

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Sui-Ying Wong
 Chinese Name: 黃瑞英 (傳寧)
 Date of Interview: 5/13/80
 Interviewer: Suellen Cheng
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Interview Number: 94
 Number of Tapes: 3
 Length: 1 Hour & 51 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-009	Introduction.	
	010-015	Sui-Ying Wong (SYW) came from Toishan, Canton in 1923.	
	016-023	Grandfather and father came to the U.S.	
	024-030	Grandfather came here for gold.	
	031-037	SYW was born in 1903 in China. Father went back to China only one time.	
2	038-046	All the brothers were born in China.	
	047-054	Father was in the Chinese herb business in san Francisco.	
	055-057	Mother didn't come to the U.S.	
	058-066	Mother had farm land which grew rice. It was a small farm.	
	067-072	Father sent money back to China to support the family.	
3	073-082	SYW went to private school in China for five or six years.	
	083-091	SYW went to Toishan city for junior high school and lived at school.	
	092-106	After junior high school SYW worked in a paper store making all kinds of paper including paper money for ancestral worship.	
4	107-118	Made \$10 a month in China. It was not enough for a living.	
	119-137	SYW arrived in San Francisco. A year after father returned to China.	
	138-143	Father had a Chinese herb store in Los Angeles Old Chinatown.	
5	144-147	Brother came to the U.S. later.	
	148-160	Soon after SYW arrived in Los Angeles, SYW worked in Chuck's Produce through a cousin's introduction.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	161-163 164-176 177-180 181-186	In 1929, SYW went back to China and got married. The marriage was arranged. Couldn't remember how much he made in the produce market. Cousins just gave him some money. SYW went to school in Los Angeles for 1½ years to learn English.
6	187-204 205-210 211-218 219-221 222-245	SYW was able to save some money. He lived at his cousin's house on East 22nd Street. Cousin had four children and lived in a three bedroom house. SYW lived in the back house. Cousin owned a produce business. SYW lived and ate at his cousin's place. SYW sometimes went to Chinese shows, sometime American shows. SYW went to work around 5:00 a.m. then around 8:00 a.m. he went to school. After school he went back to work. Sometimes people in the produce market worked 18 hours.
7	246-260 261-269 270-275 276-289	There was one truck and one driver in the market. SYW helped deliver to American restaurants. The market sold all kinds of vegetables. After SYW quit school he worked full time until 1929. After SYW came back from China, he became a partner of the market. He didn't put in any money.
8	290-305 306-327 328-363	Business was pretty good. It was enough for living. It was better than the restaurant business but not a big business. Worked in Chu ck Produce Market until 1965. Cousin passed away. SYW sold the business. A few years after 1929, the company added a couple more helper but still had one truck. During World War II, the company had four or five trucks.
9	364-379 380-401	Sometimes, the company delivered to 35 or 40 restaurants. During the Depression, the company didn't make much money. SYW and cousin was able to make the living, but a lot of people couldn't even get pay.
10	402-414 415-425 426-459	SYW worked fifteen, sixteen hours a day during the Depression time. Children were born in Los Angeles. SYW paid \$20 a month for renting a three bedroom house in 1939. SYW moved to the present residence in 1959.

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1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	460-467	SYW has two sons and five daughters.
	468-475	SYW always worked in the produce market.
	476-481	Farmers would bring the produce to the wholesale market and sold them to the wholesale houses.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	002-007	Louie Produce was a big produce house.
	008-012	Before World War II there were a lot of Japanese produce houses.
	013-017	Before SYW came to Los Angeles, there were more Chinese produce houses.
	018-022	Farmers brought in the produce, the house sold it for them and got 15% to 20% commission. Before the commission was 10%.
	023-028	Used credit in dealing with business.
	029-036	Bigger houses sometimes had more risk. So some big houses made a lot of money but some went broke.
2	037-048	In the old days, the produce market didn't do much packing.
	049-053	The business was up and down.
	054-059	SYW was able to save some money. Sometime he invested in stocks.
	060-066	SYW sent money back to his mother before and after he was married. Even now he sent money to his nephew.
	067-098	"Gee Wei" (聚會) was a form of remittance. A group of Chinese Americans who came from the same village would gather enough money to send back to China for purchasing pigs during the New Year. All the relatives would then get their share of the pork.
3	099-123	Father went back to China in 1924 and soon after that he passed away. Mother passed away during World War II. SYW still had to send money to his brothers in China. He sent back money three times a year.
4	124-144	when the nephews got married they would ask for money from SYW. Father sent money back for building a house.
5	145-156	SYW once invested a couple thousand dollars in China Bank and lost the money after World War II.

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1 Side B

Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	157-182	Before World War II, people sent money back to China through Hong Kong. During the war time, people couldn't send money back.
	183-195	SYW wrote home in China. Sometime he was asked to write letters for friends.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	003-017	Grandfather didn't have to work in the gold mines. He earned money by writing letters for other Chinese miners. Grandfather returned to China only once.
	018-022	After grandfather made money in the U.S., he retired in China, bought a farm and built a house. That's all he wanted.
	023-032	SYW didn't know when his father came to the U.S.
2	033-055	SYW spoke Toishanese. SYW associated with mostly non-Chinese customers. SYW belonged to the Chinese Produce Market Merchants' Association (華人農產商會). In the 1930s there were about 50 houses. Now there are less than 20 houses.
	056-061	The American born Chinese didn't like to work in the Produce Market.
	062-063	After the union was formed, it wasn't a long hour work job.
	064-086	The Produce Market Merchants' Association had a meeting once a month. Most of the time they just got together and discussed business.
3	087-091	The produce house owner bought what they wanted and didn't have to buy produce from the Association members.
	092-104	SYW associated also with Japanese but not with Blacks, because there weren't Black businessmen in the produce market.
4	105-117	SYW felt himself to be both Chinese and American.
	118-143	SYW also belonged to the association which dealt with the union. The union started around 1936. It helped cut down the working hours.
5	144-157	SYW thought the union was a good idea. After SYW sold the business, he worked for other people and wanted to join the union. The union rejected him for his old age.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	158-164	Children spoke a little Chinese except the youngest one.
	165-187	SYW sent all the children to the Presbyterian Church Chinese school on Adam Street. They attended the Chinese school from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day.
6	188-199	Children didn't help in his business. Soemtimes children did help during the summer vacation.
	200-219	SYW celebrated Chinese New Year and burned firecrackers. He als burned firecrackers for American New Year's Eve.
	220-233	Sometimes SYW would go to the Wong Family Association in Chinatown. He read Chinese newspapers there.
7	234-254	There wasn't much business in Old Chinatown in the early days. There were restaurants, herb stores, and grocery stores.
	255-263	When the Union Depot was built, Chinese had to move away.
	264-274	SYW visited the Old Chinatown once a week or more.
	275-300	Only 10% of the Wongs joined the family association. During the New Year, the family association had a celebration banquet.
8	301-338	SYW had no time for recreation in the early days. In 1930s there was a Chinese opera house, but didn't have many shows. They brought singers from China or from San Francisco. Now SYW stays home watching TV.
9	339-349	SYW eats all kinds of food, both Chinese and American.
	350-393	Chinese herb doctors could treat small ailments. Po Chai Pills (保濟丸) are very good Chinese medicine. SYW used Chinese herbs in cooking.
10	394-409	SYW watched a little bit of American sports but not as a hobby. SYW was too busy to have any hobbies.
	410-444	He never took vacations before. Chinese young people play volleyball today.
	445-456	SYW didn't belong to other organizations other than the Wong Family Association and the Produce Market Association.
11	457-476	The president of the Produce Market Association was elected by members.
	477-481	The first house SYW purchased cost him only \$1500.

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2 Side B

Tape: 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	<u>Tape 2 Side B</u>
1.	002-011	SYW's first house was purchased in 1934 or 1935. It was on 30th Street. SYW rented it out for \$25 a month. He later sold it for \$3000.	
	012-029	SYW then bought his second house on Normandie. After World War II, the Blacks moved in and the whites moved out. Chinese, then, were able to purchase the house in the neighborhood.	
	030-044	SYW became a naturalized citizen as a merchant's son.	
2	045-054	Brother came in 1930 and worked together with SYW in the produce market. After World War II his brother went back to China and brought his family.	
	055-072	Some of the Wong Family Association leaders were quite important in the early days.	
3	073-085	Before World War II, Chinese engaged in laundries, restaurants, grocery stores, and gift shops.	
	086-096	Before World War II, Chinese didn't have a chance to work for big companies, even if they had a college degree.	
	097-101	There were some Chinese college graduates working in the produce market because they couldn't find other jobs.	
	102-111	Chinese were not allowed to buy property, farmland in the early days.	
4	112-147	Before World War II, Chinese didn't have a chance. They didn't have many places to go. Most Chinese returned to China and lived on the income of the farmlands.	
5	148-159	There were about 200 Chinese in Los Angeles who had the same ancestor as SYW.	
	160-169	SYW always worked in the produce market.	
	170-196	Some Chinese had a wife in China but never sent money back or went back to see them. They gambled their money away.	

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

Tape 3 Side A

1	001-009	Introduction.
	010-021	Chinese usually saved money, so during the Depression most Chinese got by. Even though SYW did not make much money at the time, but he still made some money.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	022-036	Some American people treated Chinese all right but some weren't nice to Chinese.
2	037-047	Arranged marriages were very common among Chinese in Los Angeles in the early days due to the lack of Chinese women.
	048-054	Most Chinese prefer having sons rather than daughters.
	055-072	SYW didn't like interracial marriages too much. Now a days, more Chinese married to non-Chinese. In the old days, people didn't like interracial marriage.
3	073-081	SYW sent daughters to Chinese school.
	082-094	In the early days, SYW and other Chinese often thought of going back to China, but now he doesn't think of it anymore.
	095-108	One son had a business in Hong Kong. He lived there.
	109-123	Chinese always give children educational opportunity. SYW let his daughters decide what they wanted to do.
4	124-127	SYW's family members all attended church.
	128-134	Parents worshipped ancestors in China. SYW didn't carry on the custom.
	135-148	SYW felt that he worked hard but didn't have a especially hard time or became rich.
5	149-166	SYW was able to get along. In 1965, he sold the business and went to Hong Kong for a visit. After he came back, he was asked to help in the produce market. Since then he has been working in the market.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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