

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Elsie L. Wong Interview Number: 108  
 Chinese Name: 李双爱 Number of Tapes: 2  
 Date of Interview: 6/27/80 Length: 1 Hour & 39 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	008-013	Introduction.	
	014-021	Elsie Lee Tin Wong's (ELW) Chinese name is Lee Shiou Oi. ELW lives at 1823 West 24th Street, Los Angeles, 90082.	
	022-024	ELW was born in San Francisco on January 29, 1913.	
	025-027	ELW spoke Toishan at home.	
	028-038	ELW moved to Long Beach in 1923, she was in third grade at the time. She attended Chinese school in San Francisco from kindergarten up to second grade. Her family moved to Los Angeles in 1935.	
2	039-044	ELW's father started the China Society while they were in Long Beach in the 1920's. They started a chapter in Los Angeles later on.	
	045-046	ELW's father's name is Gong Nee Sa ( ).	
	047-060	ELW's father came to the United States in 1904. He came to America to seek his fortune. 1904 was the year ELW's father returned to China and brought his wife to the United States for the first time. ELW's mother was a teenager at that time. She was a "picture bride."	
	061-070	ELW's parents are from Toishan, Canton. ELW's father came to the United States as a young man. He probably first arrived at Oakland and learned to speak English there.	
3	071-073	ELW's father's English name was S.P. Lee.	
	074-082	ELW's father was an herbalist. He was not an herbalist in China. He learned the trade here in the United States.	
	083-088	ELW's father passed away in 1954. Her mother died in 1966.	
	089-101	ELW's father was a weekend rice farmer while he was in San Francisco. He was called a "Rice King" at one time because of the vast amount of land and rice he owned.	
	102-103	ELW's father asked his relatives to invest in the rice lands.	

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	104-113	ELW's father was also very successful as an herbalist. He would have both Chinese and Italian customers. Their shop in San Francisco was right next door to a bar.
	114-119	ELW does not remember how much her father used to charge. ELW's father used to cook the tea in the dining room and then serve it to his patients. ELW's does not remember any other details.
	120-134	ELW's father had a lot more business when he moved to Long Beach. He shared his office in San Francisco with a dentist. There were at least twenty or thirty patients a day. There were always a lot of people waiting to see him. He had a separate herb room.
	135-137	ELW's mother never helped with the business since she was always so busy with the children. ELW joined the YWCA while she was in Long Beach.
	138-143	ELW's father enjoyed his business as an herbalist. He was an herb doctor nearly all his life, until he became sick. He was almost 90 years of age when he passed away.
5	144-153	ELW has six brothers and three sisters. All her brothers are doctors. Only the two younger sisters attended college. One sister married a dentist and another sister married an engineer from Canada.
	154-160	ELW's mother was around 85 years old when she passed away. ELW's mother was exceptionally beautiful. Her skin was as white as pearl.
	161-173	ELW's parents were married in China. ELW's mother was from a Chinese village. She rode in a sedan chair to ELW's father's village during the wedding. She was very proud to marry a man who had returned from the United States. ELW's mother was also proud since ELW's father was the richest person in his village.
	174-184	ELW does not know whether her mother was glad to leave her village. At that time, she had no choice. It was an arranged marriage.
6	185-202	ELW's father moved to Long Beach because one year he lost heavily in the rice fields. So he decided to get out of town. The farm was located in Colusa.
	203-204	ELW's father decided to move to Long Beach because he thought that it would be a good place to start business.
	205-206	ELW's father also went to Long Beach because there were no herbalists there at the time. ELW's father did very well.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	207-208	ELW was in Long Beach through junior high and high school.
	209-220	After ELW graduated from high school, the family moved to Los Angeles. They lived on Figueroa near the Coliseum.
	221-231	At one time, ELW's two older brothers were herb doctors on the side. Now all of her brothers are just medical doctors.
7	232-245	ELW went to City College when she came to Los Angeles. She studied playground recreation. Although she finished her training, she could not find a job due to discrimination.
	246-249	ELW did not get a job partly because she was Chinese and partly because she only had two and not four years of college.
	250-266	ELW experienced discrimination throughout her school years. The school ELW attended in Long Beach was all-white, so ELW was treated as some sort of a novelty. The other students would say "Chin, Chin Chinaman" to ELW who would ignore them in return.
	267-270	The teachers were extra nice to ELW.
	271-294	ELW was not socially accepted. To see just how discriminatory her school actually was, ELW decided to go 'stag to the senior prom during her last year of high school. It was an awful evening since no one would dance with her until a gentleman asked her to dance a slow waltz. Everyone turned to look at her because she was dancing with a Caucasian.
8	295-313	When ELW returned home from graduation, she cried because everyone else had places to go except her. She just kept it to herself because no one in her family would have understood.
	314-339	ELW could not find a job for several months so she worked for her father. She worked for her father for one year putting up the herbs.
9	340-365	After working one year, she convinced her father to let her go to China. She stayed in China for six months in 1937. She did not stay longer because the war started. ELW signed up to attend Ling Nam University but she did not actually go to school due to the bombing of that area by the Japanese.
	366-393	ELW returned to China by herself. Her chaperone, Mrs. Chow, missed the boat. ELW went to China for six months but left again without attending school due to the war.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	394-400	ELW returned to the United States with her two younger brothers. They were able to finish junior high at Beijing.
	401-407	ELW learned more Chinese in the six months in China than she ever learned in language school in the U.S. ELW's father always hired a tutor for them in Long Beach. ELW also attended Chinese school in San Francisco.
	408-425	After ELW returned to the United States, she attended Metrol Business College for two semesters. She learned various office skills at the business college.
	426-433	ELW looked for a job after business college and ended up getting married instead.
	434-444	ELW was in her early twenties when she got married. She stayed at home until the kids got older. Then she helped her husband out in the insurance business.
	445-460	When Chung Wah (CCBA) first opened, ELW's husband won the first tenant. That was after the war.

## END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

1	013-019	ELW's husband was in the war during World War II. During the war, ELW stayed at home taking care of the two children.
	020-025	ELW's husband was in the shipyards, not in the service. He was in the wholesale meat business at the time. He sold his business after the war and then went into insurance.
	026-036	ELW helped her husband in the insurance business until he passed away in 1926. ELW did paper work and some socializing. There were many social obligations. ELW's husband was the secretary to a lot of business associations.
2	037-044	ELW's husband's name was Samuel R. Tin.
	045-051	ELW knows enough about the insurance business to have her own office but it is too strenuous without her husband. She also does not know enough Chinese.
	052-054	ELW was in the insurance business for about 20 years. She still carries her license.
	055-059	ELW could not handle the business in 1962 so her son took it over. They then sold the business to her brother-in-law.
	060-064	ELW went to business college again at that time to brush up on some office skills.
	065-069	ELW had to find some way to raise her two boys. They were in their late teens at the time.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	070-079	ELW was in school for about one year. She then found a job working for the county. She has worked for various departments in the county for seventeen years.
	081-082	In 1963, ELW got married.
	083-090	After she got married, she tore her front house down and built three apartments. She lives downstairs and rents two apartments upstairs and her back house out.
	091-098	ELW was only making \$314 a month while she was working as a typist. Thus she is in a better business now.
	099-104	ELW has been traveling during vacation every year since she started working for the county. ELW has traveled to various countries.
	105-108	ELW's husband works at the warehouse at MacDonald Douglas. He has worked there for forty years. He will be retiring soon.
	109-115	ELW will be working for one and a half more years and plans to retire. She is looking forward to retirement.
	116-124	When ELW was in Long Beach, she only associated with non-Chinese people since there were no Chinese over there. She joined the YWCA. She also joined the China Society and helped her father entertain exchange students.
	125-127	ELW did not associate with any Black people in Long Beach -- there were no Black people there. There were no Chicanos either.
	128-132	In Los Angeles, ELW joined the Asian Employee Association and was then able to associate with a variety of ethnic groups.
	133-142	ELW feels more Chinese than American. She especially feels Chinese because of her various trips back to China.
5	143-144	ELW can no longer read Chinese newspapers although she used to be able to.
	145-146	ELW has never felt sorry about being Chinese. ELW feels that she has a wonderful family.
	147-152	ELW never disagreed with her parents about being Chinese.
	153-156	ELW did not attend Chinese school in Los Angeles.
	157-161	ELW's father was isolated so ELW's father hired a special tutor to teach his children so that they would have a Chinese background.
	162-168	ELW's family always used both Chinese herbs and western medicine when someone was sick.
	169-182	ELW's family used Chinese herbs. They never used fongaisan (花旗參) because it was only for old people.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	183-198	ELW never learned to play mahjong. ELW enjoys playing tennis -- she has not had a chance to play in the last three years. ELW has no time for recreation. She does enjoy traveling.
6	199-201 202-204 205-206 207-210 211-217 218-235	ELW has lost all contact with people in China. ELW often goes to Chinatown for meals. She goes about once or twice a week. ELW did not join any associations in Chinatown. ELW's father belonged to Chung Wah or the Chinese Consolidated Benevolence Association. ELW's father made certain donations when the organization was first started so his picture is on the wall. ELW's father has always belonged to the Lee Family Association. ELW's late husband, belonged to the four Family Association. His father was one of the charter members of the organization. He was a pioneer in Los Angeles. He owned the Golden Gate Restaurant on Main Street. They made enough money for the whole family to return to China first-class.
7	236-273 274-279 280-288	ELW's father was a well-known herbalist in Los Angeles. Lee Sow Pang (李壽朋), the dentist, was a very prominent man in Los Angeles Chinatown. His father was one of the earliest Chinese dentists in Los Angeles. The Tom family was also very prominent. The head of the family was an herbalist. Quan Sung Jun (關崇俊) was also very prominent. Leong Jeong (梁長) is the father of Gilbert Leong. Reverend S.K. Lau was also very prominent. His father was at first a minister at a Presbyterian Church and then became an herbalist in Glendale. The Tin family was also pioneers of Los Angeles. The United Meat business are also pioneers.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	005-015 016-021 022-024 025-030	Introduction. Chinese engaged in all types of occupations before World War II. There were a lot of Chinese engineers at that time. ELW does not know what the average wages were during the pre-war period. Before the war, the prices were all reasonable and one did not need much money to live on.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	031-032	The Chinese were scattered all over and not necessarily residing in Chinatown alone.
2	033-038	Most people would save their money for their children's education. They would put the money in the bank. People would no longer send money to China because there was too much unrest.
	039-059	ELW's brother-in-law was working in the foreign service for the Chinese government. The consulate office was located in Los Angeles. ELW's brother-in-law, Hui Shiu Chan was the vice-consul at that time. He then became the Ambassador and Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs. As a foreign minister he was stationed in Formosa until last year. He is now in Oakland.
	060-065	ELW also knows some Japanese ladies who are very active in the local Democratic Party.
	066-068	ELW gets involved in county politics since she is a member of the Asian Employees Association.
3	069-080	The Chinese in Los Angeles were affected by the 1929 Depression. At that time, ELW was working as a recreational administrator at the Chinese Congregational Church. The minister at that church told her that there were not many Chinese families on Welfare although there were some single Chinese men.
	081-090	Chinese families have a lot of pride and do not want help from the government. The women would work in the sewing factories in order to help support the family.
	091-095	ELW's family experienced housing discrimination when they were in Long Beach.
	096-117	When ELW bought her present home just before World War II, her neighbor resented having ELW move in. They never associated with their neighbors. A few years later, they petitioned to get both a Korean and a Black family out of the neighborhood.
4	118-120	ELW would have preferred not moving into the neighborhood but it was a good deal at that time.
	121-133	In twenty years, everything changed and now the neighborhood consists of all Blacks and some Chicanos. All the Asians moved out. It is not a safe neighborhood -- there is nowhere in town that is safe.
	134-145	The Chinese have done very well in Los Angeles. They have not done well in the county service. The Japanese have been getting the higher positions.

## Contents (cont'd)

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	146-157	ELW thinks the Jewish people have their own methods of conducting business. ELW thinks the Chinese people have advanced more than the Jewish people. The Chinese have progressed considerably.
	158-163	ELW met her first husband at the tennis court. ELW knew her second husband's family.
	164-174	None of the American born Chinese would return to China to get married due to a cultural barrier.
	175-177	American born Chinese are just as eager as China born Chinese to have sons rather than daughters.
	178-187	ELW thinks that a lot of interracial marriages result in hard time. Families will disown their children if they marry out of their race. There is less objection in white families compared to Black families.
6	188-203	Some of ELW's close friends have interracial marriages that do work out. Most of these marriages are to Caucasians that they met in college.
	204-214	In those days it was important for the children to learn Chinese. It is no longer the case. ELW's sons went to Chinese school for a while but did not learn anything. ELW no longer cares whether her sons learn Chinese or not.
	215-225	None of the Chinese today want to return to China to live. Most of them would like to go to China to visit. ELW enjoys going to China because she would like to learn more about the country.
	226-244	ELW cannot stand movies with stereotypical portrayals of Chinese. ELW will not watch these movies unless she knows the actor and is curious to see the role he plays. ELW never protested against these movies because she was too busy.
7	245-250	Chinese consider medicine, law, and engineering as "ideal" occupations.
	251-305	All ELW's life has been very interesting. Her most difficult years were those when she first got married. She was unaccustomed to her in-laws. She could not understand why her in-laws would refuse to go to her house although they would often invite her over to their house. ELW's sister-in-law, Grace, moved in with ELW when her husband was in the service.
	306-316	Lee Family reunions at Christmas time were special occasions for ELW. ELW is still very close to her own family.
	317-324	ELW does not see her first husband's family at all anymore.



## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	325-345	ELW never gets very close to her Caucasian friends. She never visits her friends because she does not have time. In school, her Caucasian friends were very close to her but they would never invite her to birthday parties, weddings, etc. There is always a distance.
	346-374	When they first started the tennis club, they would always meet every Sunday afternoon at Chung Wah women's hall in Chinatown. There was in the 1930's. This was the first time ELW had Chinese friends.
	375-381	When the Davis Cup team from China came to Los Angeles, they stayed at ELW's home. Andrew Gew would take them out to the Los Angeles Tennis Club to practice.
	382-389	Andrew Gew was the first tennis club manager. He was the first Chinese engineer from UCLA.
10	390-401	Her Sin Gay ( ) and Gai Ho ( ) were members of the Davis Cup team that ELW met.
	402-449	In 1955, when ELW went to China, she got a chance to play at the Tokyo Tennis Club and also at the South China Tennis Club in Kowloon (Macao). ELW almost got married to one of the club members there. She still writes letters to her friends over there.
	450-458	ELW does not play much tennis anymore. She keeps up with the tournaments through the newspapers.
	459-465	ELW has never won a tennis tournament.
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1	017-018	ELW has never won any tennis tournaments.
	019-022	ELW once played with Porky of the Gew family from Berkeley who thought that ELW was a pretty good player.
	023-036	While ELW was in City College, she used to coach a girls basketball team. At the same time, ELW belonged to the Mei Wah basketball team and they played against ELW's own team. ELW's girls won.
2	037-041	When ELW was in the YWCA she went to a conference in San Marino. She was chosen to sing in the church quartet in the Sunday service.
	042-044	When ELW was in high school she used to sing in the glee club.
	045-057	ELW has been all over the world during her paid vacations with the county.
	058-068	ELW was very active in the Asian Employee Association. She was the secretary for a few years. She worked with affirmative action and grievances. The president of the organization is Yami Yamamoto.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	069-091	One of their grievance committee members became the affirmative action officer for the County of Supervisors E. Edelman.
	092-109	ELW's brother, Dr. Mark Lee, has an office in Chinatown. He was a general practitioner. His first office was at Broadway and then moved to the new medical building on Ord Street. Now his daughter, Diane, has taken over the practice.
4	110-115	Mark was one of the boys who was sent to Beijing for school for two or three years. ELW brought him back to the United States in 1937.
	116-124	Mark went to Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. He received his medical training at Austopan College in Los Angeles.
	125-132	Mark married a chemist from Sacramento who is now a math consultant at Virgil Junior High School.
	133-138	Mark had three daughters and one son. Two of his daughters are doctors and the youngest daughter, Arlene, is a dentist. His son is in medical school.
	139-145	Mark was very delicate when he was young. He was stationed in the army at Sydney, Australia during World War II.
5	146-148	Mark had a heart attack about three years ago.
	149-151	Mark was very sociable as well as athletic.
	152-169	Although he fully recooperated from the first heart attack he had to have a heart bypass. He was working parttime at first and then full time. He passed away on his day off while working in the garden.
6	170-186	Mark belonged to the Guardian Organization. May of his friends were present at the funeral.
	187-216	Mark's wife is very ambitious; she made him what he is. She has always worked. She worked for a drug firm at first when she came to Los Angeles. She is very dedicated to her work helping Chinese children.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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