

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Grace Chow Interview Number: 7
 Chinese Name: 周初光夫人 Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 7/14/79, 8/12/79, 3/3/82 Length: 2 Hours & 7 Minutes
 Interviewer: Jean Wong
 Others Present: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California members (Tapes 3 & 4)
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	001-014 015-032	Introduction Father came from Canton China. He was born in Toishan, Chew King. His business name was Hi Loy in Fresno. He was known as Hi Loy Wong. His Chinese name was Wong Wen Jeung.		
2	033-047 048-060 061-074	Mother came from San Jose County, born in Almaden silver mine. She was from the Lum family. Family from Sun Hui, Ah Chau. Parents met through a matchmaker. Father was twenty years older than Grace Chow's (GC) mother, who got married when she was thirteen years old. The matchmaker, Ah Wah Mou was from Watsonville, California. Father was married in China once when he was young. It was thought that the tie in China would bring him back sooner. Father left a little daughter in China.		
3	075-077 078-086 087-100 101-113	Father landed in San Francisco and later on located in Fresno County. In Fresno father stayed with an American family and was an all around boy for Miller and Lux, a large land owner. Father learned a lot of things and spoke very good English. He always taught the children not to be too inquisitive. When GC's father grew up, he went into a Chinese grocery store in Fresno on G Street.		

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	114-121	Father told Grace Chow that the city had a little creek which ran along where the Southern Pacific Station is now. The cowboys used to drive the horses there for water.
	122-137	Father was a laborer contractor for the American people. He sold the groceries to the Chinese and found the jobs for them. He used a credit system. He was a leader in Chinatown and was an interpreter.
	138-140	People used to call GC Grace Hi Loy.
	141-150	Father's first wife died. He did not go back to China.
5	151-162	In the old days, a woman was only in her household. She was not to be seen and not to be heard. A good woman and respectful woman stayed inside the house and was a good mother and good housekeeper. Mother never went out only on New Year's day. She would go in the evening with an umbrella or fan to shelter her face.
	163-165	In the early days, the Chinese who were born in America strictly followed the Chinese customs.
	166-181	Mother had fourteen children. GC was number six. Some died. There were five girls in the family.
	182-194	Mother was not allowed to work outside the house, otherwise she would be a very good business woman. She worked within her house and her garde, raising flowers and vegetables. GC had to be the delivery girl with a red wagon.
6	195-203	Mother saved money and all kinds of Chinese 24 karat gold jewelry. She wore gold jewelry around the neck and arms up to the elbow. That was her pleasure and her bank account by working around the house.
	204-217	After father sold his business, he bought a piece of land on Tulare Avenue and built a big house there and housed his large family there.
	218-225	GC and her sister were not allowed to go on the street after they were twelve years old. GC would go around the town to shop for her mother, so that GC would not be seen by men in Chinatown.
	226-235	GC began to go to Chinese stores for her mother when she was eight.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	236-240	GC was born in Fresno in 1899.
	241-250	Spoken both Sum Yup and Sze Yup. Grandparents would not allow GC's mother to go to school. A man would not want his wife to be smarter than he. The education was for the boys.
	251-255	Mother spoke three languages, English, Chinese, and Spanish.
	256-262	Children spoke Chinese at home and English outside of the home.
	263-273 274-295	Brothers went to Chinese school, but not the girls. GC was born in the apartment house above her father's store. Later the family moved to Tulare Avenue. Later when the boys grew up, her parents sold the place and bought a house in Kerny Park.
8	296-310	GC went to Lincoln Grammar School in Fresno. After grammar school, mother thought she was too old to go to school. When GC was engaged, her husband suggested her to go to Fresno Business College. So GC went to business college for one year.
	311-329	GC went to school with her husband at Lincoln school. Husband came from China without knowing English. GC interpreted for him.
9	330-386	GC got married when she was eighteen and has five children, one son and four daughters. Her son is a dentist in Bakersfield, and is the first Chinese to be the president of the Dental Society of Kern County. The oldest daughter majored in sociology at the University of Southern California. Her first job was as a director of young people in San Francisco's YWCA. Now she is the director of the First Baptist Church in Huntington Beach.
10	387-398	Son-in-law was a structural engineer.
	399-414	Second daughter married to an architect, Richard Tom, who designed the Los Angeles Chinatown Bank of America and won first place in a contest. He is the president of the Architects Club.
	415-425	The third daughter went to Mills College to study music and art. She taught art in Palos Verdes. Children went to college.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	426-433	The fourth daughter's husband was an engineer. She is an interior decorator and has one daughter.
	434-450	Five of GC's eleven grandchildren are in college.
11	451-467	GC graduated from business college and got married in 1918.
	468-469	Husband opened a grocery-meat market.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A		
1	013-018	Husband opened a grocery-meat market in Selma, California. Later they opened a liquor store next to the grocery store.
	019-025	The store sold Chinese curio arts and American dry goods. Had the business until 1936.
	026-032	The Depression came, they lost everything. Yet, they paid every bill they owed. And a lot of people owed them money and could not pay.
2	033-043	Then they moved to Seattle, Washington, because they had relatives who had businesses there.
	044-073	They opened the Chow Tea Company, a tea wholesale company. GC did all the distributing work. Distributed to the grocery departments. GC remembered that they had all kinds of tea.
3	074-083	Husband did all the detail work: supervising the women workers packing the merchandise. GC travelled from coast to coast and distributed the tea to the major department stores.
	084-090	First three children went to Chinese school in Seattle.
	091-095	Moved to Los Angeles after staying in Seattle for 10 years. Because the war came, and importation was cut off.
	096-106	GC missed California, so they moved to Los Angeles. Los Angeles was the largest city and the climate was better.
4	107-129	GC and her husband continued the tea business in a small way. They had two barrels of ginger. She packed the giner in small boxes and shipped them out.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	130-138 139-154	Husband got ill, so they sold out the business in the 50s. In 1941, GC came to Los Angeles. The Occidental Life Insurance Company wanted GC to sell for them. GC sold the first million dollars for the company. In 1948, GC was the first woman qualified for membership in the Million Dollar Round Table.
5	155-186	GC was selling million dollars insurance three years in succession. She was also the first Chinese who qualified for life membership in the Million Dollar Round Table in March, 1954.
6	187-199	In 1941, GC signed up for the Occidental and still book with the Occidental. Later joined the Franklin Insurance.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	003-015 016-022 023-028 029-032	Introduction There were very few Chinese working in the insurance field when GC started selling. Chinese agency would hire Chinese to do office work. One of the early Chinese agencies was CC Wing agency of the Occidental in San Francisco.
2	033-037 038-045 046-051 052-062 063-070	There were approximately 10-15 Chinese in Occidental, two or three of them were women. GC likes to sell. She had made a success of selling tea. Wing knew she was successful in selling, so they came to GC and asked her to sell life insurance. GC asked them not to give her a quota to sell. She thought of her family first. She just wanted to sell what she could. Husband knew that GC could sell and could be successful. GC had help at home although she had the full responsibility of the children and the house. As long as you can sell and bring in the business, you are just as good as they (non-Chinese) are.
3	071-081 082-088	Selling insurance is entirely different business than (the stereotype Chinese business). GC reviewed her success was due to "working hard and willing to climb and better yourself." Each day she wants to better herself.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	089-094	GC never counted the hours she counted the sales she made. If she sold more, she knew she worked harder.
	095-099	She was accepted by the non-Chinese. It was the Chinese who did not accept GC at first, because a woman was supposed to stay at home and take care of the family and husband and not supposed to go out into the business world.
	100-133	When GC just started, while travelling, GC went to a restaurant she did not want to be identified as a Japanese and so she wore a Chinese gown. Chinese restaurant proprietor asked where she came from. GC would take out her best identification, the picture of her family. The proprietor stood up and paid respect to her.
4	134-145	The dishwasher and cook came to the dining room to see GC, a Chinese woman who came from the West coast. The proprietor invited her to go back after midnight to sell insurance to his employees.
5	146-180	Many companies were surprised to know that a Chinese woman could bring in so much business. Many different general agents began to solicit Chinese women and began to solicit Chinese business. Over 80% of GC's business was with Chinese, because GC spoke different Chinese dialects and the clients felt more confident with her.
	181-191	GC's friends were from different organizations; YWCA, the Business Professional Women's Club, the Chamber of Commerce in Hollywood and other organizations.
6	192-206	GC also was a member of the Chinese Womens Club, Chinese church. GC was the first Chinese woman appointed by Mayor Samuel Yorty to be a commissioner of the Los Angeles City in Human Relations. GC served there for five years and met several city hall friends.
	207-209	GC has many Chinese friends and American friends.
	210-217	GC also is involved in missionary work, church work, taught Sunday school.
	218-222	GC enjoys people and loves people and loves to serve. That's why she has joined so many organizations.
	223-232	Her prospects were in Chinatown so she had to go to Chinatown. She belonged to the Chinese organizations.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	233-268	GC felt all Chinese when she was among Chinese. She thinks in Chinese and speaks in English. GC felt American when she was among Americans and when she visited the convalescent homes.
	269-285	To be a good salesperson you have to be aggressive. But among the Chinese people GC has to hold back a little bit.
END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A		
1	001-005	Introduction
	006-045	Emma Louie introduced Grace Chow: GC was born in Fresno in 1899. Since then she is always on the go. She is one of fourteen children born to Hi Loy and Lily Lum Wong. Her father was the owner of Hi Loy Co. GC and her husband were the owners of the Chow Tea Company. After they got married, they first lived in Selma for several years, then moved to Seattle. Later on they moved to Los Angeles, in 1941. They became the founding members of the First Chinese Baptist Church. GC became an insurance agent the same year. In 1948 she became the first Chinese American to become a member of the Million Dollar Round Table Club, and became a life member in 1951. In 1977 she received an award for outstanding community service. She has many accomplishments.
2	046-053	All of GC's family members were introduced.
	054-094	Emma Louie briefly introduced the history of Chinese Americans in Fresno. Chinese began appearing around the Fresno area in the 1850s. The town of Fresno did not exist until 1872. Chinese were involved in mining and in trades. In 1861, there were Chinese who formed the Sue and Company and claimed the riverbed for one mile above Fort Miller. This was one of the reasons why there was a Chinese settlement in Millerton. By 1870, there were 309 Chinese, including 18 women. Chinese were among the first settlers in Fresno. By 1874, there were 200 Chinese. Fresno became the meeting place for Chinese from Hanford, Visalia, Armons, Lemoore, and even from Bakersfield. Chinese were engaged in trades, laundry, cooks, grocers, etc. Most of them came from Sum Yup district, Canton. Chinatown was on the westside of Fresno. It was bounded north and south by G and F Streets, west and east by Mariposa and Kern Streets. China Alley ran east and west of the center of the town where the majority of Chinese lived.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	095-108	GC's father always lived in Fresno. He landed in San Francisco, then went to Los Banos and stayed in Fresno the rest of his life.
4	109-141	Mr. Miller of Miller-Lux ranch was always like a father to GC's father. GC's father's name is not Hi Loy. Hi Loy is the name of father's store, so everybody called him Hi Loy Wong. His name is Wong Jueng. When he got married he had another name, called Wong Wen Gum. Mr. Miller told GC's father to put up a tent and homestead a piece of land. GC's father said to Mr. Miller, "Mr. Miller, I don't want the land, I promised my mother that I come to America. When I make good, I must return to see them and live and die in China, not in America." He told the children in later days, "I am a dumb fool. I could have been a millionaire today and own all that land."
5	142-174	There was a lot of action in Fresno when GC was growing up. GC used to go to the gambling houses and watch Chinese gambling. The restaurants were always on the second floor. Chinese called them Gao Lau Guen. (高樓館) The big social events were always held in the restaurant. There were two big restaurants, Yuit Far Lau and Yue Far Lau, both owned by Chung Shan people. There were two big drug stores, grocery stores. Both grocery stores did tremendous business, especially at the New Year. Mother used to make GC the errand girl. GC did all of the shopping for her mother, because women were not allowed to go out. Her face was only shown to her husband and no one else. During the New Year, they would go out but used an umbrella to hide their faces. Women had to stay home to take care of the family. That is why her mother had thirteen children.
	175-198	
6	199-206	Emma Louie explained the terms of Chung Shan and Sum Yup.
	207-236	GC explained that right on G Street there was a Chiang family from Hok Ga (客家) people. There was a laundry and barber shop. The barbers not only cut hair but also cleaned ears for only twenty-five cents.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	237-244	One of the barbers, Wong Wah Hei, had the best business. When he died, he had a whole trunk full of money. All the people came and took his money. Wong Wah Hei did not make that much money.
	245-255	In the early days, the Chinese did not know how to go to the bank. They just gave the money to Wong Wah Hei to put away for them.
	256-261	All the children to Lincoln School and Columbia School. They were the nearest schools to Chinatown.
	262-266	The girls were not allowed to go to Chinese school. Because of the compulsory school, Chinese had to let the girls go to American school.
	267-273	When Grace was 12, her mother started telling her not to show her face to men.
	274-290	Girls stayed home and learned sewing, knitting and embroidery. Her mother taught all the girls all the stitches. Her mother said, "Someday you may marry to a husband who cannot afford your machine."
8	291-298	GC went to church. In order to go to church, GC had to wash a big tub of washing. In a big family, everybody has to chip in.
	299-335	GC went to the Chinese Baptist Church. Miss E. S. Stein, a German missionary. She spoke excellent Chinese and read a Chinese bible. She even shopped for the ladies. The missionary came to tell GC's mother the story of Christianity. Her mother then told the story to GC. The missionary would buy the threads and materials for the Chinese ladies. She would take the children to school and give them American names.
9	336-341	Mother spoke Chinese, English, and Spanish.
	342-367	Mother could sew, knit, and embroider. Mother made beautiful hats for GC's brothers. GC learned to make Chinese buttons.
	368-381	Mother was a good business woman. She planted the right kinds of vegetables and asked GC to sell them to the grocery store.
	382-398	Mother also planted beautiful roses and flowers. GC would take the flowers to the prostitutes for two dollars or so.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	399-406	The prostitutes and opium dens were wide open. Police did not pay any attention to them.
	407-425	The matchmakers used pictures to match young couples.
	426-436	One girl told her mother, "I don't want to marry him. If you like him, you marry him." This became the talk of the town. It was thought terrible for a girl to say that to her mother.
	437-441	The girls had nothing to say in those days. If the father and mother matched you up, out you went. GC's sister was married off that way.
	442-463	If a girl married out of the family, it was considered kind of a funeral. It was a sad ceremony. So the girl wailed and sang, sang an unhappy song.
11	464-484	GC sang a Chinese children's rhyme. It was about a little bird who watched a maiden.

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1	003-024	GC sang another Chinese children's rhyme, "Ring Around the Roses," and another Sze Yup village song which her father taught her.
	025-036	The girls would get around the bride and sing. They did not want the bride to leave. So they wailed and sat around the bed. They sang to the bride before the wedding.
2	037-049	GC sang a song about a dragon. The song was complimentary to the bride.
	050-096	GC sang another wedding song which tells how to cut beautiful clothes.
3	097-124	GC learned another song that the bride-to-be sang to GC's mother and mother responded to her with another song.
4	125-159	Once a bride-to-be had her hair combed up, it meant that she had become a woman. The girls usually used yards of ribbons and tied the bride-to-be up in knots and themselves around her. So whoever wanted to come get the bride, they could not use scissors, they had to untie the knots before they could take the bride out to comb her hair. The girls would ask for peanuts, leeches, etc. If the knots were cut by scissors, the bride-to-be would tell the hairdresser how to comb her hair by singing.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	160-165	GC sang the song about how to comb the hair.
	166-170	After the hair was combed up, the bride-to-be would wear a crown. A red silk square scarf with money at each end would be used as a veil.
	171-181	The bridegroom could not see her until it was time to take off the veil. He did not know what he was getting.
	182-188	The bride would break a piece of gold from the crown and leave it on the shrine and sing another song.
6	189-191	Chinese said that when a daughter got married they took everything from the house.
	192-203	When the mother cried while the daughter was going out, the daughter would sing a song. GC sang the song.
	204-213	Bride was carried to a sedan chair in a beautiful carriage, all decorated in red silk, and Chinese lanterns on each side. The minute she stepped into the carriage, she immediately stopped crying. It then became a happy occasion.
	214-218	When the bride arrived at the groom's house, the groom had to come out and take a fan and hit the door three times.
	219-227	Sometimes the young men would hide the groom so he could not come and welcome the bride. After so many hours, they would release the groom in exchange for several cases of whiskey.
7	228-238	The bride again was carried into the groom's home.
	239-244	When there was an argument between the husband and wife in later days, the wife always would say, "I did not come to your house, you carried me in here."
	245-256	The crown (冠) and gown were beautiful and were rented from San Francisco.
	257-266	An eighty year old lady used to teach GC all the wedding songs.
	267-279	In the old days, very few Chinese spoke English. GC's father spoke good English, that is why he was a good businessman. He also interpreted at court.
8	280-336	GC's mother got all the children to roll cigarettes. She used egg white for glue and chicken feathers for brushes. She would put the cigarettes in small boxes. GC was sent out to deliver them to Chinese men. Her mother taught her to be polite and to be kind to people.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	280-336	The kindness will come back to you. Her mother taught her by using some Chinese proverbs.
9	337-347	Her mother always taught them to dress nicely, especially to big parties.
	348-356	You had to invite a guest three times before they came to your party in the old days.
	357-368	The first wife had to wear a white skirt, the ones wearing pink or other color dress were the concubines.
	369-415	GC's maternal grandfather came over in the early 1800s and was a very determined person. He went away to San Jose and had his queue. He bought himself a long tailed black suit. GC's mother always said, "First, they look at your clothes before they look at you." "Fine feathers make a fine bird; fine clothes make a fine man."
10	416-464	Grandfather dressed up in a Windsor tie and went to San Jose to apply for a job. The man liked him very much and hired him to work on the hill near New Almaden with Spainards, mining quicksilver as a supervisor. All the Spainards liked him and called him "Sam the Boss." GC's mother grew up with Spanish children so she learned perfect Spanish.
11	465-489 490-END	GC learned a lot from her mother. Mother raised chicken, geese, etc.
END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B		
1	001-010	Mother never went to school. Grandfather did not believe in education for a girl.
	011-029	When mother was in Almaden as a child, she fed hummingbirds with honey water.
	030-044	Cactus was mother's main thing in the garden. She knew how to graft the cactus so she could have different flowers. One day a man asked her how to graft cacti.
2	045-053	Later, GC's mother found a paper which had pictures of cactus flowers. She asked GC's sister about it. The sister told her that there was a man who charged money to show people how to graft cacti. Mother went and found out that the man was the person whom she had

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2	045-053 054-064	taught grafting to before. She was very disappointed. The woman who taught the brides how to wail could hardly speak English but made a toast to the bride in English. (The way she said it was very appropriate and funny.)
	065-072	GC met her husband at school. Her husband came from China and did not know a word of English. GC taught him how to speak English.
3	073-080	The whole wedding ceremony took seven days or four days. The bride had to stay in the corner of the bed and sing those songs night after night.

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