

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Benson Fong Interview Number: 51  
 Chinese Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tapes: 1  
 Date of Interview: 8/3/79 Length: 30 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Jean Wong  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-019	Introduction.	
	020-026	There are sixty-five percent of American people who eat Chinese food. So there are a lot of people in the restaurant business.	
	027-041	Benson Fong (BF) said that his restaurants were not chop suey houses. They are American Cantonese restaurants which catered mostly to Jewish clientele. They are located in Jewish neighborhoods.	
2	042-049	In his restaurants, vegetables are cut in bigger pieces. Jewish people like the way they cut their meat and vegetables.	
	050-058	BF has many Chinese friends who are very successful. BF does not think that he is successful.	
	059-064	BF did not spend a lot of time in Chinatown. BF's work tied him to Beverly Hills, Hollywood, and the San Fernando valley. BF made money through the Whites.	
3	065-069	BF started his acting career in 1941 in Paramount in a film called "China."	
	070-074	BF came to Los Angeles in 1941 from Sacramento to do just one film and planned to go back. After the first film he liked acting so much, he decided to stay.	
	075-078	BF did not have time to do as many parts as he used to. He did not keep the money from the check he received from acting.	
	079-087	There are at least a hundred or more Chinese extras. There are quite a few of them but not enough parts for them.	
	088-098	The oriental actors liked to become professionals in acting but could not make a living by just acting. They all were doing something else on the side. There were no more than ten actors who devoted more time to acting than to other jobs.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	099-103	BF was found in a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco by the studio people for a screen test for "China." That's how he got in the business.
4	104-108	BF lost his father at the age of 4 and lost his mother at the age of 17.
	109-117	Due to the necessity he started a restaurant business. Being an actor, BF always had to wait for calls for new roles. He had to find something else to do. The restaurant business was the only business he could work in the night and do his homework during the day.
	118-129	For the last three generations Chinese were treated differently. Now things are beginning to change. People are learning to accept people for what they are as an individual rather than as a race.
	130-135	BF mixed a lot with Caucasians. At the time, they seemed to accept him. But when it comes to a deep relationship, he always felt that he was not quite in their circle.
	136-146	It is very hard to be completely accepted. It is all dependent on the individuals. BF tried to get himself as well as Chinese to be recognized in certain Caucasian groups.
5	147-159	BF was one of the first Chinese to join the turf club of the race track in Southern California. He was one of the first two Chinese to join a white country club. He always tried to chip in and help. When you are in these groups they never stop to think whether you are Chinese or white. You must open your heart and let them in if you want them to open their heart and let you in.
	160-189	BF felt that the success of his restaurant business was just good luck. BF was lucky enough to have good personnel to execute his policies. In order to be successful in America, you first have to serve the needs of the whites and to serve the needs of yourself. In other words to use American ways to serve what Americans want is the key to success.
6	190-216	BF thinks that every Chinese does feel more Chinese. BF felt more Chinese but lived more like Americans. BF thinks the Chinese way has more wisdom.
	217-224	Chinese old saying says that you can play in the mountain but never in the water. For that reason, many Chinese never learn how to swim.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	225-242	If a Chinese grew up in a strict Chinese way and believed in being quiet, and so on, he would be confined in certain areas.
7	243-453	BF believed some people are happy being born and raised on a green island, some are not. Some want to see one after the other so that they get there to live their life in hope.
	254-280	When BF first came to Hollywood in the 1940's, the people who he worked for were Chinese and the people who he associated with were Chinese. In the last ten to twenty years, due to his business, BF has had to associate with whites.
8	281-298	BF always went to Chinatown to eat before he got married. Later he went there from time to time for grocery shopping.
	299-304	BF did not gamble in the gambling joints.
	305-320	BF is one of the founders of the Los Angeles Chinese Golf Club. There was no other Chinese clubs that asked him to join back in the 1940's. About a year ago he was invited to join the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.
	321-327	He started his restaurant business 33 years ago.
9	328-343	BF did not think that his work changed his personality.
	344-354	BF's grandfather came from China. Father was born in San Francisco and BF was born and raised in Sacramento. Mother came from China. BF has four brothers and three sisters.
	355-363	BF went to high school in Sacramento and went back to Mainland China for one and a half years in the mid-1930's and attended Ling Nam University.
	364-367	Wife was born in Detroit.
	368-375	BF has four daughters and one son. They are all married except for his son.
	376-383	Father was a very successful businessman in the hotel, restaurant, real estate, import and export businesses. The Depression took away everything from his family.
	384-388	BF spoke Chinese and English at home.
10	389-393	BF went to Chinese school every night from six to nine and every Saturday from nine to noon.
	394-403	BF first went to Puey Jing then to Ling Nam University in China.
	404-413	BF was born in 1916 and moved to Los Angeles in 1941.

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