

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Allen Chan
 Chinese Name: 陳 志 傑
 Date of Interview: 2/22/80
 Interviewer: George Yee
 Others Present: none
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Stella Ling, Florence Lum

Interview Number: 77
 Number of Tapes: 2
 Length: 1 Hour & 30 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	004-013	Introduction.	
	014-018	Allen Chan (AC) is the brother of James Chan who was also interviewed by George Yee.	
	019-024	AC was born on April 12, 1914 in Los Angeles. AC was born on Alameda Street in Chinatown, between Ferguson Alley and maybe Aliso Street.	
	025-031	AC lived in Chinatown from nine to twelve years. After that, AC's family moved into an American district. It was located about five miles from Chinatown. AC has lived there ever since.	
	032-037	AC's family moved probably because his father wanted his family to have more than what was offered in Chinatown. He wanted his family to live in a home instead of an apartment house. It was to build up their prestige for the children's future.	
2	038-046	AC's father worked in the daytime and went to night school on Mission near Los Angeles Street. A woman would teach him English for at least two hours every night. He would then return home and read the Bible. This is how he learned how to speak English.	
	047-051	AC attended Hewitt Street School which was a mile from Chinatown. It was on First Avenue where Japanese town is today. There is still a Hewitt Street there.	
	052-054	There was a river by the school. AC got lost there one day because he could not find his way home since he insisted on walking home by himself. Even the police came to look for him.	
	055-056	There were a lot of Chinese that would go to Hewitt Street School at that time. That was the only grammar school that they had at that time.	
	057-067	AC got lost there because it was so difficult to find Alameda Street which was right between the bridge for Los Angeles River. AC was only in kindergarten at that	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	057-067	time and probably made the wrong turn somewhere. He was heading to the river and did not know where to go from there. AC was lost for several hours. There were a lot of policemen looking for AC.
3	068-073	After grammar school, AC went to Lafayette School on 14th Street. He then attended Poly High School which is where Poly Technic High School is today.
	074-083	AC made the all-city football team when he was in high school. He would play as a guard against 165 pound kids. A lot of Koreans made the team but AC was the only Chinese that ever made it. AC weighed 103 pounds at that time. He was about five feet tall at that time.
	084-088	Nevertheless, AC was able to show those people how tough he was even if he was small. People were surprised at what AC could do.
	089-094	In those days, most of the kids were minorities and there was some prejudice. Most of the minority students stuck pretty close regardless of whether they were Black, Mexican or Chinese.
	095-098	AC noticed that the football team of his days was closer together than the teams found today.
	099-108	The neighborhood at the Poly Technic area was predominantly white. As time went by, the Koreans and Japanese started moving in. At one point AC understood Korean and Japanese better than he understood Chinese because of his close association with them.
4	109-113	AC took up electronics in high school. AC has worked for three different governmental agencies--at federal, county and city government levels after the second World War.
	114-115	AC did electrical work for the civil service after the war.
	116-123	Being in the war made AC more Americanized. One would become more Americanized regardless of whether they were an American or a minority.
	124-129	Once you learn how to be a good mixer, you can find a job with anybody. On the other hand, if you have a chip on your shoulder then you will feel inferior. If you are yourself, everyone will help you.
	130-132	AC's philosophy has been the same for years--treat people as equals.
	133-139	AC has never felt sorry for being Chinese. He is a human being. There is no reason why he should be sorry for being Chinese. Everyone should be thankful for what they are and must adjust themselves to what they really are.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	140-150	People thought that after the war that AC would discriminate against the Japanese because he fought against them. AC did not.
5	151-152	People must learn how to forgive and forget regardless of whether they are right or wrong.
	153-168	People in AC's generation must learn to associate with other people which would even help them understand themselves. Discrimination is two-way. Many times, AC is the only Chinese invited to an American home. Everything depends on how you approach people and how you adjust to the reality that there are different nationalities.
	169-180	AC's family used herbs when he was young. After he grew up, he went to American doctors because American medicine is more advanced.
	181-192	AC's family no longer use herbs in their cooking. The modern aged people today no longer believe in herbs anymore. They may boil bones to get blood calcium but they do not do that very often anymore.
6	193-204	Before the second World War, the children did not gamble. They were well disciplined and thus well behaved. The children today are not as disciplined as those in AC's days.
	205-210	In AC's youth, they would play hide and seek in the yards. They would play with whatever they had.
	211-224	AC did belong to a Chinese baseball team. That was the initial athletic team among the Chinese. They first played baseball and then basketball. Now basketball is more popular in the Asian countries than baseball is. Baseball is still more important to the Japanese than basketball is.
	225-234	The China born did not often write letters because they are lazy. The American born Chinese will keep in contact once in a while, but not constantly because they do not know if the letters are received on the other end.
7	235-242	AC writes to his nephew in Hong Kong but he never gets any replies. AC gets a reply once in a long while. It does not matter to AC. When they come to Los Angeles, then they look AC up.
	243-249	AC does not believe in family associations because they are not helpful to the needy. They just have dues to keep the organization going.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	250-263	AC's family belonged to a Chan family association. They are useless because they are not helpful and are only concerned about collecting money. These family associations are still in existence.
	264-274	Most of the prominent figures in Chinatown in the 1920's and 1930's were business people. They are down-to-earth because they made their money the hard way. They have respect for hard-working people.
8	275-284	There was a man by the name of Lee and AC's uncle, Chan Pak Leong that worked for immigration as interpreters.
	285-289	There were a lot of Chinese doctors. It is hard for AC to remember their names.
	290-299	Before World War II, the Chinese were mostly laborers. They were no different from the foreign immigrants and refugees today.
	300-302	The laundries were the most profitable jobs in those days.
	303-306	Even today, there are too many restaurants but they still make a living.
	307-313	All the jobs in Chinatown were conducted by the Chinese. The Chinese could not get into the work force elsewhere.
9	314-333	AC started working for a Caucasian in 1936 and 1938. He was the only Chinese in his division. AC worked for aircraft plants. He worked for Northrop. AC worked in the riveting department and electrical department.
	334-336	There were very few Chinese also working in the plant.
	337-347	AC probably got the job at the plant because of his prior education. They would hire you regardless of your educational level but would place you in different departments. They would give the Chinese promotions if the Chinese workers could show that they were better than the others.
	348-356	In the 1920's and 1930's, \$40 a month was considered good whereas \$30 a month was considered average. This was during the Depression.
	357-369	People were doing good if they were making a dollar a day during the Depression.
	370-381	The value of a dollar was much higher in those days. It was possible to live on \$30 a month in those days.
10	382-384	In those days, \$30 was about the same as \$300 today.
	385-387	Rent only cost about \$10 in those days.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	388-414	Everything was just as competitive in those days as it is today. Either you know your trade or you did not get a job. That is true in the 1920's and in the 1980's. You will not get a job if you do not know anything.
	415-440	By 1925 or 1930, the Chinese started moving out of Chinatown. They would move into white neighborhoods. The Chinese just had to tolerate the prejudice that was going on in those days. The Chinese received a lot of abuse.
	441-447	Only after the war started did discrimination begin to taper off a little bit. There was a lot of discrimination from the 1920's to the 1940's.
11	448-458	There was still some discrimination after World War II until the 1950's or 1960's. Things improved after the civil rights movement.
	459-475	In those days, the Chinese would gamble their money. A lot of Chinese would not put their money in the banks. The Chinese would bury the money that they saved. Nobody knows how they were able to preserve the money after being underground for so many years. The money would not accumulate moisture. There was no plastic in those days. The dollar bills looked as new as ever.
	476-485	The Chinese probably did not trust the banks at that time. They were afraid of bankruptcy. They felt that if the banks used their money, they would not get it back anymore.
	486-488	There were no Chinese banks at that time, just American banks.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

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	026-030	The Chinese probably did not trust the banks at that time. They were afraid of bankruptcy. They felt that if the banks used their money, they would not get it back anymore.
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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	033-038	There may have been Chinese involved in politics in China but there were none in the United States. There is not even any representation for the Chinese today.
	039-045	The Chinese would send money back to their relatives in China but no one really knows who gets the money. It was a waste of time and money for the Chinese to send money back.
	046-054	There were no bread lines for the Chinese during the Depression. The Chinese had labor jobs. Most of the Chinese were provided for in Chinatown. The Chinese would work for 12 to 16 hours for a dollar. The meals were included but that was the only way they could survive at that time.
	055-061	A pound of porkchops cost 10 cents in the 1920's. A spaghetti dinner cost five cents. You could get a lot of things for just a penny in those days.
	062-067	Food did not cost too much in Chinatown in those days. About 10 or 15 cents would buy you a large bowl of noodles.
	068-073	During the Depression, money was tight and a lot of banks were closed. The Depression was a turning point for the whole world.
	074-080	Before World War II, there would be gang wars or tong wars but those did not jeopardize the other races. These gang wars were just between the Chinese people.
	081-083	AC heard shots fired by tong members but he never saw anyone get shot.
	084-087	Chinatown was wide opened in those days in terms of gambling. Gambling tapered down when the vice squad came in.
	088-097	Gambling in those days was similar to Las Vegas today. In the 1920's, the gambling houses would provide free meals, etc. There were a lot of Filipinos that would come to Chinatown to eat at these gambling houses. The Chinese would accept them unless they overdid it. The gambling houses were for customers, not for free loaders. AC would occasionally bring home what they did not eat.
	098-103	The vice squad started in the 1920's and got worse in the 1930's. They would raid Chinatown and Japan town.
4	104-110	There were a few prostitutes in Chinatown. There were more prostitutes in Pico House than in any place in Los Angeles. They were Caucasian prostitutes, there were no Chinese ones. That was just a block away from Chinatown.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	111-116	There were some whorehouses scattered within Chinatown at that time. These would be Chinese prostitutes. They came through white slavery. The caucasians would sneak them into the country.
	117-136	AC did not see any underground tunnels in Old Chinatown. AC was curious as a cat while he was young and he would crawl into cellars but did not see any tunnels. There were ordinary cellars in the houses in Old Chinatown. There were some opium dens but not any tunnels. The street was on a slope so it seems unlikely that they could have built tunnels underneath the buildings.
	137-145	In the 1920's, all the races were segregated and the Chinese were located in the center. There would be a lot of fights between these ethnic groups. Other groups would come and fight the Chinese on the streets.
5	146-156	A lot of kids would get involved in these fights. Sometimes there were mobs of twenty or thirty kids on each side. The police would not come and break things up. They would fist fight, or shoot guns, or throw rocks. Some people would get badly hurt but probably no one got killed.
	157-167	When the Union Station was to be erected, the Chinese had to move to a new area and that is when the fights gradually stopped. There were gang fights until the late 1930's.
	168-179	Only the kids participated in these fights. The Chinese would just fight in defense. There was a fight about once a week or twice a week. It was something for the kids to do to keep from being bored.
	180-196	AC has often heard people comparing the Chinese with the Jewish people in doing business. The Chinese and Jews are similar in a lot of ways. They are similar in financial matters.
6	197-205	In the 1920's, there were cars pulled by horses for transportation. Then there were trolley cars. It was quite a thrill for AC to ride on those horse cars at that time. It would only cost a penny a ride--you could ride all day for just a penny.
	206-207	AC's father would occasionally take his children for a ride on those horse trolley cars because they enjoyed it so much. AC's father did have his own horse and buggy.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	208-217	The trolleys went out when the Pacific Electric red cars came in. The trains on Alameda Street eliminated the horse pulled trolleys in that area.
	218-233	The Chinese would purchase horses and buggys in those days. They had their own stables where the Union Station is today. The stable was run by Americans but they considered it a Chinese stable. Some people lived on top of the stable. There were rooms upstairs and a bathroom in there somewhere.
	234-235	Unfortunately, AC does not have any pictures to show how people lived in those days. People were happy and they were healthier than the people today.
	236-251	There were hundreds of Chinese fruit and vegetable peddlers in those days. They would peddle their food to various places in the American community. They had to get up around 3 o'clock in the morning to buy their vegetables and would not return until late at night. They worked so hard but did not get good incomes. That is the way the Chinese life was like in those days.
7	252-267	In the 1930's, the grocery stores started coming in along with supermarkets which pushed the fruit and vegetable peddlers out of business. That was in the mid-1930's.
	268-274	There were also American fruit and vegetable peddlers.
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1	002-011	Introduction.
	012-019	There were also American fruit and vegetable peddlers at that time but most of them were Chinese. Each peddler would take care of a certain area.
	020-028	In the 1930's, the peddlers used Model T Ford trucks in order to deliver their fruits and vegetables. The peddlers stopped using the horse and buggy in the 1920's.
	029-039	There were some small Chinese farms at that time in the San Fernando area. They were doing pretty well. Peter SooHoo, a well known person in Los Angeles, became a millionaire because of his asparagus farm. His farm may have been located in the San Fernando area. He made his fortune through asparagus because he was the only one who had an asparagus farm.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	040-049	There were no Chinese fruit farms. The farms usually grew vegetables because they did not grow orchards at that time. The Americans grew oranges. Some Chinese were hired to do field work in the orange groves at times.
	050-055	The Ninth Street Wholesale Market was mostly run by the Chinese. The Chinese worked with the farmers and then sold the vegetables to the wholesalers or to the peddlers.
	056-062	The business was so good at the produce market that they started the Eighth Street Central Market for the Chinese establishment. The produce markets competed with one another.
	063-076	At one time, the farmers controlled the produce market business. The building was not owned by the Chinese though. It was rented by the Chinese. Later on, the Japanese, Italians, and other people started coming in. In the older days, there were just Chinese. The Chinese established the produce markets in the 1920's. There are still some Chinese at those markets today.
3	077-088	In the 1920's and 1930's, there were a lot of arranged marriages. The parents would agree to marry their sons and daughters to another family. Once the pledge was made, the marriage must take place. AC thinks that is ridiculous. It was like that up to 1930's.
	089-093	There were some but not as many arranged marriages among the American born Chinese. Not many American born Chinese went back to China to get married because of the great cost.
	094-100	In those days, the China born Chinese would return to China to get married because the American born women were too modern for them. Today, it seems as if the Chinese men like the modern women more than the traditional women.
	101-112	Most of the Chinese wanted to have sons, regardless of whether they were China born or American born. In the 1920's and 1930's, the people wanted to have sons in order to keep the family name. It was ridiculous because a grandchild is yours regardless of whether it is your daughter's or son's. The Chinese did not see it that way; they were concerned with the name.
4	113-120	AC did not learn how to read and write in Chinese school because his mind is more in the American than in the Chinese ways. Other American born Chinese also attended Chinese school but did not learn much either. AC is just not interested in the Chinese language.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	121-124	From the time AC was ten years old, he lived in the American districts. Within a few years he could still understand but could not speak Chinese any longer.
	125-133	Some of the Chinese from Hong Kong can no longer speak Chinese because they mix so much with the American people. These people are immigrants.
	134-143	AC can speak Chinese now. When he was 21 years old, during the Depression, AC was looking for a job. An old man was a real good cook but told AC that he would not cook for AC unless AC spoke Chinese. That is how AC relearned Chinese. He talks funny but those people will not let him speak anything but Chinese to them.
5	144-149	AC tried to translate the English into Chinese which is not grammatically correct but they get the overall idea of what he is trying to say.
	150-154	A lot of Chinese immigrants make their children read the Chinese newspapers so that they will retain the Chinese language.
	155-156	The Chinese children did not think much about going to Chinese school.
	157-168	Until today, the Chinese are still interested in returning to China. A lot has changed in China from the 1920's to the 1980's.
	169-173	When AC was young, he went to see American movies. There were not many Chinese movies or Chinese theaters.
	174-178	AC worked in a couple of Charlie Chan movies. He was one of the sons when the series first started.
	179-183	AC was not embarrassed about these Charlie Chan movies since he was in them.
6	184-196	The actor that play Charlie Chan looked very much like a Chinese but he was a Swede. He also acted and talked like an elder of the Chinese race. AC talked to him quite often and told him that he thought that he was a Chinese. He was a very nice and friendly person.
	197-208	Some people do say that they are ashamed of being Chinese but AC thinks that they are ignorant because they do no adjust themselves to what they are. A person with a PhD, for example, still has a lot of people competing against him or her.
	209-215	There are very few Chinese that are willing to compete with other well educated people. The Japanese seem not to mind competitions but the Chinese always seem to have a fear of competing.
	216-219	The Chinese seem to be just as smart as other people but they do not seem to go for politics and things like that. AC does not know why.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	220-239	The Chinese have always wanted their sons to be businessmen, regardless of whether it is 1920 or 1980. When AC goes to Hong Kong or other countries the parents always say business. The Chinese are very good mathematicians. The Chinese like business because they think they can make more money in business. They have no knowledge of other things like computers.
7	240-246	There are computers in Hong Kong only recently whereas there has been computers in the United States for ten or twenty years.
	247-255	The Chinese are always backwards in some sense. They do not know how to see a situation in the future. Nowadays, they will use a hand calculator instead of an abacus.
	256-263	There was one kid in Caltech who only knew how to use an abacus. Nevertheless, he beat everyone else that were using slide rulers.
	264-273	In the 1920's and 1930's, the Chinese parents would be proud if their sons were able to establish a business, any business, for themselves.
	274-286	Laundrymen made a lot of money in the 1920's and 1930's. The parents would be happy as long as their somes made money. Some laundrymen are now retired but they still have money to throw around.
8	287-299	AC enlisted in the Navy in World War II in 1942. He got along with the commander. AC wanted to eliminate his training but still have his credit so that he could get a promotion.
	300-307	AC had to associate with a lot of people while he was in the service. He was the only Chinese in a group of a hundred and so it was difficult for them to understand him. Nevertheless, AC made a lot of friends there.
	308-314	From there, AC went overseas. They put AC in the Atlantic. AC then decided that he wanted to fight in the Pacific but had a hard time getting transferred. He was finally transferred.
	315-325	By doing that, AC received the friendship of the captain and of AC's fellow men on the ship.
9.	326-334	When they got to the Orient, they all fought together and got injured together. AC's captain died. AC was the first to be asked if he wanted to attend the captain's funeral. AC was the only Chinese aboard the ship.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	335-340	AC was on a destroyer. They then went to Pearl Harbor for repairs. AC decided to transfer to another ship.
	341-349	AC had a privilege of taking any destroyer in Pearl Harbor because the Admiral was AC's captain's uncle. AC was given a high recommendation by his own captain so that is why AC had the privilege of going on any destroyer he wanted that was in Pearl Harbor.
	350-356	AC asked them to pick out the best fighter and he wound up on the U.S. Reed. Two months later, the Japanese sunk that ship.
	357-365	It took AC about three months to return to the United States because he was hospitalized. AC was in the Navy during World War II for two years and ten months and had been on four destroyers.
	366-372	AC has a high recommendation from Forster and one of his assistants, McCormick.
	373-380	AC would have stayed in the Navy but he was released on a medical discharge. He got out in 1945.
	381-382	AC worked with the electronic radars on the ships.
10	383-389	The other destroyers that AC was on were the Waffer, the Norman Scott, the Reed, and another one with a French name.
	390-398	When AC tried to transfer ships, the captain tried to persuade AC to change his mind although AC had the right to transfer.
	399-410	AC does not keep in touch with his shipmates because they are all over the United States--you do not know where they are and they do not know where you are.
	411-425	After AC left the Navy, he went to school for five years. It was because of his schooling that he took a long time finding a job. He got a job in the county and for the federal government. He then returned to school for three years and then worked for the Water and Power Department.

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1	014-015	AC's last job was in the Water and Power Department.
	016-017	AC has been retired for five years.
	018-021	During Chinese New Years in the old days, there would be a small dragon dance. Today, the dragons are long and about half a block in length.
	022-027	The dragon dances in those days were somewhat different from the ones today. The dragons were more realistic in the old days--today the art is now as keen.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	028-038	They would have drums for the lions to dance to. There were no parades in those days--there was just the lion and dragon dances and some firecrackers. A lot of people would come and watch. There were no formal drum and bugle choirs. The Americans did not participate in the activities.
2	039-041	In those days, Chinatown was only about four square blocks.
	042-050	Sometimes they would parade for organizations and sometimes for the schools. They would use Chinese New Years to raise funds for the Chinese schools.

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