street.
3	070-076	MW went to Macy Street School and Los Angeles High School.
	077-085	The family moved in 1938.
	085-091	Brother Peter SooHoo graduated from USC and worked for the Department of Water and Power.
	092-095	One brother had a security patrol service in Chinatown.
	096-097	Younger sister went to UCLA.
	098-103 104-111	MW didn't join any organizations until she got married. The family observed both Chinese and American holidays. Mother taught children all the Chinese customs.
4	112-119	The SooHoo Family Association was not formed until MW grew up.
	120-128	Most of MW's friends were Chinese. MW played around with the neighbor's children.
	129-133	MW married in the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church.
	134-137	MW's only child Barbara Jean was well-known in the Chinese community.
	138-151	MW had many friends and decided to organize the Chinese Women's Club. The Federation of Los Angeles Women's Club invited the Chinese Women's Club to become a member in 1940.
5	152-160	There were 14 members of the Chinese Women's Club at the beginning. Some of them were American born and some were from Hong Kong.
	161-186	The Club gave scholarships to Chinese boys and girls. The Club donated \$1600 for scholarships every year to high school students. The scholarship fund was raised by selling cook books, luncheons, etc.
6	187-195	The Club used to send representatives to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.
	196-218	The daughters of the Club members later became members of the Los Angeles Chinese Women's Club Juniors which was organized by the Senior members.
	219-228	The Juniors group did a lot of community service activities.

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Tape: 2 Side A
2 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	229-242	The Club has a luncheon every year. There are about 35 members of the Juniors.
	243-275	Father's store was named Sang Yuen. The store sold Chinese dry goods and was a grocery store. The store was moved to Spring Street right next to the Chinese theatre. It was closed in the 1940s.
	276-293	Brother was a friend of Herbert Lapham of the Santa Fe Railway company. The two worked together on the new Chinatown project.
8	294-316	Husband's produce market, Superior Produce, was located the Terminal Market. He was originally with the Thomas G. Chong Company in 1920.
	317-331	The produce was from the Los Angeles area.
9	332-339	Outside of Chinatown, many Chinese were in the produce business.
	340-396	The other family members had restaurants in new Chinatown. MW and a cousin had a Chinese Restaurant, Lotus Inn, in China City. Business was very good. The restaurant seated 100 people.
10	397-430	The small stores and booths inside of China City were set up by Mrs. Sterling. MW's restaurant was on Spring Street.
	431-447	MW's restaurant was not burned during the fire.
	448-462	MW sold her place in 1944.
11	463-478	There were either 11 or 19 people who bought in the new Chinatown lot. Peter SooHoo bought a lot too. The Los Angeles Chinatown Corporation owned some property. The new Chinatown has expanded in many directions.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	001-014	The East Gate of Chinatown was built by Y.C. Hong in memory of his mother.
	015-020	Hill Street used to be Castelar Street.
	021-024	The stores on Spring Street were all individually owned. All the Chinese merchants belonged to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.
	025-037	People talked about tearing down the old Chinatown for a long time before they actually tore down Chinatown.
2	038-044	The ones who could not afford to buy in the new Chinatown area stayed in China City where the rent was cheaper.

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2 Side B

Tape: 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	045-059	There were Italian people on Spring Street. They rented the stores to Chinese.
	060-070	MW's restaurant was built as a part of China City. Father's store on Spring Street was an old building.
3	071-091	After the new Chinatown was built, both MW and father moved to the new Chinatown. Father lived in an apartment.
	092-114	The SooHoo family was very proud of Peter SooHoo's accomplishments. Tvey Far Low, General Lee's, and Y.C. Hong all moved to new Chinatown.
4	115-125	MW is also active in the Mei Wah Club. A group of Chinese girls were playing basketball at the International Institute and needed a sponsor. MW became the sponsor for the girls.
	126-139	In the early days, the Mei Wah girls played basketball. Now the girls are married. They raised money for scholarships, the Alpine Playground, Chinese churches, and the Chinatown Library.
	140-147	The group raised money by holding carnivals, fashion shows, and other activities.
5	148-157	The Mei Wah Club was founded in 1932. Dora SooHoo was an original charter member. MW's brother, David SooHoo, started the Chinese Girls Drum Corps in 1938.
	158-172	The Chinese Girls Drum Corps was in existence for fifteen years. The group performed all over in the city.
	173-178.	After the girls all got married, the group disbanded.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

1	001-003	Introduction
	004-020	The last performance of the Chinese Girls Drum Corps was at the CCBA building dedication in 1952. Barbara Jean Wong was the majorette for the Drum Corps.
	021-033	Both MW and her daughter were very active in community activities.
2	034-068	Barbara Jean Wong Lee has been the coordinator for the yearly "Miss Los Angeles Chinatown" Beauty Pageant for fourteen years. Barbara explained the procedure of selecting Miss Chinatown. It encouraged young Chinese women to participate in the Chinese community

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	034-068	activities, to develop more knowledge of their own cultural background, and to develop self-confidence.
3	069-077	To encourage more interests in participation by a community organization, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce created a sponsorship program for the Miss Chinatown Pageant.
	078-089	Barbara reorganized the pageant. For a while there were several Miss Teenage Chinatown Pageants.
	090-109	Miss Los Angeles Chinatown was then participating in the Miss Chinatown USA Pageant in San Francisco.
4	110-141	The criteria for the contestants were described. The Miss Los Angeles Chinatown has one year to prepare for the Miss Chinatown USA Pageant, especially for the talent contest.
5	142-154	The first year Barbara was involved in the Pageant, the luncheon had 250 to 300 guests. It was so successful, they decided to hold the pageant in a hotel restaurant. Now, at least 800 to 1000 people participate in the event.
	155-167	Barbara used to perform as a child. She is also active in the church and many service groups.
	168-180	Barbara spoke half Chinese and half English. Now Barbara basically speaks English.
	181-185	When MW was a child there was no church sponsored Chinese school.
6	186-189	Barbara went to the Presbyterian Church Chinese school for one semester. She took up Mandarin at USC.
	190-202	Barbara was raised in Hollywood. Most of her friends were non-Chinese. Mother always took her back to Chinatown and Chinese churches so she never lost contacts with Chinese people.
	203-206	Barbara belongs to the Chinese Presbyterian Church.
	207-220	Barbara went to Columbia University and met her husband in New York. She majored in drama at USC. She majored in English and Theatre Arts at Columbia.
	221-249	Barbara was the first Chinese on radio. She was a child actress in the radio program called "Uncle Whoa Bill."
7	250-293	Barbara started her career as a radio actress at CBS. She was in her first commercial at the age of 5. Barbara did not have any agent. She worked until television came in. She worked in some films and theatre works until her children were born.

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3 Side A

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	294-305	Barbara has four daughters who also appeared in plays when they were young.
	306-315	Barbara's oldest daughter is a counselor in high school. She graduated from USC. Her second daughter graduated from UCLA and manages a women's wear boutique. Her third daughter is a senior at California State University, Los Angeles. Her youngest daughter is in graphic design at Cal State, Long Beach.
	316-334	Chinese have a long way to go although they have made progress.
9	335-389	Barbara felt that she was always treated fairly, especially on the radio. She did not play Chinese roles. She played all roles. She played the part of Amos' daughter on the Amos 'n Andy radio show. She could follow all kinds of accents.
10	390-401	Barbara can still recall all the accents.
	402-455	Harold Fong was another Chinese who worked in radio. She was in the profession until she was married.
	456-469	Bessie Loo was Barbara's agent for her TV career.
	470-484	Barbara is now a teacher at Los Feliz Elementary School.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A

1	001-010	It is wonderful to be able to hear different languages. That is why Barbara teaches English to people who have different language backgrounds.
	011-016	Barbara's daughter did not have a Chinese language education. The oldest understands Cantonese.
	017-022	MW has a flower shop in Chinatown. She has to deal with Chinese speaking people.
	023-043	MW has her flower shop for thirty years. More new immigrants are in Chinatown. There are fewer and fewer Cantonese speaking people in Chinatown. One half of the Chinatown businesses are owned by Vietnamese.
2	044-052	MW serves her own old customers who are not necessarily from Chinatown.
	053-072	There have been funeral processions passing through Chinatown.
3	073-091	Barbara hopes that the younger generation would continue to remember their culture and to continue to learn more about their culture.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	092-109	MW showed a picture of the Los Angeles Mei Wah Girls in front of the CCBA new building grand opening. It was the Mei Wah Drum Corps' last performance. Barbara explained the relationships between the Mei Wah Club and the Girls Drum Corps.
4	110-149	MW showed a picture taken in 1945. Lily SocHoo was the first and only American born Chinese woman to be named as a consul to China. Lily's last name was Tom Leung. Christine Ung is a granddaughter of MW's sister.
5	150-162	MW explained the people in her family album. Lucile Yee was one of the first Chinese women directors of the Los Angeles Chinatown Corporation.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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