

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Elaine Chow Interview Number: 6
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 3
 Date of Interview: 10/26/79, 12/2/79 Length: 2 Hours & 9 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-017 018-024 025-034	Introduction. Father came from China. Mother was a native of Sacramento. Father had a mining camp and had many Chinese under him at Alameda County.	
2	035-041 042-055 056-073	Parents got married through a matchmaker. Mother tried to run a restaurant once. Sister married at the age of 15 to an old man through a matchmaker. Elaine Chow (EC) lived with sister. Father had a grocery store at Dinuba. The store sold Chinese merchandise.	
3	074-077 078-123	Mother passed away when EC was young. EC showed an old family photo. EC had a paper brother. The picture was taken when EC was around nine. EC was born around 1900. EC and sister were born in Tesla, Alameda County. They went to Dinuba for schooling.	
4	124-135 136-143	At school one American boy always kicked her and called her "Chink." EC went to Stockton to live with her sister and attended high school there.	
5	144-151 152-189	EC made friends mostly with Chinese and some American friends. EC spoke Chinese at home. She didn't go to Chinese school. EC hired a private tutor to teach her children Chinese. Chung Wah objected to EC's hiring a tutor.	
6	190-200 201-210	EC felt that children should learn reading and writing Chinese. Children studied Chinese at the church. EC used to go to church. EC got married in 1921. EC's husband owned a restaurant in Louisiana. EC stayed there for a short time.	

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1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	211-215	EC and her husband came to Fresno and went into the egg wholesale business.
	216-220	EC finished two years of high school.
	221-237	EC and her husband came to Los Angeles and stayed in the egg business. Later they got into the beer business and became the only Oriental beer distributor.
7	238-252	EC helped manage the business and kept the books. Later the union formed and they had some difficulties in the beer business.
	253-261	After husband passed away, EC ran the business alone.
	262-320	Running the beer business has a lot of headaches. One should know all the regulations. EC's business was located on 1104-1108 South Central Avenue. Customers were Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Pilipinos. EC distributed only to Asians. The brewers only allowed the distributor to distribute to a certain area.
8	321-350	There were quite a few Chinese liquor stores. EC had around 200 Oriental liquor stores and grocery stores with a liquor license.
9	351-404	EC sold the beer business three years ago. The egg business was a hard business. They stored the eggs in the spring and sold them in the fall. There were about 30 people working for EC. EC's brother was a very successful egg distributor in Bakersfield.
10	405-433	EC associated mostly with Chinese. EC was very, very busy and just had a few casual friends. EC associated with some Caucasians and few Japanese but not with blacks or Mexicans socially.
	434-454	EC felt more Chinese. she spoke Chinese with her Chinese friends. most of her friends were born in America.
11	455-457	EC did not feel discriminated against.
	458-465	EC participated in community activities whenever she had time.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	001-012	Blank.
	013-020	EC joined the Chinatown activities whenever she had time.

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Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	021-029 030-041	EC helped the Chinese servicemen during World War II. Husband belonged to the CACA and family associations once.
2	042-045 046-049 050-065 066-072	Husband used to be a treasurer of the Chow Family Association. EC spoke Cantonese with her husband and some Cantonese with her children. EC used to go to the Wong Family Association every year with her sister-in-law. Since her sister-in-law passed away, EC stopped going. Especially the increase of crime. EC didn't go to places alone. The associations had all the activities for Chinese.
3	073-086 087-106	Husband played golf. EC didn't like to play golf. Husband helped cooking dinner. EC liked to play bridge, but afraid of going out in the dark. EC used to play mahjong and lost money.
4	107-110 111-129 130-131 132-136 137-146	EC had no relatives left in China after her father-in-law passed away. EC believed in Chinese medicine very much. EC had an acupuncturist. EC went to Western doctors for regular check ups. EC's husband was from China and knew Chinese very well. EC didn't like Louisiana so they came back to Fresno. EC didn't like the restaurant business.
5	147-162 163-176 177-213	Husband liked to play Chinese cards with his Chinese friends. He also played cards with American friends. EC and her husband used to go to movies and dancing. EC's husband didn't like to join any club. But later he joined the Golf Club. In the 1930's and 1940's, all the prominent people belonged to Chung Wah.
6	214-229	EC had a good Chinese friend. They shopped together and went to shows together. They also went to Chinese operas together.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	001-011 012-024	Introduction. EC didn't consider anybody was prominent, everybody was just people.
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Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	025-041	There are more Chinese working in professional jobs. Before World War II, most Chinese were in the produce wholesale business and other businesses. Some Chinese owned property.
2	042-047	EC was busy in her own work and didn't pay attention to what other people did. EC worked five days a week.
	048-054	EC managed the business and had many people work for her after her husband passed away.
	055-057	EC hired a housekeeper to take care of her children while she worked.
	058-066	EC sent her daughter to a private school. She wasn't treated nicely by her schoolmates in 1934. EC took her out and sent her to a public school.
	067-074	EC had one son and one daughter.
3	075-077	Both of her children graduated from USC.
	078-087	Children went to elementary school near West 76th Street. It was an all white neighborhood.
	088-094	EC moved to Los Feliz in 1945. They lived on West 22nd Street first and then to West 76th Street in the 1930's.
	095-103	At that time, the owner was not willing to sell the house to EC. EC got an American friend to purchase it for her.
4	104-108	Before purchasing her house, the family rented a house on 22nd Street.
	109-117	It cost \$9000 to purchase her first house. EC had no problem purchasing her second house.
	118-134	EC got along very well with her neighbors from 76th Street. Even up until today they are still friends.
	135-152	During World War II, some store salesladies wouldn't wait on her. It was because they thought she was Japanese.
5	153-167	EC paid \$30 a month to her housekeeper. She paid \$75 a week to her employees. Later, they got \$275 a week. Most of them were deliverymen.
	168-173	EC had Chinese workers who got the same pay as American workers.
	174-195	During the Depression, - lost a lot of money in the egg business. They stored the eggs for 35 cents a dozen and later sold them for 13 cents. EC owed a lot of money to the bank and the storage house.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	196-216	EC borrowed money from the banks to start the beer business.
	217-260	Husband made a great deal of income. Husband bought a lot of property in Arizona in the 1940's and bought some properties on Wilshire Boulevard.
7	261-262	In the 1930's and 1940's one could get a dozen eggs for 25 cents.
	263-283	The workers lived pretty well. Chinese invested their money in different businesses.
8	284-286	Most of the Chinese workers gambled.
	287-308	A lot of Chinese workers sent money back to China. EC's husband sent money back to China to his father and also took care of some Chinese from the same village.
	309-317	EC's father-in-law was a fortune teller in Hong Kong.
	318-357	EC's husband came to America for an education. He wrote to his father. Husband had asthma and could not return to China to visit his father. EC tried to cure him and realized she was no doctor.
9	358-369	EC didn't know how to clean a chicken when she just got married.
	370-393	EC grew up with her sister and brother-in-law. They had a cook so EC never learned how to cook. Brother-in-law hired mostly Chinese to work in the ranch.
10	394-410	EC learned cooking after getting married. EC loved both Chinese and American food.
	411-427	EC's husband kept on sending money back to China. Family always came first for Chinese.
	428-434	During the Depression, EC and husband planned to return to China but in one year they lost \$100,000 in the egg business.
	435-441	EC didn't have any relatives in China.
	442-452	EC was not happy that her husband kept on sending money back to China because EC worked too.
11	453-470	EC arranged to bring her husband's niece over to the United States because she thought it was her husband's wish to bring her over.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

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Tape: 2 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	<u>Tape 2 Side B</u>
1	001-011	Blank.	
	012-024	Husband sent money to his niece for sewing machine, etc. She married a barber in Hong Kong.	
	025-045	After EC's father-in-law passed away, husband still sent money back to China and sponsored two Chinese boys from China. These two Chinese boys were later married and had their own families. They married Caucasians.	
2	046-056	there were many interracial marriages in EC's family.	
	057-062	EC thought there were not many interracial marriages but now there are more interracial marriages.	
	063-070	In the 1930's and 1940's Chinese met their wives through matchmakers.	
3	071-080	Before World War II, there were many interracial marriages among EC's friends.	
	081-083	All the children of interracial marriages were all Americanized.	
	084-090	EC didn't have any preference for sons. She never asked her friends how they felt about having sons or daughters.	
	091-110	EC felt it was important to have a Chinese education but she was too busy to help her children. She sent them to church to learn Chinese. It was the Chinese Presbyterian Church on Adams Street.	
4	111-113	EC still felt it is important to learn Chinese.	
	114-130	A lot of Chinese looked forward to return to China for visiting but not for living. EC visited China several times after getting married.	
	131-136	EC didn't like to go back to China to live but to visit.	
	137-147	Chinese were always portrayed as cooks.	
5	148-169	EC and husband knew Benson Fong for many years. EC thought Benson Fong had a good role in the movie Charlie Chan. The Chinese was portrayed all right.	
	170-177	EC didn't see many films of Anna May Wong's.	
	178-180	EC didn't see many Chinese movies.	
	181-192	For Chinese to have their own business was always the best job.	
6	193-201	EC's children are doing very well. EC never thought of what would be the ideal job for them.	
	202-209	EC thought Chinese liked to go back for a visit.	
	210-222	Husband was the only Oriental beer distributor.	

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

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Tape: 3 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	<u>Tape 3 Side A</u>
1	001-005 006-010 011-016 017-039	Introduction. Blank. Introduction. EC joined the Chinese Women New Life Movement with friends. EC was a treasurer for fifteen years from the late 1930's. EC kept the books and collected dues. Lily L. Chan was the president.	
2	040-069	EC joined the Los Angeles Chinese Women's Club in 1947. It was an organization which helped people. The group gave luncheons once a year for fundraising. EC was a treasurer for a few years. The club was formed in 1947. There were about fifteen members at the beginning. Now the juniors took over and the seniors stayed inactive. Once a year, they visited hospitals and gave parties for the Chinese there.	
3	070-079 080-088 089-098 099-103	At one time, EC got a group of girls to entertain the Chinese fliers who received training in America. Madame Chiang Kai-shek visited Los Angeles in the 1940's. EC participated in the event. EC's husband participated in CACA's activities. EC's husband never objected to her activities. EC kept busy with community work and her business.	
4&5	104-110 111-122 123-129 130-137 138-193	It was very common for Chinese women to participate in activities. EC never stayed home. EC felt that she had her own place in business rather than just supporting her husband and enjoying it. EC attributed her success to her husband. EC felt that she and her husband were accepted by their Caucasian friends. The brewer allotted all the distributors to certain areas regardless their racial background. EC had some Caucasian customers. EC delivered to the Oriental customers only.	
6	194-216 217-237	The Jews seemed to be very close to Chinese in business as well as in customs. EC had to pick their customers too. If the customers were too far away, they didn't deliver due to the high cost of delivering. EC sold the business five years ago. The business became more difficult, due to the high wages and high insurance costs.	
7	238-247	EC sold the business to a Japanese. The brewery business was getting bad.	

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	248-262	Son worked for Miller and then went to sell liquor for a liquor house.
	263-281	EC had to speak Chinese with Chinese customers most of the time.
8	282-292	EC was a member of the Wholesale Beer Distributor Association. Husband and son occasionally attended the meetings. EC didn't go to the meetings.
	293-302	EC attended the Chinese Presbyterian Church.
	303-310	EC associated mostly with Chinese friends. But sometimes associated with non-Chinese.
	311-320	EC felt more Chinese than American. EC had a lot of Caucasian friends, very close friends.
321-343	EC spoke half Chinese half English with her Chinese friends. EC didn't understand Mandarin which some of her friends spoke.	
9	344-363	EC loved Chinese food. but in her life style EC was more American.
	364-368	EC didn't feel that she should be humble. she felt that she was just as good as other people.

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