

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Spencer Chan Interview Number: 154
 Chinese Name: 陳 鴻 文武 Number of Tapes: 5
 Date of Interviews: 4/7/83, 4/26/83 Length: 4 Hours & 30 Min.
 Interviewer: Suellen Cheng
 Other Present: None
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: 1 Side A
1	001-012	Introduction	
	013-032	Spencer Chan (SC) did not know where his parents come from. SC explained why.	
	033-041	Father was a Methodist minister and served in the church on Los Angeles Street. He read and wrote English.	
2	042-048	Father had shares in various ranches owned by farmers whom SC's father assisted.	
	049-055	Father was one of the several Chinese who spoke English and helped Chinese who did not have much contact with Americans.	
	056-068	In 1895, father built the family house on Third Street in Boyle Heights.	
3	069-075	SC lived in that house till he moved to the convalescent home.	
	076-088	There were eight children in the family. SC and his two sisters are the only survivors in the family.	
	089-096	SC was born in Los Angeles near 5th and Wall Streets in 1895.	
	097-110	SC's family was the only Chinese in the neighborhood and sensed some discrimination.	
4	111-124	SC as a small Chinese boy was sensitive about discrimination in front of the big Americans.	
	125-145	SC went to the Poly High School. He did not see any other Chinese.	
5	146-157	SC did not want to discuss on personal question.	
	158-169	Mother stayed home and took care of eight children. Now a day women worked more.	
	170-194	Mother often visited Chinese homes on her own well. Sometimes SC would take her to Chinatown to visit people.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	195-206	Mother was very capable and spoke English so she could go to Chinatown by herself by streetcars.
	207-230	There were general merchandise stores, drug stores, art goods stores, and grocery stores. The Marchessault Street led to the barns, the vegetable peddlers barn. The Apablasa was parallel to the Marchessault Street.
7	231-240	SC went to Chinatown by streetcar.
	241-270	Most of the alleys in Chinatown were narrow. Downstairs of Man Jen Low was the narrowest alley in between the Apablasa and Marchessault Streets. In the rainy day, the roads were muddy.
	271-286	SC used to go to Mou Long, a store owned by Woo, for goods.
8	287-301	Most of the time SC would pick up the little jobs that other people did not want.
	302-330	In 1915, Peter SooHoo Sr. and SC went to the Registor of Voters at the instigation of a Mexican fellow, Trodry, who was running for City Council.
9	331-389	They went around and registered eligible Chinese voters. Most Chinese were afraid to register. They got about 300 Chinese registered. They used the CACA Hall to register Chinese. When they went to Macy School to vote, they ran into opposition. The election people tried to scare Chinese away.
10	390-445	On the election, everyone reported to the CACA headquarter and was took to vote. They help in elections for several years. Before that Chinese never registered to vote. Now SC still vote.
	446-468	SC went to San Francisco CACA convention as a delegates in 1915. The convention lasted a week.
11	469-482	The Harvard and Yale Steamships used to run between San Francisco and Los Angeles. It was SC first trip on boat to San Francisco.
	483	END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	001-020	SC had been to San Francisco with father for several days before the CACA Convention. The group of Los Angeles delegates took Harvard Steamship to San Francisco. The World Fair was held in 1915 in San Francisco.
	021-032	In 1918 SC got into the Army. By training, SC was a pharmacist.
2	033-064	SC's brother raised homing pigeons. He was enlisted by the Army to work in the Signal Corps. He stayed home and did not have to go to anyplace.
3	065-081	SC was supposed to be a pharmacist. It was hard to get a job in the drug store. He worked in the Army Hospital in Camp Fremont San Jose for a year. When he got out the Army in 1920 there was no job available.
	082-084	Father suggested him to go to China and worked there.
	085-095	SC worked for the Brunswig Drug Company on the Republic Street and North Main Street. The owner was a Frenchman and hired many refugees worked there.
	096-098	Father suggested him to go to China to marry. But father got killed in an accident all the plan went down the drain.
	099-109	As an Oriental he had difficult time to find a job in drug stores. He worked for the Brunswig for two years.
4	110-115	Father past away so SC did not get chance to go to China.
	116-151	SC was the only Chinese worked for the Brunswig. In the old days, all the medicines were compounded by prescription.
	152-184	The Spanish influenza during the World War I was quite a problem. SC worked in the Camp Fremont even after the War was over.
5	185-205	SC went into investment in Arizona. SC did not know and did not want to discuss much of his personal history.
	206-226	SC did clerical works such as filling up the orders for the retailers. In the Army SC manufactured medicine. Salt was the big thing in the Army in those days.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	227-255	There was one Chinese fellow SC met at the Camp Fremont who became a cook in the Army. The Chinese came to America under a false paper and didn't speak much English. At the end of the war he spoke perfect English.
	256-268	A couple of SC's friends went to the Army during the World War II.
	269-282	SC and his partner, Yip, were partnership in a gas station business, Plaza Service Station, across the Fire Station.
8	283-302	There were the Sun Wing Wo, the Sam Ward, and many other Chinese stores on the Los Angeles Street. There was the Tai Wo Tong on the corner where the Fire House is now.
	303-329	Father's office was on 415 North Los Angeles Street. Father would rent a horse and buggy to go around when needed.
9	330-355	Father would take street car to the church in Pasadena and preached there. Santa Fe Railway was just right next to the church. There would be 10 or 12 people came to the church to listen to SC's father.
	356-371	Father had a mission in Chinatown north of Hop Sing Tong. The mission and the Hop Sing Tong shared the same stairway.
	372-392	There were 4 or 5 young men lived in the rooms in the mission. They paid a couple dollars and took care of the place. They cooked and ate there. On Sundays the family would come to the church.
10 & 11	393-411	The downstairs was a art good store. It was on the corner of the Los Angeles Street and the Marchessault. The Old Chinatown was torn down to make way for the Union Station.
	412-437	SC did not have money to get involved in the building of New Chinatown. Peter SooHoo did not have much money, but had civic influence.
	438-482	The Yee Sing Chong was at where the Hong Kong is now. Yee Sing Chong gave credit to many restaurants. When these restaurants went broke, Yee Sing Chong got the restaurants.
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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	001-012	Introduction
	013-016	The Jerry's Joint specialized in Chinese food and Chinese atmosphere but not owned by Chinese.
	017-033	The Grandview owner's wife had a bar on the Southeast of the Jerry's Joint and the south of Kong Chow Temple.
2	034-040	There were Japanese women barbers on Alameda Street.
	041-068	The owner of Grandview and his wife adopted a son. SC discussed the adoption cases in Chinatown. Some Chinese family simply had too many children and did not have enough money.
3	069-093	SC knew the Grandview people. Most of the people SC knew came from China. A lot of native born Chinese would not work in the Chinese restaurant on the count of poor working condition. SC knew most of the bar people because SC drank there.
	094-110	Chinese would not eat at the Jerry's Joint It was a exotic attraction for tourists.
4	111-130	The Grandview was the first Chinese bar in Chinatown. Man Jen Low had a bar upstairs. Tsuey Yuen Low was on Macy Street and had a big bar when it was moved to new Chinatown.
	131-134	In a small place a Chinese used to do everything.
	135-151	During the Prohibition, Tuey Far had a moonshine. People drank with tea cups. The police was paid off.
	152-159	There were some bootleggers around. Some places would rather selling chop suey than fulling around with illegal liquor. They could make enough money on chop suey.
	160-177	SC originated the gas station in Chinatown in 1925. The August Alley, Ferguson Alley, Negro Alley were all in Chinatown. In those days, one did not have to know the street names.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	178-192	The gas station was not profitable at all. SC's partner got married and left. They sold the station after five years.
6	193-206	In 1924 SC worked in farming in Riverside. It was a potato and asparagus farm.
	207-213	SC stayed in the farm and did not know any Chinatown in Riverside.
	214-223	The Bing Kong Tong was strong in San Bernardino. In a small town, you either belong to the same tong or else you get out of there.
	224-239	SC stayed in Riverside for a couple years and drove trucks and trackers. Mexican workers would take care of horses. SC also delivered stuff to Los Angeles. It was three hours drive.
7	240-288	It was a Chinese owned ranch, several hundred acres. They hired Chinese wetbacks. The workers did not have anything to start with, and end up to be slavery. Kwon Duey Lung worked for the lottery joint. He held the paper of some illegal Chinese, so they would work for them.
	289-326	The lottery used to be wide open. There were lottery place in the drug store on the corner of Sanchez Street.
8	327-359	There were many lottery houses. The gamblers would go to different places for superstitious reason.
	360-378	The Chinese women as well as Black women also gambled. The Chinese women would use part of their food money to buy the lottery tickets.
	379-387	Any kind of people would come to Chinatown to gamble.
9	388-404	Chinese farmers would not be able to come to Chinatown unless they had days off in the Chinese New Year.
	405-419	Some Chinese were quite wealthy some Chinese went broke during the Depression.
	420-438	There were many Chinese crooks just like any body else.
	439	END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	001-023 024-041	Blank There was no Chinese woman registered to vote. SC did not ask any woman to register.
2	042-047 048-055 056-068	By the time women had the suffrage, SC and the CACA were not involving in registering the voters anymore. The White men resented that the Chinese went to vote. SC was not an officer of the CACA. SC just did things for nothing.
3	069-104 105-116	The CACA assisted native born citizens. Some people with the citizen paper and did not want to be bothered. Some Chinese were proud to be a citizen, some were not. Some people did not believe that any politician would do any good for them. SC voted for the principle. The CACA believed that Chinese should assert their rights.
4	117-124 125-145	The CACA sponsored and supported the politicians who would help the Chinese people. The social activity was not the purpose of the organization. At the beginning, there were very few members went to the meetings.
5	146-173 174-188	The CACA had a big size hall with a kitchen in the back. The kitchen was there for the simple preparation of tea, etc. The CCBA's office had the same set up. It was not busy in both the CACA and CCBA offices.
6	189-204 205-216 217-222 223-235	SC did not remember that CCBA and CACA had mahjong tables. SC thought that if people wanted to gamble they could go to the gambling houses. SC's boss gave up the ranch in Riverside before the Depression. SC recalled that he and friends gathered in the Chinatown gas station before going to USC football game. SC became a Union representative for the movie workers.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	236-265	Before going to the football game, people asked him if he would like to work in the movies. After the football game, he went to see Tom Gubbins and started working for the movie called Shanghai Express.
	266-282	SC saw injustice in the Chinese workers. He got involved in the Union. The union was not very popular at the time.
8	283-311	At that time SC's Father died and mother was sick, the other two sister were school teachers. Caroline Chan taught at the 9th Street School. Brother was working in a fish cannery. SC had to take care of his mother and his younger sister. The movie business and the union job was flexible that he could take care of his family.
	312-342	The 33 union members all against the establishment. They were Blacks, Filipinos, dancers, and stuntmen. It was not a minority group and became quite influential. SC stayed in the union until he retired.
9	343-349	Most Chinese did not want to have anything to do with the union. Without labor union one could get less pay and got laid off more quickly.
	350-394	In the early days the workers did not have to be union members. Later the union was successful in requiring the producer to hire only union members.
10 & 11	395-429	The union required that producer had to hire people to work from the beginning to the end of the film if the film was filmed outside of Los Angeles. They could not just hire people for one or two days and let them wait the rest of the time.
	430-434	SC was in a hundred of films.
	435-477	SC also worked for other jobs. Working for the movie industry was not a steady job.
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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	001-038	In 1933, SC came out of the farm and worked in the National Dollars Store in San Francisco. The stores had over 100 stores and thousands of employees. He stayed in the store for a year. The wage was very cheap.
2	039-041	Several brothers of SC gas station partner also worked for Joe Shong.
	042-077	The Union had several class memberships. One is Actors and Actresses Guild. The other group was Extras Guild. Being orientals, Chinese got more chance to work in the films as extra.
3	078-087	People like Keye Luke and Victor Sen Yung were in different guild. SC took both roles as actors and extra. Benson Fong came in later.
	088-108	SC was not working for the Good Earth. SC explained the reasons why he was not working.
4	109-146	The Union regulated what the employers did, and what the members should do. A worker did not have to be the union member. The union negotiated with the employers. SC explained the function of the union.
5	147-156	The Union did go on strike before. Chinese members had to do what the union wanted them to do.
	157-199	James Leong was quite a promoter. He was not only in the filming business but also in the silkworm business. He went down to Mexico and planted mulberry trees there. At the same time he opened a couple motel for fishermen.
6	200-224	James Leong had an idea to produce film in 1921. That was the way he got into America. He got into many ventures and got people to invest in his businesses.
	225-234	He was also going to make some soft drink to compete with Coca Cola.
7	235-253	James Leong also tried to can chop suey and failed.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	254-274	During the Sino-Japanese War, James Leong was involved in the factions of the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party.
	275-294	SC would work any job to make money. Some Chinese who worked in the movie industry had stores or had rich parents.
8	295-339	SC had to help his mother and family, so he was not able to work any steady job.
9	340-388	SC talked about his own health condition and life in the convalescent home. His sister also lived in the same convalescent.
10	389-457	SC explained how he managed his money after he moved in the convalescent home.
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Tape: 4 Side A

1	001-008 009-035	Introduction SC showed some of the old pictures. One shows Barbara Jean Wong and Spencer Chan in the movie called "The Mystery of Chinatown", in 1935.
2	036-069	SC showed more pictures of Chinese performers, and some other photos and letters related to his work for the commercial producing company.
3	070-113	SC explained the photos taken while he did some commercial show for the Gas Company.
4	114-145	SC got \$200 for a picture taken for the commercial purpose. He spent only half a day to do the job.
5	146-175 176-187	Another picture shown Barbara Jean Wong and SC in 1946. The photos were used for the clock commercial. SC played the minister in the "Flower Drum Song" of the 1960s.
6	188-231	SC explained more Flower Drum Song photos.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	232-261	SC showed a picture of him who was given an life membership award by the Guild. The program of the Flower Drum Song was shown.
	262-284	Some of the old films were still running. SC still got some residual from time to time.
8-	285-317	SC explained how the residual was distributed.
	318-330	The peanut man's photo was shown. His name was H.W. Gim, SooHoo Gim. He sold peanuts in the China City.
9	331-389	SC showed another picture of the "Lost of Horizon". SC lent all the photos described above to the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California for duplication.
10	390-430	SC did not bring many things to the convalescent home.
	431-435	SC were in more than one hundred films.
	436-475	SC was also involved in the American Legion. He showed a picture of himself and Dan Wong who was really a SooHoo.
	476	END OF TAPE 4 SIDE A

Tape: 4 Side B

1	005-022	There were several Chinese doctors belonged to the American Legion. SC helped a lot Chinese veterans to understand their benefits as veterans. The American Legion became very unpopular during the Vietnam War.
	023-038	After the war, Chinese veterans could bring their wives and families over to America.
2	039-072	Around 1955, the American Legion presented a life membership to SC. The office building of the American Legion was on 11th and San Pedro. The building was built by some original charter members and leased to different stores.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	073-123	The Chinese Cinema Players had put out many plays for many causes. The casting agents sometimes played favoritism. SC gave an example of how a studio casting agent pick up a player.
4	124-144	Sometimes a studio casting would take advantages in the process of looking for prospective players.
5	145-154 155-190	Bessie Loo was instrumental to nominate people to work for the studio. The "Yellow Jacket" was performed at Ebell Theatre. It was a play put out by the Chinese players for self satisfactory. Most of them were not actors. The response was not very good. Some people were not satisfied with it.
6	191-207 208-223 224-233	SC's agent was Bessie Loo. He was able to do the job for the movie industry at the same time to take care of his mother. During the World War II, the Chinese Cinema Players helped raising fund for the China Relief. SC helped in the fund raising effort. SC unofficially helped Bessie Loo to call people to be the extra.
7	234-287	Each individual had different income. Before the Union formed, an extra got \$5 or \$7.50 (a Day). It was quite difficult to find people to come to see the "Yellow Jacket". Everybody was amateur and was not very satisfied.
8	288-316 317-336	SC helped along with transportation throughout the whole effort. There was no financial support to the performance of the "Yellow Jacket". The China City was originated by Mrs. Sterling. Many people who worked in the movie industry also had shops in the China City.
9	337-353	The peanut man had a store in the China City. The fire burned down the China City.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	354-365	Many people who worked in China City could just closed the store when they were needed in the movie industry.
	366-376	Compared to what other Chinese people could make in the early days, a Chinese extra could make just as much without working everyday.
	377-392	SC had connection to the casting agent and was able to get on movie whenever there was chance.
10-	393-409	SC had to work at home helping his mother, the flexible movie job was the best kind of job for SC.
	410-435	Many Chinese ladies did not take a steady job and occasionally worked for the movie industry.
	436-456	Bo Ling and Bo Ching worked together on stage as well as for the movies.
11	457-485	SC worked three days for the Flower Drum Song and earned \$500. At the same time he also worked for other film.
	486	END OF TAPE 4 SIDE B

Tape: 5 Side A

1	001-002	Introduction
	003-025	SC talked about the movie of "The Majority of One". He worked for that film for 8 weeks. He was picked by cattle call interview. He got about \$40 a day. It was made before the Flower Drum Song.
	026-040	During the war, they got less pay than before because the wage freeze.
2	041-058	SC got \$250 a week during the war. In 1935, before the union one earned \$5 a day.
	059-068	When the union came along, the players got more. SC was the charter members of the Union.
3	069-082	Up to 1962, a player did not get residual as well as insurance.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	083-090	From about 1962, the residual was given to certain players.
	091-110	During the World War II, many Chinese and Filipinos played the Japanese parts. They got about \$75 a week as a contract extra.
4 & 5	111-128	Some of the extras stay with the studio for 14 to 15 weeks without stoping. The war movies used a lot of oriental faces. Many Chinese were able to make some money.
	129-133	It was very competitive among all extras.
	134-189	SC talked about tha Pauncho Villa story. Many Chinese were the victims. General Pershing helped to bring those Chinese harassed by the Pauncho Villa in 1916. Wong Duck, one of the victims, later was released and came to Los Angeles. He had a stand in China City. He also worked for the movies.
6	190-211	Wong Duck worked in China City. He could not speak English but could speak Spanish.
	212-246	In the early days, people like SC's father always need to carry the legal paper. During the War, many Chinese were enlisted and served in the army. After the War, they were able to bring their families to America.
7	247-282	Some people would get married in China for someone in America and brought the wife over for the real bridegroom. The peanut man was illegal.
8	283-331	The peanut man's father in China was an adopted father. His brother was in Los Angeles and did not have a child. He, the peanut man's uncle sponsored him over to America as son rather than nephew. So he had a paper name. Many Chinese did that.
9	332-343	Hiram Kwon was an immigration lawyer.
	344-374	Delbert Wong was appointed by Governor Brown to judgeship. He was American born and did not take many immigration cases.
	375-388	Hiram Kwon involved in many immigration cases.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Sumamry
10	389-400	In the early days Chinese women stayed home. Not all of SC's sisters worked outside of home.
	401-414	Lily SooHoo's sisters all worked. But the girls from other families did not worked. They stayed home.
	415-453	Some women were born and raised in America and did not speak English at all.
11	454-464	Lily SooHoo's family's children all had good education. Her sister Louise Larson was a journalist.
	465-471	SC spoke Chinese at home when young. In the early days the teachers did not care if a minority student would go to school or not.

Tape: 5 Side B

1	001-003	Blank
	004-009	Teacher did not care whether children spoke Chinese or Mexican at home.
	010-016	(SC were taking his daily medication.)
	017-043	In the early days the Chinese New Year was a big day. All the stores closed up. Children all dressed up and were taken to visit places. Chinese Lily were used for decoration. Oranges with leaves were also prepared for the New Year.
2	044-051	In the Chinese New Year, people went around and visited each other and exchanged Lai See.
	052-063	SC's family also observed other holidays such as the Moon Festival.
3	064-109	SC also described the other Chinese customs in weddings. It was fashionable to be late for the banquet. The family must be regarded highly, because the servants of the host would drive the horse carriage to invite and to take SC's parents to the banquet.
4	110-131	There was a Chinese school around. SC started going there when he was very young. It was not a successful school.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	132-152	SC was guests to the Tom Leong family parties as a student. It was not necessary a USC students party.
5	153-189	SC attended USC. The Chinese student body was small. Many of the students came from Hawaii. Some of them lived on 7th and Main Streets. The students sometimes got together.
6	190-201 202-219 220-237	Around 1915, most of the Chinese would get together at Dr. Wong's place. Dr. Wong was a Chinese herbalist. American physicians did not like Chinese herbalists to take their patients away from them. People would smoke opium at Dr. Wong's place. They just paid off the cop so they would not be arrested.
7	238-243 244-254 255-292	Opium smoking was not limited to Chinese. SC explain the way to smoke opium. SC have seen the opium smoking in Chinatown. SC and his partner went to Hanford during the summer vacation. They worked in the apricot orchard. SC witnessed the opium smoking in the fruit ranch. It was about 1915.
8	293-306 307-329	There were Chinese in Oxnard who also smoked opium. SC did not have a car until he came out from the Army.
9	330-373 374-385 386-393	SC was the third child in the family. His oldest sister believed in another sector of the Christianity. SC had his first car in 1920. SC worked in Hanford for only one summer.
10	394-421 422-447 448	SC worked in the restaurant in between picking fruits. SC did it for fun. It was a whiteman's farm. Chinese and Mexican temperary helps were hired. It was not expensive to go to USC. The oldest sister Kathryn went to UC Berkeley. END OF TAPE 5 SIDE B END OF INTERVIEW

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