

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: George Tom Interview Number: 31
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 3
 Date of Interview: 4/21/79 Length: 1 Hour & 15 Minutes
 Interviewer: Stanley Lau
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Rodney H. Chow

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1 Side A</u>
1	000-018	My father's ancestry is from Sun duck (Sam Yup). Mother is from Sam sur. Dad was born in Vancouver, British Columbia. Grandfather was a herbalist. Granddad came to Marysville then to Los Angeles in the 1880's or 1890's. My father was an apprentice to Granddad as an herbalist. My mother -- dad went to China to get married and brought mother over in about 1917. He has never been back to China.	
	019-048	Granddad established the herb business in 1903 in Los Angeles. We had cousins here who also were herbalists at that time.	
2	049-057	I was born in 1918, born at 9th and Olive Streets. Granddad had the herb store there, Foo and Wing Herb Company. I was born in the home with the aid of a midwife. Her name was Mrs. Kerng.	
	058-060	It was a two story house, I have a sister and two brothers.	
	061-074	Originally we spoke only Chinese because that was all mom spoke. We have to go back a little first...then 9th and Olive was getting crowded and they were tearing down a lot of the old houses.	
3	075-077	So we moved to Pico and Hill then we got kicked out of there because they wanted to build a new building. Then we moved to 120 W. 15th Street. We lived there until my dad passed away in 1927.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	078-081	I was only 9 years old and my brother was 6 months old. So it was enough trouble for my mom being a widow. Tradition in the old country when you are widowed you didn't stand much of a chance. Of course Granddad thought of it so we didn't get pushed around. We always lived away from the Chinese neighborhood.
	082-096	I never had any problem with my neighborhood. I never recalled having any problems being Chinese in a white neighborhood.
	097-102	There were no other minorities where we lived (on 15th and Main Streets).
	103-106	I went to 17th Street School. Frank Wiggins trade school was later built on that site. In 1927 we moved to Pico Boulevard and Union, then I went to country school and I graduated from there to Santois Junior High School.
4	107-117	I finished one semester at Berendo Junior High School because it was during the depression and they closed Santois School. From Berendo I went to John H. Francis Polytechnic High School. I graduated from there and went to Los Angeles Junior College. Because it was the depression and I had to earn some money, I quite school and went to work at the Department of Water and Power in 1936.
	118-129	I wouldn't say I was the first Oriental employed at the Water and Power, there were four Japanese and two Chinese.
	130-135	There was a Lee and Chun, who is a graduate Civil Engineer.
	136-141	At that time (I didn't know it) during Mayor Shaw's time if you put some money in the drawer during your interview you had a job.
	142-149	Prior to 1927 we had a group to study Chinese. We had a Mr. Chan who came to teach us.
5	150-174	When we moved to Pico Boulevard we had a live in foreign student. He was going to the University of Southern California studying sociology. He would teach us Chinese every evening and on Saturdays (8 students), 3 to 7 weekdays, and 9 to 12 Saturday. The students were Lincoln and Monroe Leong, Arthur Chung, Richard and Mae Tom, Edith and myself, and Allan Lim.
	175-182	We studied geography.

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	183-206	My mother always said you are Chinese you speak Chinese. Of course she didn't speak much English. That is why we moved next door to our cousins during the depression. Later she had to go to work to keep the family together. Of course we went to Chinese school so there wasn't much time to get into trouble.
	207-218	I went to Poly High, there were some Orientals, and some negros. It was a very cosmopolitan group. I joined the band and gym team and never had to consider my yellow face. I had as much non-Chinese friends (Caucasian friends) as Chinese friends.
	219-240	I always felt it interferred with things (in reference to the question whether you felt more American or Chinese.
7	241-247	I never felt sorry about being Chinese. I don't think my sisters and brothers felt any different than I (we had some encounters with prejudices). We all worked in the civil service so that probably made the difference, it made it easier for us to get into governmental work. (Meaning their attitude.) We were not typical of the Chinese because we were living in the outlying areas, our attitudes were different than those living in the Chinese neighborhoods.
	257-274	In my growing up days we used Chinese medicine when we got sick. There were times we did go to western doctors. There were times when fevers reached 106 degrees and we would have to call the western doctors.
8	275-293	But for common colds we always took Chinese medicine.
	294-295	The majority of the time we ate Chinese but there was some times we had spaghetti or some non-Chinese food.
	296-321	(In answer to the interviewer's question regarding recreation.) It was during the depression you couldn't do too much. I recall going to Saturday Matinees for 15¢. But games -- there were really not much time. We may have tossed a ball around.
	322-342	I knew how to play Chinese chess, etc. We would watch the older folks play their games and learn.
9	343-349	Granddad used to write to get the Truth Magazine, he was religious. But he never got any answers. He finally settled with the Chinese Presbyterian Church. He tried

Interviewee: George Tom

Page: 4

1 Side A

Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	343-389	to learn about the different denominations. We didn't have any transportation so I didn't attend much church. Mom and Dad had a 1924 Hudson and Mom kept it up until 1940. It only had 17,000 miles on it (so you can see we didn't travel much.)
10	390-416	My mother being widowed, we stayed clear of any Chinese family associations. She always warned me never to join any tongs. The only Chinese organization I belong to is Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA).
	417-428	I joined it after I came back from the war time in 1947. I was an associate member as a youngster. My grandfather and father were members of CACA.
	429-442	I was a member of the CACA band. The band was organized in 1927. There were other bands then -- dance bands and marching bands.
END OF TAPE 1		
1	000-016	The most important families in Los Angeles during my time: Y.H. Chong, Tom Tit Leong, Tom Puey Hin, Joe Tom, Woo Jook, Woo Hay, Quon Sun Jen, Tommy Quan family (United Meat Company), Chung Kee, Tuey Far Low (Quan Family), Wing Chong Lung, (grocery, Tom family), Ging Wong grocery store Kwong Hing Lung at Adams and San Pedro), Chung family (Far East Restaurant).
2	017-073	Before World War II, five years, most Chinese were working in the laundry business, restaurants, or as a houseboy. It was very hard to get a job. There were very few Chinese who worked for white people. They (Caucasians) wouldn't hire them.
3	074-088	George Jue, he is an MIT graduate, couldn't get a job so he had to go and manage his father's restaurant business.
	089-095	Paul Tom, a graduate pharmacist, had trouble getting a job. Paul went to work for Peter Lee, who opened an herb store on the plaza area corner (Los Angeles Street), in the southwest corner of the plaza, southeast corner was Ferguson Alley.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	100-115	The average income before World War II -- in 1939 I was making \$99 per month. I was working at the test lab before I was working at Von's grocery store and would make \$22 per month. I was just getting by without any big savings. Those days we could buy day old bread and donuts.
4	116-144	Most everyone saved their money but in those days there wasn't much to be saved. Gambling was done mostly (as I can remember) by the cooks and waiters. But the business people saved their money.
5	145-173	I think the Chinese tend to congregate together. Generally when one Chinese family would move into an area others would eventually follow.
	174-191	When I moved to 52nd and Broadway I bought the house for \$7,000 -- I paid \$800 cash and borrowed \$600. That made \$1,400 cash down, I had a FHA loan for the rest.
6	192-208	The local Chinese were oriented towards politics in China. The Chinese American Citizen's Alliance (CACAA) was just getting a feel of American politics.
	209-220	Personally being a civil worker and because in the old days the ruling at work was no politics, I did not discuss politics and religion.
	221-237	In the beginning those Chinese who were in professions were more republicans. Most of the Chinese felt that when they came to America they would get a nest egg and return to China to live a life of Riley.
7	238-265	Those of us who grew up here did not have this feeling. We felt this was our home. I had relatives in China. I had no communications with them.
	266-276	The Chinese survived because they had their own trade -- it wasn't easy. We used to sell tea door to door -- oolong and one pound ginger candy. We used to buy tea at 10 packages for 10¢ and sell each package for 10¢ so it was a very lucrative business.
8	277-301	Candy ginger was 9¢ to 15¢ and we sold it for 25¢. Tea was \$2 or \$3 a tin and we sold each package at 10¢.
	302-315	As long as you didn't encroach into the white areas there were no incidences. You couldn't go to Biminis (a swimming pool) so you stayed away. You hear about those things so you don't go.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	316-350	These things changed after World War II.
	351-358	I never had any trouble from the Department of Water and Power. I did my job and got my job done. I rolled up my sleeves and did the same as they (whites).
	359-368	Not really I did not encounter comparison of Chinese with Jews.
	369-382	I met my wife in 1929. She was going to the University of Southern California.
10	383-400	I was working at the University of Southern California as a research assistant with an engineering project and I got to go to dances. We had about a two year courtship.
	401-419	Getting back to meeting girls during my days it always appeared that the Chinese girls didn't seem to be like the overseas boys, I don't know why. Most boy and girl meetings or dating were arranged by older folks. "So and so should get acquainted with so and so daughters." Most of the time that is how it was done.
	420-434	Quite a few of my friends went to China to get married.
	435-441	They did this because they liked to have someone with the same cultural background.
11	442-460	The American born Chinese tended to want sons. I don't think I favored my son over my daughter.
	461-480	Interracial marriage is inevitable -- can't help it. It wasn't common in my days.
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1	000-013	Interracial daitng was not common. If it happened there was a lot of fireworks.
	014-020	Even dating between Chinese and Japanese did not create happy feelings. My children do not know Chinese fluently.
	021-026	We sent them to Chinese school but I guess they don't teach Chinese the way they used to. We tried to teach them to speak Chinese. They understand Chinese but cannot speak it.
	027-040	In my generation you don't say too much you listen. Parents say something and you do it. Now a days, things are different. Children are allowed more freedom. Times have changed. You couldn't raise the children the way your folks raised you.

Interviewee: George Tom

Page: 7

Tape: 2 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	041-070	We have to change with the times. During my childhood there was the thought of sending us back to China but there was never enough money to do it.
3	070-077 078-090 091-094 095-122	I say I would have gone because I was raised to listen. Those who ere in business sent their kids to China. There were quite a few that did it. I don't realy recall seeing too many movies with Chinese being portrayed. I felt they did try to make it as close as possible. No, I didnot get upset as Chinese people today got upset with the Chinese portrayal. I was never embarrassed to be Chinese.
4	123-134	The Chinese would rather own their own business because this way they could make the most money.

END OF TAPE 2

- Automobiles, 1A:9
- Berendo Junior High School, 1A:4
- Businesses, 2B:4
- Children
 birth of, 1A:2
 preference for sons, 2A:11
- China
 marriages in, 1A:1
 return to, 2B:2-3
- Chinese American Citizens' Alliance,
 1A:10; 2A:6
- Chinese language
 decline in knowledge of, 2B:1
 importance of, 1A:6
 learning of, 1A:4-5; 1B:1
- Chinese Presbyterian Church, 1A:9
- Chinese schools, 1A:6
- Chong, Y. H., 2A:1
- Chung, Arthur, 1A:5
- Chung, Kee, 2A:1
- Chung family, 2A:1
- Depression (economic 1929-1939),
 1A:4
- Discrimination
 in employment, 2A:2-3,9
 in public places, 2A:8
- Education
 ethnic ratios in, 1A:6
- Ethnic identity
 Chinese vs. American, 1A:7; 2A:6-7
 and housing patterns, 1A:7
 pride in, 2B:3
- Families and family life
 and death of father, 1A:2-3,10
 language spoken in, 1A:2
- Foo and Wing Herb Company, 1A:2
- Food
 Chinese vs. American, 1A:8
- Friendships
 among other ethnic groups, 1A:6
- Gambling
 people involved in, 2A:4
- Ging, Wong, 2A:1
- Herbal medicine, 1A:2
 family involvement in, 1A:1
 training for, 1A:1
- Hin, Tom Puey, 2A:1
- Housing patterns
 Chinese American clustering,
 2A:5
 and ethnic identity, 1A:7
 in integrated neighborhoods,
 1A:3,7
- Immigrants and immigration
 reasons for, 2A:6
- Interracial marriages
 hostility toward, 2B:1
 number of, 2A:11
- John H. Francis Polytechnic High
 School, 1A:4,6
- Jue, George, 2A:3
- Kwong, Hing Lung, 2A:1
- Lee, Peter, 2A:3
- Leong, Lincoln, 1A:5
- Leong, Monroe, 1A:5
- Leong, Tom Tit, 2A:1
- Lim, Allan, 1A:5
- Los Angeles Junior College, 1A:4
- Marriages
 in China, 1A:1; 2A:10
 mate selection patterns in, 2A:10
- Medical practices
 Chinese vs. Western, 1A:7-8
- Midwives, 1A:2
- Money
 savings, 2A:3-4
- Music and musicians, 1A:10
- Occupation patterns
 and discrimination, 2A:2-3,9
 typical jobs, 2A:2
- Politics, 2A:6
- Presbyterian Church, 1A:9
- Prominent individuals and families,
 2A:1
- Public places
 discrimination in, 2A:8

- Quan, Tommy, 2A:1
Quon, Sun Jen, 2A:1
- Recreation, 1A:8
Religious affiliations, 1A:9
Restaurants
 workers, 2A:4
- Sam Sur, China, 1A:1
Sam Yup, China, 1A:1
Santos Junior High School, 1A:3,4
Savings, 2A:3-4
Seventeenth Street School, 1A:3
- Tom, Edith, 1A:5
Tom, George
 birth of, 1A:2
 courtship and marriage of, 2A:
 9-10
 education of, 1A:3-5
 employment of, 1A:4; 2A:3,9
 ethnic identity of, 1A:7; 2B:3
 father of, 1A:1,2-3,9,10
 friendships of, 1A:6
 grandfather of, 1A:1,2,9,10
 language spoken by, 1A:2,4-6
 mother of, 1A:1,2,3,6,9
 organizations involved in, 1A:10
 residences of, 1A:2,3,5,6
 siblings of, 1A:2,7
Tom, Joe, 2A:1
Tom, Mae, 1A:5
Tom, Paul, 2A:3
Tom, Richard, 1A:5
Tongs, 1A:10
Transportation, 1A:9
Truth Magazine, 1A:9
Tuey, Far Low, 2A:1
- University of Southern California,
 2A:9-10
- Values, 2B:1
Vancouver, B.C., Canada, 1A:1
- Water and Power, Department of, 1A:4;
 2A:9
Wing, Chong Lung, 2A:1
- Woo, Henry, 2A:1
Woo, Jook, 2A:1