

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Lillian Fong Interview Number: 66  
 Chinese Name: 方惠蘭 Number of Tapes: 1  
 Date of Interview: 1/28/80 Length: 54 Minutes  
 Interviewers: S. Cheng & B. Sam  
 Others Present: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Mee Jin Chen

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	001-024	Lillian Fong's (LF) Chinese name is Hue Lan Fong. She lived in Los Angeles all her life. She was born on January 11, 1925 in Los Angeles.		
	025-027	Her mother was born in China and her father was born in Hawaii. Her father had a Chinese herb store in Los Angeles. Her father came to Los Angeles around 1910 and died in 1953. He came to Los Angeles to make a living. At home, LF's family spoke Lun Dung dialect and outside they spoke English.		
2	028-033	LF went to 17th Street School first, and then to John Adam Junior High School, Rice School, and Polytechnic School. She graduated with the class of 1943 and went there for three years.		
	034-045	LF is retired right now. She worked all her life as a clerk, she cracked walnuts, and she worked as a waitress. She worked at Texaco, temporary services, and worked in the civil service and state agencies.		
	046-056	LF associates mostly with Chinese. But at work she gets along with Black and Hispanic people.		
	057-061	LF feels more American than Chinese. She is glad to be a Chinese rather than a black.		
	062-065	LF has two older brothers who are both married. There were no disagreements as to being a Chinese or an American.		
3	066-068	LF is different from the other Chinese Americans because she did not get married, she has no children and she retired at 51½.		
	069-083	When LF's family got sick, they had to take Chinese herbs instead of Western medicines. Sometimes they drank		

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	069-083	a Chinese herb drink. There were Chinese herbs added for nutrition and strength to some of their meals.
	084-094	They played the phonograph for entertainment but never played mahjong because they did not believe in gambling. They did not go to any ball games or movies. They went to some Chinese operas and movies but not too often.
4	095-117	LF's parents corresponded with friends and relatives in China. LF's father belonged to an association called the "Sung Ying Tong" in the 1940's but it is not in existence today. He did attend all the meetings all the time and women were not allowed to be members.
	118-124	Prominent Chinese in Los Angeles before the War were Dr. Lee, the dentist in Chinatown who has two sons who are also dentists. Both Dr. Lee and one of his sons are dead now. Dr. Alfred Lee is semi-retired now.
	125-138	Before the War, most of the Chinese were engaged in the hand laundry business. Some had stores selling Chinese <b>souvenirs</b> . LF's oldest brother works for Occidental doing accounting and the second oldest brother works for Douglas as an engineer. LF's mother was just a housewife. Some relatives worked for American families and others worked for the county.
5	139-151	All the people in the laundry were exclusively Chinese and there were other jobs that would not hire the Chinese people because of discrimination. For example, the bank would hire only one per token. Personally, LF feels she was discriminated for getting jobs after she graduated from high school. Some companies would not even give out application forms to her.
	152-175	The first job that LF held was at the Terminal Island in San Pedro. Dave _____, the mortician, gathered up a whole lot of people to work there. It was miles and miles away that the Chinese did not stay to work there for too long. It was a Federal civil service job -- an office job. The average income at that time was \$18 a week. LF's first job was in sewing and she earned \$18 a week. She worked for an American company called Sandy's Sports Wear which hired white people. LF was the only Chinese -- she worked eight hours a day sewing at that factory.
6	176-189	Food was very cheap. Five cents for a hamburger. Rent was \$20 a month. Chinese who did not speak English liked to stay among the Chinese people. They did not like to

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	176-189	move once they settled down.
	190-209	At that time the Chinese sent money back to China or gambled. Others saved their money in the bank. Some people went to Gardena to gamble among their friends.
	210-211	Chinese felt the obligation to contribute money for Chinese political issues and sent money back to China.
7	212-234	They sent money four times a year for wedding, fixing up the house, etc. Money was sent home as long as LF's parents were living. Money was sent through the Cathay Bank. The check was then sent to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, it was then delivered to the village in China.
	235-250	The relatives in China needed money when they went to the cemetery "pai san." Even now, LF sends money through a relative in Oakland who has a brother in China.
	251-262	Everybody was affected by the Depression in 1939. LF was four years old. It always seemed that LF's family was poor. Not much money was saved.
	263-272	LF did not feel any hostility during the Depression. She thinks the Chinese did better than the average people during the Depression because the Chinese worked hard and sent the children to school for a good education.
8	273-283	The Chinese are like the Jewish people in many respects. They both worked harder and longer hours. There are a lot of Chinese considered "Chinese Jews."
	284-303	Before World War II, most Chinese men got their wives from China. LF's father went back to China and the marriage was arranged. LF's brothers got married here in the United States. The husbands always wanted to have sons rather than daughters because the sons can carry the family name.
	304-312	Chinese generally do not approve interracial marriage -- even now. Personally, LF does know a few who got married to the Japanese, white, blacks, Chicanos, etc. It was not favored in the public as well as in the family.
9	313-367	LF's family had a cousin who taught them Chinese at home. But they did not use it and have forgotten a lot. LF thought it was a waste of time, or that they could have used the time to play. Chinese was taken after attending American School for one hour. Every kid did it just to please his or her parents. Most Chinese hoped to go back to China but not all got to go back to China. Some who did go back did not like it and came back to the United States.

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Time Segment	Counter. Number	Summary
9	313-367	LF's parents did not go back to China because of financial reasons and family commitments. People who did go back to China did not like the Communists rule and felt that life was more comfortable in the United States.
	368-377	There were some Chinese characters in the American movies but there were no actual protests by the Chinese at that time. People were proud to be Chinese and were not embarrassed about it.
10	378-384	After the children grew up, the parents considered the ideal positions to be doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, etc., because everybody looks up to them.
	385-432	LF's father had the herb store since LF was born, he died in 1953 -- that is, he had the store for 25 years or more. He bought the store from someone else. The old store was bigger than the next one. It was located on Main Street.
11	433-END	When LF was one year old, her family moved out to another place. She helped in letter writing and bookkeeping. LF's father had Chinese and non-Chinese clients -- there were some colored patients. He got the better clients because he advertised in other papers. He charged by the weight for the herb. His income was \$3,000 a year. Later on, a part-time helper was hired to help in the shop. LF's mother also helped. LF's father prepared some special herbs and mixed them and suggested the method to cook them. He was not a doctor but a Chinese herbalist and it was not illegal for him to practice. The name of the store is D. R. Wong Company.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

1	001-021	LF's father bought the herbs from Chinatown and did not import them. At that time there were a lot of herbalists on the street. There were more non-Chinese than Chinese.
2	022-033	LF's brother helped around in the store but was not interested in the business as a career. Herbalists were well looked up to aside from the fact that they owned the store -- but their incomes were not great.
	034-048	In the grammar school, they were mostly Chinese who lived in the neighborhood. LF did not like John Adams because they were very strict. Everybody was treated equally but the Chinese grouped together.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	049-081	When LF was young she would go to Chinatown with her father to buy the herbs. They would take to bus because they did not have a car. They went to a Chinese restaurant for meals after shopping in Chinatown. They watched the train that passes through Chinatown. Herbs were ordered from San Francisco. China City was built at one time and LF and her father visited the place.
	082-090	China City does not exist now. There were boys pulling rick shaws and Caucasians would ride in them.
4	091-123	At one time, LF worked in Central Plaza. She worked in a restaurant to crack the walnuts and was paid 25 cents an hour. There were several counters in the restaurant which sold Chinese food. It still exists today. Nowadays LF goes to the restaurant to visit. In those days the restaurant would deliver the walnuts at home and LF cracked them for a nominal fee. The whole family helped in cracking the nuts and this helped in their income.
	124-137	After high school, the first job was at a sewing factory for \$18 a week. LF worked there for a couple of months. Then she got a Federal job at San Pedro, paying \$36 a week as a civil servant. There were other Chinese working in the environment which was mostly white.
5	138-148	LF worked for six months at that job and left. The next job was at the Federal Housing Administration and it started at \$36 a week and LF got a raise later on. All this happened during the war. The income was just adequate and there was not much to be saved. There were plenty of clerical jobs.
	149-150	
	151-178	LF was born in her father's herb store and then her family moved to 1412 South Grand Avenue and moved to her present residence in 1949 which they rented. There they bought a house close to her father's herb store. They had some roomers at one time or other relatives lived with them -- and they cooked their own food.
6	179-192	While working, LF did not join clubs or associations because she did not have the time. On weekends she did the laundry, cleaning, and washed her hair. At other times she travelled to other places either by herself or with a tour group. Sometimes the family would travel together to San Francisco and visit friends and relatives.
	193-195	LF's father's relatives were mostly from Hawaii.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	193-195 196-218	LF's father came in 1910 and her mother came in 1920. LF's father got married before 1910 in China and left her mother to come to the house. He worked and saved money. Then he managed to sponsor his wife to come to the United States. All the children were born in the United States.
	219-223	LF's father was born in Hawaii but his parents came from Lun Dung and her mother from Lun Dung village which is very close to Canton.
7	224-239	LF's has lived in her house for thirty-one years. It is a two-story building and has twelve rooms. Her parents bought it because of the tradition that when the sons grow up, all the children would live under the same roof. LF's family rented out some of the rooms for \$26 a month.
	240-255	They did not have any religion and did not believe in anything. However, they went to the cemetery for "pai san." The reason was that her father's brother was buried there in the Chinese cemetery which is located in East Los Angeles on First Avenue and Eastern.
	256-263	It is not very large and is running out of space.
	264-280	LF's father and mother were buried in the Chinese cemetery too. Usually, in the spring, they would go to the Chinese cemetery during the three weeks Ching Ming period. Although the Chinese generally do not have a religion they worshipped the ancestors on the land or heaven.
	281-END	So, they do not really have a religion.

END OF TAPE 1

END OF INTERVIEW

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