SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Margaret K. Lee
Chinese Name: 承 女中 表:
Date of Interview:1/26/80, 4/29/80
Interviewer: Beverly Chan
Others Present: None
Language: English
Summarizer: Stella Ling

Interview Number: 85
Number of Tapes: 3
Length: 1 Hour & 39 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary Tape: 1 Side A
1		Introduction.
1.	001 - 008 009 - 010	Margaret Kwan Lee's (MKL) Chinese name is Kwan Wui Yee (河 女口 意). Kwan is her maiden name.
	011-016	MKL's parents were from Canton, China. MKL's father is from the Hoiping village and her mother is from Suhing.
	017-022	MKL's father was born in the late 1800's. MKL's mother was born in 1898.
	023-032	MKL's father owned land in China. He was a merchant in the United States. He was in the Chinese dried goods business. His shop was located on Sanchez Street in Chinatown, near the old Plaza. It was just behind the Peking House on Main Street.
2	033-036	MKL's father came to the United States in 1910 or 1912. MKL's mother came in 1914.
	037-038	MKL's parents were married in China but all their children were born in the United States.
	039-046	MKL was born in Los Angeles in 1922. MKL had three brothers and one sister. MKL's brothers were conceived in the United States but were born either on the high seas or in China.
	047-053	MKL's parents returned to China quite frequently. They returned to China to visit their relatives.
	054-060	MKL's mother is Sam Yup and her father is Sze Yup so MKL speaks both dialects. Her parents could speak both Cantonese dialects.
•	061-069	MKL's family lived right next door to her father's store in Chinatown. It was located on Sanchez Street.
3	070-073	In those days, there were a lot of places with the businesses downstairs and the living quarters upstairs. In a lot of other places, the living quarters were attached to the store.
	074-081	They lived on Sanchez Street until 1936. MKL does not know if they owned or rented their house.
	082-097	MKL's father owned another house outside of Chinatown on Avenue 34. They rented the house out while they lived in Chinatown. MKL does not remember when her

trouble buying the house.

father bought the house. He never said that he had

Interviewee:	Margaret	К.	Lee
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Page	:_		2	
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Contents (Cone a)	
Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	098-102	In 1936, MKL's family moved to Avenue 34. By then they no longer had the dry goods business. MKL's father owned an asparagus ranch.
4	103-107	MKL's father's business was not affected by the Depression. The dry goods business was discontinued.
	108-117	MKL attended the California Street School which is now the Board of Education. She then went to Central Junior High School. She then attended Belmont High School. She graduated in the summer of 1940.
	118-119	MKL did not have any part time jobs while she was attending school.
	120-123	After high school, MKL went to Woodbury College. She was there for two years and completed the secretarial courses.
	124-127	There were only a few other Chinese students at MKL's college.
	128-136	In 1940, MKL's family moved to her present residence on Avenue 33.
	137-141	After college, the war started and MKL worked for the Navy Department in Terminal Island. MKL did secretarial work.
5	142-148	That became too far for MKL and a bunch of other girls to drive to so they transferred another branch of the Navy Department. MKL worked there until the war was over.
	149-150	MKL was elected the Moon Festival Queen of 1941.
	151-164	MKL was a member of the Chinese girls club called the Mei Wah Club. The club was sponsored by Mrs. Maye Wong. The Mei Wah Drum Corp is a subsidiary of the Mei Wah Girls Club.
	165-171	There were quite a few Chinese who attended Belmont High School because of its vicinity to Chinatown.
	172-177	Belmont High School is located on Beverly Boulevard and is considered to be in the Central Los Angeles District.
	178-185	The Mei Wah Girls Club did a lot of charity work. They would help out certain organizations.
6	186-198	The Moon Festival was sponsored by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association along with the participation of various agencies. A lot of Hollywood stars were involved in the event. It was to raise funds for the aid to China due to the Japanese invasion.

Interviewee:	Margaret	к.	Lee
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Page: 3
Tape: 1 Side A

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	199 - 210	They wanted all the local people to participate in the event either by giving a donation or providing a service. The entertainment committee was responsible for putting together a program to get the American community to come over and participate in the Chinese Relief.
	211-218	There were dragon stands and a Queens' float. They also had an enormous flag which many people carried and as they walked through the different areas, people would throw money into the flag.
	219-222	All the proceeds from the events on August 7, 8, and 9, 1941 went to the United China Relief.
	223-238	A group of girls went to the Benevolent Hall and were interviewed. There was also a private talent show. This was the first time they put together such an event in Los Angeles.
7	239-249	There were about 30 or 40 girls there. A committee was there to choose the Moon Festival Queen. They decided in the next day or two and MKL was notified.
	250-263	MKL only had to sit on a float during the parade. After the event was over, there was nothing more for her to do. She did not have to make any speeches. MKI was just part of the United Relief pageant.
	264 - 278	The parade took place on Los Angeles Street. The whole parade moved thorugh Chinatown. There was a drum and bugle corp, American Legion participants, Shriners, and many other people participating. The parade started where Los Angeles Street originates and then went through Spring Street and parts of Broadway.
8	279-289	People from all over Los Angeles participated in the parade, not just people from Chinatown. It was opened to the public. It was covered by all the major newspapers. There was a very large participation.
	290-296	Some of the movie stars from Hollywood were on stage. Some were doing radio announcements for the China Relief Program.
	297-317	Aside from the parade, the temples were open to the public. They also held cooking classes. There were entertainers and Chinese dances. There were dragon dances. There was a fashion show of Chinese costumes on stage in Chinatown. Different events took place at different places simultaneously.
	318-322	The parade as well as the other events all took place during the evenings.
	323-335	The relief program was a nationwide campaign and was able to raise five million dollars. MKL does not know how much Los Angeles Chinatown contributed to this total sum.

Interviewee:	Margaret	K.	Lee	

Page:		4	*********
Tape:	1	Síđe	A

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Time	Counter	
Segment	Number	Summary
9	336-343	New York and San Francisco were two other cities that joined Los Angeles for this fund-raising effort.
	344-363	The relationship between the Americans and the Chinese was generally good. Even when China and the United States were allies during the war, there was still a barrier between the two when it came to employment and housing.
,	364-366	Those times were not like today where regardless of where you go, you are welcomed.
	367 - 386	MKL has not personally experienced any discrimination. The only time was when MKL wanted to be an airline stewardess. She sent letters to major airlines who said that they were not hiring. MKL knew that they were just not hiring non-American people.
•		
10	387-399	Discrimination in employment stopped about five or six years ago, according to MKL. After the war, discrimination slowly disappeared.
	400-404	When MKL was young, her playmates were mostly Chinese because she lived in Chinatown.
	405-411	When MKL moved to Avenue 34, she was still a member of the Chinatown associations.
	412-419	MKL spoke Chinese at home. Through the years, a little English was mixed into the Chinese.
	420-432	MKL attended Chinese school after American school. They had Chinese classes from 4:30 to 7:30 to learn how to read and write Chinese. MKL remembers very little from these classes.
	433-443	MKL attended Chinese school for about ten years. MKL also had lessons in Chinese history and geography.
	444-456	In Chinese school, they learned how to trace and write Chinese characters. Most of the lessons involved oral training. There were a few books that they were told to read and memorize. These books came from China.
11	457-461	There were about 20 students in MKL's class. There were about 100 students in all.
	462-465	MKL attended a regular Chinese school that was not affiliated with the Church. It was called the Chung Wah Ho Hao (中華度大).
	466-476	There were less students in the older gradesmaybe about ten people in a class. A lot of people stopped attending Chinese school because their work load from the American school became more demanding.
	477-481	MKL was able to join a few activities in her American school.

Interviewee:	Margaret		

Page: 5

1 Side A
Tape: 1 Side B

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
11	482-490	At times MKL had so much homework from American school that she would do it while she was at Chinese school.
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1	002-006	MKL just put the time into Chinese school but did not really learn very much. It was not that MKL did not care to learn Chinese. It was that there was work to do from American school and they knew that Chinese school was only for a few hours and they would do just enough to get by.
	007-017	MKL enjoyed Chinese school. MKL finished all the grades the Chinese school offered. Nevertheless, she was of no comparison to the students educated in China. They only acquired a smattering of Chinese.
	018-021	MKL feels that American born Chinese should be taught their Chinese heritage.
	022-023	MKL does not have any children.
	024-032	MKL thinks that the younger Chinese generation no longer know how to even speak Chinese. Very few of them attend Chinese school because their families have moved away from Chinatown and their friends are no longer Chinese.
	033-039	Most of the Chinese children of MKL's generation attended Chinese school. American born Chinese do not feel as strongly about sending their children to Chinese school. They will make more of an effort if they live in Chinatown.
2	040-051	MKL has always had a stronger Chinese influence than American influence. MKL thinks of herself as a Chinese American.
	052-058	MKL's parents identified themselves as Chinese since they were born in China. MKL's mother became a naturalized citizen but her father did not.
	059 - 063	MKL's mother was a good storyteller and told MKL about her own childhood days in China. She would also talk about the Chinese customs and different things.
	064-066	MKL's family celebrated Chinese New Years. They were given the "lei si" (本山 大). They also played with firecrackers.
	067-068	All the Chinese customs were presented to MKL during her childhood days.

Interviewee:	Margaret	Κ.	Lee	

Page: 6
Tape: 1 Side B

Contents ((cont'	a)
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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	069-071	MKL's parents were not religious. They did not have as altar for ancestor worship.
	072-073 074-087	MKL never became religious later on in her own life. MKL's mother used Chinese herbal medicine for the family ailments. They used herbs in their soup. Herbs were also used to cure childhood diseases such as small pox, chicken pox, and measles. These herbal medicines did work. These were just housewife remedies.
·	088-093	MKL's family did see American doctors. The doctors used to make house calls in those days. They sometime had to go to the doctor's office.
	094-096 097-100	MKL's parents would visit the herbalist doctors. MKL never questioned what the herbal medicines were. When they were ill, they would simply drink whatever tea was presented to them.
	101-107	Sometimes the Chinese medicine works fine. The Chines medicine will not work for certain ailments and in these cases, the Western medicine would be better.
4	108-118	While MKL was growing up on Sanchez Street, the shops in that area included grocery stores, drugstores, barber shops, herb stores, basketry stores, curio shops, restaurants, and a few laundries.
•	119-123	Sanchez Street was mostly residential. Los Angeles Street was more commercial.
	124-127	MKL's father had a car. They were taken to parks. They also traveled to San Francisco and San Diego.
	128-133	They also went down to the beaches, to Hollywood, and all over Los Angeles.
	. 134-138	When they were on an outing, they would also dine out. They would go to American restaurants.
	139-146	A few other Chinese families would also venture out of Chinatown like MKL's family did. Most of the Chinese would stay in Chinatown because of the transportation problem.
5 .	147-149	MKL's father always had a driver who would take their family out on these outings.
	150 -15 8	MKL does not know how much it cost her father to purchase their car. MKL's father always drove a Buick MKL remembers pictures of their family with the car when she was only seven eyars old.
	159 - 164	MKL's father had a preference for Buicks but he also had a Dodge at one time. He would buy another car about every three years since the previous car would Wear out.

Interviewee:	Margaret	Κ.	Lee

Page:		7	
Tape:	2	Side	A

Time	Counter	
Segment	Number	Summary
1	001-009	Introduction.
	010-014	IN MKL's family, the older generation preferred Chinese music. MKL's mother liked mahjong. The younger group would prefer ball games and movies.
	015-018	MKL's mother plays mahjong with her group of friends about once a week. MKL's father did not play mahjong. MKL plays once in a while.
	019-020.	MKL's siblings also preferred Western styles of recreation.
	021-025	MKL's parents enjoy watching Chinese movies.
•	026-030	Occasionally there would be a Chinese opera troupe that would tour the United States. MKL's parents would go
•	•	and watch these operas. MKL was told that she did go to the operas.
•	031-037	When the famous opera star, Mei Lan-Fang (本年順方), performed in the United States, MKL's parents did see him. MKL's mother told her that MKL used to imitate him. He came when MKL was just a child.
2	038-040	MKL did not write to any relatives to friends in China because she did not know how to write Chinese.
	041-047	MKL was aware that her family had relatives in China. She used to help her father write the English portions on the envelopes of the letters that were being sent back to China.
·	048-054	MKL's father was a member of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. He was also involved in a merchants' association. He was also a member of the Lau Kwan Giang Chow () () () () () () () () () (
	055-062	The associations would have Chinese New Years parties. They would also get together donations for various
	063-071	drives. The family assocation that MKL's father belonged to wa one of the many sponsors of charitable and social functions. People who belonged to a family assocation had the same surname.
3	072-080	Most of the associations at that time were involved in the anti-Japanese efforts. These associations would donate funds.
•	081-090	The family association would also act as a mediator for family disputes.
,	091-097	MKL's father held different offices in these associations but MKL does not know the details.

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Interviewee:	Margaret	N	TEE

Page:		8	
Tape:	2	Side	A

Contents (cont.d)	
Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	098-115	Y.C. Hong was considered a prominent Chinese individual before the war because he was a lawyer. He would help the Chinese in legal matters. He had his own office in Chinatown.
4	116-128	Before the war, the Chinese were restaurant owners, grocers, laundrymen, and curio store owners.
	129-136	The curio stores were for tourists as well as for Chinese who wanted to purchase Chinese antiques and other merchandise.
	137-154	MKL does not know if there were any jobs not opened to the Chinese. There were a few Chinese in the civil services. When a Chinese was needed, such as in the immigration office, a Chinese would be hired. But when an American was needed, a Chinese would not have a chance.
5	155 - 180	When a Chinese interviewed for a job, if he or she met the necessary requirements, the interviewer would then ask his colleagues if they objected to it.
	181-182	MKL nenver personally experienced any hiring discrimination.
6	183-189	The jobs in Chinatown were exclusively taken by Chinese people. A Chinese employer would exclusively hire Chinese employees.
	190-204	In a restaurant, for example, people who go to a Chinese restau; rant expect there to be Chinese help. It was also easier for people who lived in the Chinese community to go to a Chinese restaurant to work.
	205-217	When someone needed a carpenter or painter, for instance, there would not be many Chinese in those professions so you would have to rely on American businesses of that sort.
	218-235	Some businesses may have hired non-Chinese workers but most of them would be family businesses and the family members would take care of the various type of work that needed to be done.
	236-237	MKL does not know what the average income was in those days.
	238-245	MKL was still going to school in the early 1940's. One of MKL's brothers was still going to school in China. Another brother was working for Douglas Aircraft. MKL does not know how much money he was making.
	246-259	MKL's brother was not an engineer. He attended a special school and was hired because of his skill. He must have been an airplane mechanic.

Interviewee:	Margaret	κ.	Tee
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Page: 9
Tape: 2 Síde A

Concerns	(COILC Q)	
Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	260-270	Two of MKL's brothers returned to China to go to school. They went to Nam Hoi High School. One of MKL's brothers was there for three years and the other was there for five years.
	271~279	It was MKL's father's idea to send MKL's brothers to Nam Hoi. One brother may have been 14 and the other one was 16 when they went to China. They did not attend the university in China.
8	280-293	Most of the Chinese families did want to send their children back to China to get an education. About three-fourths of the Chinese families were able to send their children back to China. Some obtained a full education and others studied there for a few years. Chinese parents wanted their children to have a better understanding of the Chinese culture and language.
	294-297	MKL's other brother was not sent to China because he was younger and still attending junior high school.
	298-313	MKL did not return to China to get a Chinese education. It was not because she was a girl. Life in the United States changed for the Chinese. MKL attended Chinese school in Los Angeles.
	314-317	MKL was too young to know how much it cost to send a child back to China to get a Chinese education.
	318-320	MKL wrote to her brother while he was in China. She did not write to him in Chinese.
	321 - 328	MKL did think about returning to China when she was young. She did go to China last year.
9	329-346	MKL was much younger than her brothers so she did not notice any changes in them when they returned from China.
	347-362	The majority of the Chinese lived in Chinatown. People wanted to be where the Chinese were.
	363-373	Chinatown became too crowded and Chinese families had to start moving out of Chinatown.
	374-383	There were some Mexicans in Chinatown but the Chinese ended up buying the Mexicans out.
10	384 - 397	Chinese with family back in China would send the money that they saved back to their family. The Chinese would save money for the education of their children as well as for a better livelihood for themselves. Everything done was geared towards the improvement of their family.

Interviewee: Margaret K. Lee

Page: 10

2 Side A
Tape: 2 Side B

Concents (
Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	398-432 433-457	Chinese people always gamble. Gambling was not legal so the Chinese gambled undercover. Forms of gambling included "fan tan," "pai gao," and mahjong. Bachelors would gamble since they had no family. MKL does not know how other families saved their money. The more modern Chinese would have bank accounts. Some Chinese did not believe in banking and would keep their cash in their homes.
11	458-465	If someone had family back in China, that would be considered their obligation.
	466-480	MKL's father sent money to his cousins in China. He also had other close relatives such as aunts and uncles whom he had to take care of. MKL's father would send money to one person and that would then be distributed to everyone.
END OF TAP	E 2 SIDE A	
1	001-015	At that time, the money sent back to China would be mediated by banks. MKL does not know of any grocery stores that handled this kind of service. MKL's father would go to a bank to purchase a certain type of check and then send the check back to China.
	016-021	Maybe some individuals who did not know how to go about sending money back to China would seek the help of a clan member at a grocery store.
	022-032	MKL does not remember the Depression. MKL's father's business may have been affected but MKL was too young to know.
2	033-040	Chinese and Jewish people may conduct their businesses in a similar manner. Both Chinese and Jewish people are both homebodies and family conscious. The family comes first, the mother is very important and the other elders are highly respected.
	041-047	In MKL's family, MKL's father was the most important family figure. MKL's mother was just as capable as her father. MKL's mother never worked at a full time job.
·	048-050	MKL does not remember any hostility towards the Chinese in Los Angeles.
	051-067	The Chinese did better than the general population in the Los Angeles area probably because they were more thrifty. The Chinese are definitely more hard-working than any other racial group. The Chinese engaged in hard work that had long hours.

Interviewee:	Margaret	K.	Lee	
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Page: 11
Tape: 2 Side B

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	068-069	MKL does not know of anyone involved in Chinese or American politics.
	070-075	Most of the Chinese men met their wives through arranged marriages in China. The Chinese men would return to China to get married. Some families in the United States had arranged marriages.
	076-082	The American born Chinese had a complete different set of ideas compared to the China born Chinese. Since the American born was raised differently from the China born, the two would not be ideally suited for each other.
	083-099	Some American born Chinese men did return to China to get married. They returned to China mainly because they did not find a suitable wife in the United States. Some relatives or friends in China may know of an eligible woman and so the man would return to China in order to meet her.
	100-110	American born Chinese would go dating as people do now. They would go to dances or to Chinese club meetings. Some people did not attend these functions and they would be the ones to have arranged marriages.
4	111-118	Both the American born Chinese and the older generation Chinese preferred to have sons rather than daughters.
	119-129	Most people frowned upon interracial marriages during the 1930's and 1940's. Even though interracial marriages are more prevalent now, they are still frowned upon. It is slowly becoming more accepted.
	130-132	MKL did not personally know anyone in those days who was married to someone of a different race.
	133 - 142	MKL does not think that interracial marriages matter too much. The main thing is that the two are happy and
	· .	respect each other. Hawaii is a good example of various interracial marriages that all seemed to have worked out.
5	143-147	For MKL, she would not have ventured to the other side. She still says "Chinese for the Chinese."
	148-170	When asked about the Chinese portrayals in American movies, MKL feels that certain movies such as "Good Earth" gave a very good picture of what China went through during the famine. When Anna Maye Wong was a movie star, some Chinese people were against her because they felt that the roles she had were low cast parts.

Interviewee: Margaret K. Lee

Page: 12
Tape: 2 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	171-178	People's dislike for the roles Anna Maye Wong were in, were just expressed in general conversations. People may have made open protests.
	179-190	Charlie Chan movies were good. Fu Manchu movies were more fantasy. Fu Manchu movies were more cast-typing and not true portrayals of the Chinese. MKL does not know if there was any protesting. The Chinese American Alliance may have been involved in some protesting.
	191-192	MKL has never heard anyone say that they were embarrassed to be Chinese.
	193~205	The Chinese want their children to be lawyers, doctors, and engineers. For themselves, they must get what they can do or what is offered.
END OF TAPE	2 SIDE B	
1	001-004 005-018	Introduction. The older generation Chinese probably lacked the proper education to pursue professional jobs. These Chinese engaged in home-owned business. They wanted to earn enough money to support their family and to provide their children with a good education.
•	019-029	When a child attends school, he or she may find cut that he or she has interests outside of the family business. If so, they would not go into the family business. Another child of the same family may not pursue higher education and may continue on with the family business.
	030-040	In those days, some Chinese wanted to return to China to retire. On the other hand, if their entire family was in the United States, there would be no point in them returning to China to retire. If they brought their family to the United States, they would probably retire in the United States.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

MARGARET K. LEE INDEX

Depression (1929-1939), 1A:4 Agriculture, 1A:3 Discrimination, 2B:2 in employment, 1A:9-10; Bachelors, 2A:10 2A:4-5 Banks and banking, 2A.10; 2B:1 Dry goods stores, 1A:1,3,4 Belmont High School, 1A:4,5 Businesses Education in Chinatown, 1B:4; 2A:6 in China, 2A:7-8 employees of, 2A:6 importance of, 2A:10 ethics of, 2B:2 number of Chinese Americans involved in, 1A:4 California Street School, 1A:4 Calligraphy, 1A:10 of women, 2A:8 Celebrations and holidays, 1A:5, Ethnic identity importance of, 1B:1 6-8; 1B:2 pride in, 2B:5 Character traits, 2B:2 "Charlie Chan" movies, 2B:5 Families and family life, 2B:2 Children preference for sons, 2B:4 Family associations, 2A:2-3 sent to China, 2A:7 Friendships among other Chinese Americans, continuing ties with, 2A:10-1A:10 11: 2B:1 education in, 2A:7-8 · Gambling, 2A:10 Japanese invasion of, 1A:6, "Good Earth, The," 2B:5 7-9 Herbal medicine, 1B:3 marriages in, 2B:3 money sent to, 2A:10-11; 2B:1 Hoi Ping Village, China, 1A:1 returns to, 1A:2; 2A:7-9; 3A:1 Hong, Y. C., 2A:3 China Relief Program, 1A:6,7-9 Chinatown (Los Angeles) Incomes, 2A:6 attraction of, 1B:3 Interracial marriages, 2B:4 businesses in, 1B:4; 2A:6 other ethnic groups in, 2A:9 Japanese Americans Chinese American relationships residents of, 2A:9 Chinese American Citizens Alliance, with, 1A:6,7-9; 2A:4 Jews, 2A:3 Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1A:6 Lau Kwan Giang Chow Association, Chinese New Years, 1B:2; 2A:2 2A:2 Chinese schools, 2A:8 Lawyers, 2A:3 attitudes toward, lA:ll; lB:l Lee, Margaret K. curriculum of, lA:10 education of, 1A:4,10-11; decline in, lB:1 1B:1; 2A:8 hours spent in, 1A:10 elected Moon Fesitval Queen, number of Students in, 1A:11 1A:5,7 Chung Wah Ho Hao, 1A:11 employment of, 1A:4-5,9 ethnic identity of, 1B:1-2; Cîtizenship, 1B:2

Correspondence, 2A:2

2B:5

INDEX

Lee, Margaret K. (cont'd.)
father of, lA:1-2; lB:2,4-5;
2A:1,2,3,10; 2B:2
friendships of, lA:10
mother of, lA:1-2; lB:2; 2B:2
name of, lA:1
organizations involved in,
lA:5,10
residences of, lA:2,3,4
siblings of, 2A:6-7,8-9

Mahjong, 2A:1,10
Marriages
in China, 2B:2
mate selection patterns of,
2B:3
Medical practices, 1B:3
Mei Lan-fang, 2A:1
Mei Wah Girl's Club, 1A:5
Money, 2A:10-11; 2B:1
Moon Festival, 1A:5-8
Movies

Chinese, 1B:1 stereotypes in, 2B:5 Music and musicians, 2A:1

Occupation patterns and discrimination, 1A:9-10; 2A:4-5 ideal jobs, 2B:5 typical jobs, 2A:4,6; 3A:1 Opera, Chinese, 2A:1

Politics, 2B:3
Prominent individuals and families,
2A:3

Recreation, 1B:4-5; 2A:1
Religion, 1B:3
Residential patterns
and businesses, 1A:3
locations of, 2A:9
Restaurants, 2A:6
Retirement, 3A:1

Sam Yup dialect, 1A:2 Sojourning, 3A:1 Stereotypes, 2B:5 Sze Yup dialect, 1A:2 Temples, 1A:8

Values, 2B:2

Women
education of, 2A:8
Wong, Anna May, 2B:5
Woodbury College, 1A:4
World War II, 1A:4-5,7-9