

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Phillip Chow
 Chinese Name: 周煜榮
 Date of Interview: 6/22/80, 6/29/80
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan & Gordon Chow
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

Interview Number: 107
 Number of Tapes: 2
 Length: 1 Hour & 21 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	001-018	Introduction.	
	019-025	Phillip Chow's (PC) parents are from Kwang Chou and Hoiping and Tonseng Lee (<u>東勝里</u>). Hing Tang is the city. PC was born there too.	
	026-027	PC's Chinese is Chow Yuk Lin.	
	028-031	PC's father was a Canadian merchant. He went to Canada when he was in his twenties. He went there as a businessman and was there for over 40 years. PC's father was in the restaurant and grocery business.	
	032-039	Very few Chinese migrated to Canada and the United States. PC's father went there because of the poverty in his village. He may have been unable to come to the United States at that time.	
2	040-042	PC's father stayed in the Alberta province.	
	043-044	PC's mother was a housewife..	
	045-048	PC was born in 1926. He has two brothers and three sisters. PC is the middle boy.	
	049-052	PC's family spoke Sze Yup at home.	
	053-059	PC came to the United States in 1939. His father thought that PC would have a brighter future in the United States.	
	060-066	PC attended school in China for five years. Early in 1939, PC's father returned to China to visit the family. At that time, Japan was taking over the countryside. PC's father brought his family to Hong Kong and so PC was there for a year before he came over to the United States.	
	067-071	PC learned some basic English in the school in Hong Kong in 1939.	
3	072-076	PC attended school in the village until the fifth grade. They were taught Chinese writing, reading, mathematics, and the basic things.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	077-079	At the six grade level in PC's school, they started teaching English.
	080-088	There were about 40 to 60 houses in PC's village. Everyone was a Chow in that village.
	089-095	When PC first arrived, he went to Seattle and went to school there for six months. He then came down to Los Angeles.
	096-103	There were quite a few Chinese in Seattle at that time. There was a small Chinatown there. PC's father was in Alberta at that time. He came to this country later on.
4	104-116	PC did not go to Canada because the Canadians did not allow Asians to enter the country. When PC visited his father in Canada after the war, the youngest Chinese PC saw was about 40 years old.
	117-133	When PC's father had his own family, he decided to try to bring his children over. PC could not enter the United States legally. PC's father was a legal immigrant to Canada but there were many laws in Canada that prevented him from bringing his children over.
	134-143	PC's only way was to come to the United States under false pretenses. The majority of the Chinese entered the country under pretenses. PC's father had to pay \$1600 to get the false papers.
5	144-152	PC came to the United States as a "Wong." He used the family name, Wong, for many years -- through school and through the service. After the service, PC had his name legally changed to Chow because he wanted his future children to carry his own family name.
	153-154	After that, PC went back to China.
	155-162	PC was the only child that came to the United States in 1939. PC's father tried to get his oldest son out but the immigration office in Hong Kong found out that he was coming under false pretenses. Since PC was the second son, PC's father proceeded to try to get PC over.
	163-179	After PC came to the United States, PC befriended his so-called father, Mr. Wong. They liked each other tremendously. According to the Wong family tree, there was another son that was the age of PC's younger brother. The two of them negotiated a price for that piece of paper in order to bring PC's younger brother over.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	180-185	Mr. Wong did not have a son. He went to China that year and when he returned, he simply told the immigration office that he had a son so that he had this slot that he was able to sell.
6	186-188	PC was able to get his younger brother over here under the same pretenses in 1951 or 1952.
	189-194	PC came to Los Angeles in 1940. PC was in the military service for 33 months. PC worked in the Army Paratroop. He was drafted.
	195-198	When PC entered the country under false pretenses, he was already a citizen -- they were called "naturalized" citizens.
	199-204	PC attended a special education school in Los Angeles when he arrived. It was set up by the Board of Education for all these foreign students. The school was called Central Junior High School.
	205-213	There were three different classes -- beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes. About one-third of the students were Chinese. There were also a lot of Japanese and some Mexicans and Europeans.
	214-221	Because of PC's age, he could not go to school like the rest of the students so they placed him with this foreign adjustment department. They were taught English.
	221-233	PC went through all three levels at the school. Since PC learned fast, he was in the advanced classes within a short period of time. The teacher liked PC quite a bit and she advanced PC to the ninth grade in one year.
7	234-244	PC was attending school around 1941. During that time, all the classes were dwindling down because the Japanese students were being sent out to the camps. In 1942, PC was sent to the regular ninth grade classes.
	245-257	At that time, PC had friends who owned a produce stand in North Hollywood. He was going into the service and so they offered PC a job over there with good pay. PC went to work there as a produce clerk. He attended North Hollywood Junior High and North Hollywood High School.
	258-269	PC did not run into any Chinese at that school. He did not feel ill at ease because he always liked to mingle with Americans. PC never felt out of place. At that time, PC did not experience any discrimination or hostility.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	270-284	While PC was in the service, he was in an Army uniform when he went to Fresno to visit a friend of his. The three of them went to a public park with a swimming pool. They were asked not to swim over there. That was the only time PC was really discriminated against. This was in 1943 or 1944.
8	285-292 293-300	PC joined the army in 1943. He had just turned 18. When PC went to basic training camp, he ran across a few Chinese. PC went into the Army with a good friend named Stanley. He knew Stanley for a long time -- ever since he entered the country.
	301-306	PC did not graduate from North Hollywood High School. He was unable to complete tenth grade because he had to join the Army.
	307-320	After coming back from the Army, PC had a relative on his mother's side in Montana that needed someone to run a restaurant. PC went up there. He once again registered in high school as a tenth grader. He realized that he was much older than the other students and did not have time to waste in three years of high school.
	321-329	PC then took the general education development test which was offered to all the veterans. He passed the test and got a high school diploma.
9	330-334	PC then registered at a Catholic college in Helena, Montana. PC is not Catholic but that was the only college in town.
	335-351	PC was in Los Angeles for three years, from 1940 to 1943. When PC first came to Los Angeles, he was offered a job as a helper in a grocery store. The store was at 27th and San Pedro Street.
	352-369	During that time, PC's father sent PC some money. The grocery store that PC worked for had a warehouse right next to it. They made the warehouse into living quarters and PC lived there along with 5 or 6 other youngsters.
	370-394	They ate in the market, right next door. Some of the grocery store owners also lived in the warehouse but the older man had a family so he lived in an apartment upstairs from the market. The business was some sort of a partnership between four or five Chinese. They were from the village of PC's father's partner which is how PC got that job.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	395-403	PC's father had a partner in Alberta who got into the partnership for the business in Los Angeles. That is how PC got a job with them. So PC went from Seattle to Los Angeles.
	404-434	PC's father's partner had a son in Seattle working as a houseboy. He decided that his son should get into business sooner or later. That is why he invested about \$500 in the grocery store in Los Angeles.
	435-441	PC was not paid but they provided him with food and shelter. They did him a great favor because jobs were hard to come by in those days.
	442-455	After working in that place for a few months, one of the partners opened another grocery store in Los Angeles. He offered PC a job at the new grocery store. PC was paid \$5 a week, working seven days a week after school.
11	456-469	In those days, PC could go to a movie for a dime and the street car cost three cents a ride. A hot meal in a Chinese restaurant was 35 or 45 cents. PC ate in Chinatown often.
	470-482	All of PC's friends were Chinese in those days because of the language difficulty and the difference in ethnic backgrounds. Most of the students were Mexicans because it was in a Mexican neighborhood.
	483-487	All of PC's friends spoke Sze Yup. The majority of them worked in the laundry.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	013-021	All of PC's friends spoke Sze Yup. The majority of them worked in the laundry. They were all about PC's age -- between ten and twenty years old.
	022-024	There may have been child labor laws in those days, but that was how the Chinese operated.
	025-031	There were very few girls at PC's school. They all had families. Very few Chinese families would send their daughters to the United States. Most of the slots were for sons.
	032-041	There were a few Chinese boys that spoke Sam Yup. The boys that came from Toishan spoke differently and usually stuck together. The majority of the kids were from Toishan rather than Hoiping which is where PC is from.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	042-044	On PC's immigration papers, it also said that he was from Toishan. the dialects varied slightly.
	045-050	PC often wrote to his family in Hong Kong.
	051-056	PC would send money home when ever he could. Before going into the service, PC had saved up \$700 and sent the whole thing to his mother.
	057-067	After the war in China, PC's family returned to the village. When PC's father retired, he also returned to China. They came back out again when the Communists took over the country. They owned a piece of property in Hong Kong so they were able to support themselves by just collecting the rent.
3	068-077	PC's older sister who was married was left in mainland China. PC's younger sister was also married and stayed in China. PC's older sister has already passed away. PC's second sister went to Canada after the war because the family she married into were also Canadian merchants. She passed away in Canada.
	078-083	PC did not communicate with his sisters but with his family. When PC's father passed away in Hong Kong in 1964, PC's mother came over to the United States.
	084-089	PC had a niece that was married to a British subject who was Chinese. PC's mother went to England on a tourist visa and that is how she was able to come to the United States.
	090-091	PC missed his hometown in the beginning. He still thinks about the place but he does not miss it anymore.
	092-097	PC returned to China in 1948. He was married over there. PC returned to China to see his family, not to get married.
	098-103	At that time, PC still wanted to retire in China so he did not mind marrying a Chinese girl there since they would at least have a lot in common.
4	104-110	PC met his wife through a mutual friend -- it was a matchmaker. PC met with her before they got married. He met with her two or three times.
	111-119	PC's family and his wife's family knew each other very well since they lived in the same village for many years.
	120-128	At that time, it was very common for Chinese to return to China to get married. That was the only way to find Chinese girls since all the slots were for sons to immigrate.
	129-133	PC would have married an American born Chinese if he found one that he liked.

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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	134-136	PC's wife is from the same township as PC. Her village was a Wong and his village was a Chow. They were just a short distance away.
	137-144	PC never considered marrying a non-Chinese. PC dated but it was not romantic, they just enjoyed each other's company.
5	145-178	In those days, people had very different attitudes towards interracial marriages compared to today. People resented interracial marriages. There were some interracial marriages but they were rare. One man by the name of Chan married a Caucasian American woman. He had two Chinese daughters from a previous marriage. They got divorced later on. They were looked down on by both the Chinese and the white American communities.
	179-191	In those days, a Chinese man that married a Caucasian American would immediately cause people to think that the woman was not from a good family.
6	192-195	If a Chinese woman married a Caucasian man, people would think poorly of the woman but not the man.
	196-209	Generally speaking, the Chinese preferred sons over daughters. PC has not preference and he did not have a preference in those days either. PC has two boys and two girls. PC wants one son to carry on the family name but aside from that he loves his children equally.
	210-217	Some Chinese families would keep trying to have a son even if they had six or seven daughters.
	218-227	The preference for sons is very old-fashioned thinking. It was a common attitude in those days. Sons were quite common, though, since traditional Chinese families were so large.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	003-017	Introduction.
	018-022	PC feels more Chinese than American. PC has never felt sorry for being Chinese. PC never disagreed with his family about his Chinese identity. PC is proud of being Chinese.
	023-024	PC feels that he was a typical Chinese.
	025-030	When someone in the family was sick, they used Western medicine. The present medical technology is advanced and PC has a lot of faith in it. PC does not think that the Chinese medicine men are well trained.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	031-034	PC's parents used Chinese medicine but PC prefers Western medicine for his own family.
2	035-050	PC's family cooks with herbs for the taste rather than for the medicinal value. They take some drinks which they believe are good for their health -- for example, lok mei (), yep toy gan, and those kinds of things. PC does not care about the medicinal value of these herbs but he just acquired a taste for them while in China.
	051-057	PC likes both American and Chinese forms of recreation. He likes to play mahjong, he likes to go to ball games.
	058-065	PC does not belong to any of the associations in Chinatown. He does not support these associations strongly because they are geared to benefit a certain group rather than the entire Chinese community.
	066-071	PC paid dues for the Chow Association once to purchase property. Some of PC's friends and relatives are members of family associations while others feel the way PC does.
3	072-076	As long as you are part of the family, you are a member of the family association. Those that do not pay their dues are not active members.
	077-087	The Chow family was one of the prominent families in Los Angeles. Grace Chow as a community leader. She joined a lot of other organizations. Her husband passed away -- he was active in community activities when he was alive.
	088-091	Wilbur Woo is also considered a community leader. He is presently the president of the Cathay Bank.
	092-101	PC got to know Wilbur when he was a produce buyer for one of the markets. Wilbur owned one of the wholesale houses so PC ran into him often. When Grace Chow's husband used to have an import export business in Seattle, PC went there and has known the family since 1939.
	102-103	PC did not know Wilbur Woo's father but he was one of the bankers in China as well as a minor official with the government.
4	104-112	Before World War II, the Chinese were laundrymen, farmers, grocery store owners, and restaurant owners. There were very few professionals.
	113-115	PC did not know of any doctors, lawyers, or other professional Chinese.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	116-121	In the restaurant businesses, the employees were all Chinese. Most of the laundries were also run by Chinese.
	122-139	Most of the other jobs were off limits to the Chinese. Even Safeway would not have considered hiring a Chinese. The Chinese were discriminated against. PC knew through the grape vine that it was useless to apply for those jobs because they just did not hire Chinese.
	140-147	PC did not know of any Chinese that had a good enough education to go into the professions. In those days, the parents that could afford to send their children to college wanted them to go into business administration rather than into a profession.
5	148-152	A man named Ralph had a degree in geology in the mid-1940's. He eventually got a job working for Gulf Oil Company in Los Angeles.
	153-154	PC did not know of anyone before that with that kind of an educational background.
	155-167	Before the war, PC made \$5 a week as a part time worker and a full time student. In the early 1940s, the average income was about 35 to 65 dollars a month. When PC first came to the United States, a Chinese chef in Seattle was making \$65 a month. There would be not much difference for the workers in Los Angeles.
	168-173	A grocery clerk at Safeway may have been making \$25 a week or \$100 a month.
	174-179	The Chinese were generally receiving lower wages. Jobs were hard to come by in those days.
	180-186	When PC first came to the United States, the job openings for the new arrivals would be as houseboys with Caucasian families. They were paid about \$10 a month plus room and board.
6	187-192	PC always worked. His employer always paid for his meals. PC slept at the warehouse.
	193-197	An apartment in those days were rented for about 25 to 40 dollars a month. In those days, very few people had families here. They were mostly single men.
	198-203	A street car ride in the 1940's cost three cents. A loaf of bread or a quart of milk was about 7 or 8 cents. Movies cost ten cents.
	204-213	Most of the Chinese lived in Chinatown in those days. They did not move even if the neighborhood changed.
	214-217	About 90 percent of the money that was saved was sent back to China.
	218-223	PC was able to save most of his salary in those days because he did not spend any money on recreation.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	224-232	Most of the time, PC felt it was his duty to help out his family in China so he would send money back on his own accord. Other times, PC would get letters requesting financial help from his own family. PC was unable to help his other relatives.
7	233-240	PC's father also sent money from Canada back to his family in China.
	241-246	PC did not know of any Chinese that was involved in politics in China. PC did not know anyone involved in local politics.
	247-253	PC remembers people trying to sell war bonds in China.
	254-261	There may have been war efforts in Los Angeles to aid the Chinese during the war against Japan but PC was not aware of it. At that time, PC was only twelve years old.
	262-267	Most of the Chinese felt that they had family obligations in China. Their main goal for leaving China was to make a better life for one-self as well as to financially help the family.
	268-273	PC was not in the United States during the Depression.
	274-287	The hostility against the Chinese at that time was like an unwritten law. PC knew that he could not purchase property in certain areas because of the discrimination against the Chinese. Certain jobs were also off limits to the Chinese.
8	288-303	The discrimination against the Chinese has improved a great deal over the years but it still has a long way to go. Even if all fields are opened to the Chinese, there is still a little discrimination against the Chinese both in hiring and in promotions.
	304-314	PC thinks the Chinese have done a lot better than the general population. The Chinese take life more seriously -- they work harder, and they try to prove that they are capable of improving themselves, their families, and their community.
	315-323	PC does not compare the Chinese to other ethnic groups. Some people compare the Chinese to the Jewish as a joke.
	324-335	PC wanted his children to attend Chinese school but because they lived away from Chinatown, there was no way he could send his children to Chinese school. PC wants his children to be able to read a little Chinese and speak the language fluently.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	336-347	In the 1940's, the Chinese families that lived close to Chinatown would send their children to Chinatown -- even if they were American born themselves.
	348-363	Many of the Chinese wanted to return to China to live. PC wanted to himself. Because of the turn of events in China, many people perished this thought. If the government was not Communist, many of the Chinese would return to China either to live or to retire.
	364-371	PC does not think the American born Chinese wanted to go back to China to attend school.
	372-385	PC does not think the movies give a true picture of the Chinese. They have a tendency to look down at the Chinese way of life. PC does not think the portrayal of the Chinese in movies has improved over the years.
10	386-394	PC does not know anyone personally that has protested against the portrayal of Chinese in the movies. PC has read about certain Chinese organizations that have.
	395-398	PC does not think anyone is embarrassed about being Chinese.
	399-421	People of PC's generation feel that a good education is very important. Ideal jobs are in medicine, law, accounting, and engineering.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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