

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Peter Soo Hoo Interview Number: 44  
 Chinese Name: 司徒天佑 Number of Tapes: 2  
 Date of Interview: 12/15/79 Length: 1 Hour & 15 Minutes  
 Interviewer: M. Kwok & S. Cheng  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	007-012	Father was born in Los Angeles and went to USC. Was very active in civil service in Los Angeles Chinatown.	
	013-018	Father was active in forming a band, a Chinese orchestra, also in fundraising during the Sino-Japanese War, etc.	
	019-023	Paternal grandmother was born in Ventura. The other three grandparents were born in China.	
	024-026	Grandfather was 83 years old when he passed away in 1951.	
	027-035	Maye Wong would know more about Peter Soo Hoo's (PSH) grandparents.	
2	036-045	Mother's family was in the herb business. Her father was Tom Leong. Father's family had a general merchandise store.	
	046-062	Maternal grandfather's customers were Caucasian. Mother worked for the Chinese Consulate from 1933 to 1967. She was the secretary and then became a vice consul.	
	063-075	Father worked for the Department of Water and Power as an engineer from 1925 to 1945. He was the first Chinese mechanical engineer to work in the department.	
3	076-088	PSH's father promoted the idea of building a new Chinatown. He was financially supported by DWP himself.	
	089-102	Father was more of a leader. At the DWP he was more confined to the office. Father got the job right after he graduated from USC.	
	103-111	Mother was born in Los Angeles and went to USC. She spoke Chinese and worked for the Chinese Consulate.	
4	112-117	PSH spoke a lot of Chinese with his grandmother and studied Chinese from a tutor.	

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	118-126	PSH was born in 1926 in Los Angeles on Alverado and Sunset. From there they moved to 12th Street, about two blocks near his maternal grandmother.
	127-133	Paternal grandfather kept his business until the Old Chinatown was torn down. PSH's sister visited him once a week.
	134-149	Paternal grandfather's store was in a very depressed area. It sold all kinds of merchandise. He was blind but got around to manage the store.
5	150-157	Paternal grandfather lived in the store on Marchessault Street.
	158-176	PSH went to USC. PSH never felt like he was in the position to go to Chinese school per se. He had a Chinese tutor who gave him lessons two hours a week for three years.
	177-187	There were not many Chinese classmates in the grammar school except for his cousins. In high school, he had many Chinese classmates, who PSH later associated a lot with.
6	188-213	PSH's maternal grandfather had a lot of domestic helpers. He passed away during the Depression. Two sons took over the herb business up until the 1950's.
	214-237	PSH's maternal grandfather's customers were mainly Caucasian. Later due to the changing attitudes of Caucasians and the shortage of herbs during the war, the business decreased.
7	238-244	Mother had two sisters and five brothers.
	245-263	PSH mainly associated with white American students at school. Outside of school he played with his sisters and cousins.
	264-280	PSH spoke Chinese only with his grandfather and didn't speak much Chinese at home with his parents.
8	281-289	Parents' family came from Canton.
	290-300	Family used Chinese herbs most of the time in the early days.
	301-309	The family also cooked food with herbs.
	310-321	PSH went to American movies for recreation.
9	322-329	Family did write to friends in China.
	330-341	Family observed Chinese holidays. The whole family got together and had Chinese food.

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1 Side A  
Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	342-350	Father formed a Chinese band which played in the Chinatown parades, San Diego Fair and Santa Barbara Fiesta.
	351-394	PSH's three uncles on his mother's side also played in the orchestra. They played in Chinatown as well as in downtown. They played American music and got paid for playing.
10	395-404	They played for different occasions in Chinatown.
	405-414	The family celebrated American holidays such as Christmas as well.
	415-427	Father belonged to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), CACA, and the Chinatown Corporation which was formed when the old Chinatown was torn down.
	428-443	China Society was also founded by PSH's father and his friends. He was president and secretary for the organization.
	444-460	PSH now is still a shareholder of the Chinatown Corporation.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	006-011	The members of the Chinatown Corporation were merchants in the New Chinatown such as the owner of Yee Sing Chong, Tvey Far Low, etc.
	012-023	Father helped to find the land and write the contract for the New Chinatown. Most of the merchants didn't speak as much English as PSH's father.
	024-035	The Chinatown Corporation is still in existence. There are about 73 or 75 shareholders. Some sold their shares to the others.
2	036-043	The corporation didn't have much capital. It owned three pieces of property and a parking lot on College Street and Hill Street.
	044-055	It seemed that it is more difficult to get things done in the corporation now than before. If PSH's father was still alive, it would have been better. It needs the type of individual like PSH's father, a leader type.
	056-065	In the early days, the corporation met two to three times a week and met with CCBA to get their support.
	066-071	PSH went to the meetings with his father but couldn't understand.

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Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	072-089	Mother's family had their own activities in their own home. Mother did a lot of shopping for her family. She was the eldest, so she took the responsibility.
	090-100	Mother transported her father to places. PSH didn't think most Chinese women drove in the early days, but PSH's mother did drive.
	101-113	During the Depression, one uncle was a janitor in an apartment. The other uncle worked at the National Dollar Store in downtown. Most of the work was menial jobs.
4	114-123	Mother and her sisters went to USC. PSH's uncle went to USC. But during the Depression they had to work different jobs. Two uncles had to abandon their education and go to work.
	124-136	Father's family members were in a different business. One was in the restaurant business. Maye Wong's husband was in the produce business.
	137-143	The family was affected by the Depression very much.
5	144-148	PSH's paternal father still had his business during the Depression.
	149-154	The Soo Hoo and Leong families were important Chinese families in Los Angeles.
	155-161	Chinese had enough income. Chinese always managed very well.
	162-169	Chinese put their savings in the bank.
	170-171 172-188	Family did not send money back to China. Father sold War Bonds and stamps in Chinatown to the tourists for the war relief.
6	189-202	Today's Chinatown cannot attract more tourists due to the shortage of parking and the security problems.
	203-209	PSH's aunts and uncles met their wives and husbands in house parties, dances, and in church and school.
	210-213	None of his family and friends went back to China to get married.
	214-224	The idea of having a son seemed always to be ingrained in people. PSH has three daughters and one son who is the youngest.
	225-236	Interracial marriage was a taboo in the old days. PSH still thinks the same way. But his oldest daughter married a Jewish boy. He still likes to see his children and go out with Chinese friends.

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Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	237-241	PSH took his children to Chinese church every weekend. Mother's sister married a Swedish man in the 1930's. It was a shock to the family. Grandmother adjusted very well after the initial shock.
	242-257	
	258-264	PSH met his wife in Chinatown when he was young. so his parents never had to worry about him.
	265-279	PSH was rather embarrassed and felt left out that he did not speak much Chinese. He thinks it is important to learn the Chinese language.
8	280-285	PSH's sister didn't have a chance to learn Chinese.
	286-295	PSH sent his children to Chinese school for a couple of years every Saturday.
	296-300	PSH thinks to go to Chinese school is to learn Chinese heritage.
	301-308	PSH's grandmother wanted to go to China and to die there but she didn't.
	309-324	Uncles and aunts didn't think of going back to China until the last couple of years. Some of them just visited China. PSH didn't know anyone who actually returned to China to stay.
9	325-337	There was always some distortion when the Chinese were portrayed in the movies. It never bothered PSH that much.
	338-364	PSH graduated from college in advertising and marketing. He got into the DWP and worked in market research. Later he worked in sales promotion. Now the department does not do promoting and only concentrates on conservation. PSH has been working there for 20 years.
	365-381	PSH didn't think that he was treated differently at the DWP. He got along very well with other colleagues.
	382-397	Father was a very intelligent person. PSH didn't think his father had a difficult life.
10	398-411	The Silverlake area used to be a restricted area. Chinese were not able to purchase houses there. PSH's father purchased two lots on the street that was not included in the restricted area.
	412-421	Oriental's couldn't join the band and clubs in the early days.
	422-431	PSH was in two clubs, the Advertising Fraternity and the Marketing organization, without any problems. Things have changed to a better situation.

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1 Side B

Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	432-480	Family bought the house in 1937 for \$700. Father never got to enjoy the house. The house was built in 1952 and was designed by an architect.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	000-010 011-017 018-021 022-039	Introduction. There were always disagreements among different groups about the Chinatown policy. Chinese always thought professional jobs as ideal jobs. Father told him never to be an engineer. Because his father's job was so confining to him and didn't fit his personality. He was a very active person.
2	040-045 046-051 052-056 057-066 067-069	The professional jobs was a break through on the traditional Chinese jobs such as restaurant and laundry work. PSH doesn't consider himself as successful, but he is able to support his family. The older generation has done a good job so that the younger generation can enjoy life better. Father must have seen things needed to be corrected. He worked toward the immigration laws and went to Washington D.C. for a better law for the Chinese. Father had Caucasian friends. He was mostly involved in Chinatown activities.
3	070-079 080-099 100-104	PSH associated mostly with his high schoolmates and his wife's friends. PSH is a member of the CACA. Now he is not as active as before. Right now he is trying to bring up his children. PSH never joined any professional organizations.
4	105-112 113-123	PSH went to Chinatown two to three times a week for lunch. He is the secretary for the Chinese Corpotaion. Sometimes the family goes to Chinatown for dinner. PSH felt a special tie to Chinatown because of his father's involvement in developing it. Unfortunately the children didn't have any special ties to Chinatown.

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