

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Ida Lee Interview Number: 121
 Chinese Name: 朱 閔 嫦 珠 Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 7/29/80 Length: 2 Hours & 6 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Tom Moy

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1 Side A</u>
1	006-009	Parent's occupation. Father was a butcher in California and mother was a housewife.	
	010-037	Father arrived in the United States in the 1900's when he was about 30 years old. He lived in San Francisco first, for 23-24 years. Arrived in Los Angeles in 1923 approximately. He was married in China. His wife followed him from China in 1916. No apparent difficulty for her mother and older brother, born in China to come to the United States. Ida Lee was born in Oakland, California in 1919. Parents came from Kwantong, Namhoy Kang Kong. Her Chinese name is Jen Quan Shung Jen. Father's last name is Quan.	
2	038-050	Language, dialect spoken at the house was Sum Yup (Do Kong dialect). Not easily understood by city people in Canton. Other dialects spoken by the Quans was Tong Wa and San Wa.	
	051-082	Family came to Los Angeles in 1923. Father wanted to start his own meat business, wholesale and retail. In Oakland her father and her uncle had a similar business. The new business was located on First and Main--"the middle of downtown"--Ida says. The other meat markets were located nearby as well as a Chinese Theatre and Chinatown itself. He had business with a variety of people, Pilipinos, Japanese and Mexicans.	
3	083-089	Her mother did not help with the business. She was a housewife. She had two older brothers. One stayed in China forever and the other brother stayed with the family. She also has three younger sisters.	
	090-105	They lived in a small apartment behind the meat market. It was a two story building but they lived only on the second floor. They lived in other locations too.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4&5	106-114	Ethnic origin of neighbors--Japanese in one neighborhood. Jewish when they lived in Boyle Heights.
	115-131	First bought a house--two stories, bought in 1931 in Boyle Heights. Cost \$7,500. No problem in making the purchase.
	132-191	Schooling was all in Los Angeles: Elementary school--California Street School and Santa Monica (1-1½ years). From California Street School to Amelia Street School. Junior High School at Hallenbeck in Boyle Heights. High School at Theodore Roosevelt where she graduated. California Street School is now located near Hill Street and Temple. Amelia Street School--"east by the river" is at East 1st and Vignes. Ethnicity in the schools: California Street School was mostly Chinese, some Mexicans and Japanese since it was near Chinatown. 50% Caucasians. Amelia Street School had mostly Japanese and Mexicans because it was near the Japanese part of town. Few Chinese and Caucasians. School friends selection: at Amelia she had mostly Japanese friends. She got along with Mexicans. Her after school playmates were mostly Japanese. At California Street School it was mostly Chinese. Santa Monica had many Caucasian friends. She attended 3rd grade in Santa Monica.
6	192-200	Her father opened a branch of the business on Santa Monica. It was successful but after a year later her father turned the business over to a cousin and the family moved back to Los Angeles.
	201-214	Family life in Santa Monica. Family lived in an upstairs apartment behind the market. Ida doesn't recall any discrimination in the neighborhood. There were no Blacks or Mexicans living there.
	215-244	Attended Chinese school, June. Was in downtown Los Angeles in Chinatown. She attended another Chinese school in Chinatown in the 1930's but doesn't recall the name of the school. She has had a 6-8th grade Chinese education. After junior high school between 4:30-7:30 weekdays and 9:30-12:30 Saturday. She attended Chinese school as an accepted practice.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	245-295	Feelings about herself. She felt very Chinese at home but American in school. She ate Chinese food at home. Recreation--none. No spare time. She read when she was free. Mostly she read English books. Her parents were too busy for recreation. Her father worked from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and half days on Sunday. Family owned a car. On Sunday afternoons they would drive to Lincoln Park. Mother played mahjong but not her father. Father's friends mostly were Chinese. Same with mother. Father spoke English but mother hardly spoke English. Father did most of the shopping, especially when the family lived in Santa Monica.
8	295-301 302-309 310-348	Musical taste of parents was Chinese opera and Chinese. Medicine--Chinese medicine was preferred at first. Later they consulted with American doctors. Feeling about being Chinese or American. She had conflicts with her parents on doing some things that were not considered Chinese such as school activities, after school sports, and plays. She was not allowed to date even among Chinese.
9	349-350 351-366 367-381 382-427	On dating--Chinese girls started dating in late 18 or 19 years of age. Ida worked after graduation from high school. She did bookkeeping in her father's market. She started working with her father when she was in school. Ida got married at 19 years of age. Some Chinese girls got married earlier than 19. Ida did not join any association. Neither did her father. T.B. Chew was an important individual. Kwan Sun Jung--mother was an important individual. Anna May Wong was important too.
10	428-442 443-460 461-483	Feelings regarding portrayal of Chinese in American movies. Liked <u>Good Earth</u> . Others made fun of Chinese. Not aware of any protests. Kinds of jobs Chinese engaged in before the war. Restaurants, laundries, grocery stores. Few professional jobs such as dentists or medical doctors. Average income of Chinese in the 1930's--truck drivers were paid \$20 per week. \$100 a month was good wages.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	003-029	Chinese lived mostly near other Chinese, such as in Chinatown. But their family moved to Boyle Heights because her brother got married and chose a house near Hallenbeck Park, "not far from Chinatown" Ida asserts. Both father and son selected the house and when the family moved in, her brother and his wife lived there also. This kind of family arrangement is typical. The family's move to Santa Monica may have been sparked by a business decision, Ida speculates. No problems in the neighborhood.
	030-059	Discrimination--She and her husband had problems renting a house in El Cerrito. The landlady said "sorry I cannot rent to you, it's in my deed that we cannot rent to...Orientals." Ida said this was in 1938. They did not protest, even though they did not get back their first month's rent (a deposit). Discrimination in renting or buying a house. No problem in Santa Monica because the family lived in the same part of the business building but in back.
2	060-075	In Chinatown the Chinese could get an apartment near their business but not in the same building as the business. Not many Chinese could afford cars, thus they lived near their business. Ida's family had a car, therefore they could afford to expand their business in other areas such as Boyle Heights, where they had no business.
3	076-082 083-097	Her father sent money to relatives in China. Mother's role in the family--"She was a typical Chinese matriarch." Her father controlled the finances. Her mother's role was to raise the children and discipline. Her mother probably did not advise her husband on the meat business, Ida thinks.
	098-102	Some women stayed home after they got married, others did not. It depended on the couple's economic situation.
	103-107	Most Chinese families sent money to relatives in China.
4	108-140	No political involvement of the family in China, nor other families either. In the 1930's there was anti-Japanese feelings by the Chinese, most particularly in 1937 and 1938. Ida thinks that the anti-Japanese feelings were directed only at Japan and did not affect her relationship with Japanese Americans.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	141-147	Conversation among friends--topics discussed were non-Chinese except maybe food among her Chinese friends.
5	148-155	She spoke Chinese with her family, friends and family members. Her friends were mostly American Chinese or those Chinese who lived for some time in the United States and were Americanized.
	156-183	Affects of the depression on Chinese--Businesses collapsed. Her father's business was not affected until 1935-1936. At that time her father closed several businesses. Many Chinese restaurants were closed.
	184-200	Hostilities towards the Chinese. Ida felt that there was discrimination while she was growing up. She cites the Exclusion Act. Some wives and families could not be brought over to America. So there was an awareness of discrimination against China born as well as American born Chinese.
6	201-224	Generally the Chinese did as well or better economically than other ethnic groups. She feels that the Chinese and the Jews are very similar. Both are an intelligent race, stress family, are clannish and hard working.
	225-243	Chinese men met their wives through a matchmaker. However she knew her future husband before she married him. Her family was related through marriage. Her husband's sister is married to her cousin. Therefore she and her future husband did not have to be introduced. They already knew each other.
7	244-256	In regards to American born Chinese couples wanting sons as the Chinese born Chinese preferred, she thinks that it was a personal choice. Older women looked forward to a grandson. She thinks that women of her generation probably wanted a boy first but that it wasn't all that important.
	257-271	Some Chinese men did go back to China to get married. However the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented many Chinese men from going back to China since once they left they could not return to the United States. Therefore, many Chinese men married American born Chinese women.
	272-284	Interracial marriages were frowned upon. Two of her sisters are married to non-Chinese but that was after 1945.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	285-303	The importance of attending Chinese school. Her parents felt it was important. She was given no choice in attending. When she got married, she sent her son, Richard to Chinese school.
	304-310	Language spoken--she speaks Dau Gong dialect, which is the area her husband is from. Her son "speaks Chinese when he has to." Her son writes very little Chinese.
	311-348	Older Chinese wanted to return to China to die. Her father died in 1946 in the United States and did not return to China because of the war. In the 1930's Ida thinks that many Chinese wanted to return to china. Her father wanted to die in China. But her mother, as she got older, accepted the United States as her home and with the grandchildren here in the U.S., her mother was more content to remain here. Ida regards the United States as her home.
9	349-367	Feelings about being Chinese--some Chinese would rather be Caucasian.
	368-427	Jobs desired--children should become professional people. Ambition was pushed on her sons, not the daughters. The sons inherit, the daughters don't. No protest. That was the accepted custom regarding inheritance. It was not a secret.
10	428-460	Attitudes toward education, aspirations--Chinese girls did not go to college. Women were expected to get married, have a family. She attended night class in accounting. Now she is an accountant.
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1	001-007	Education--attended accounting classes after high school and before she got married.
	008-016	When she got married she gave up her job working as a bookkeeper with her father's market. She stayed home with her newborn baby for a few years. After that she went back to work as a bookkeeper in some other firm.
	017-022	Career attitudes--she went back to work but she wasn't career minded.
	023-041	Childhood games, entertainment--she had dolls, other toys such as wooden blocks. She played with her sisters and cousins. At elementary school she played hopscotch and jacks. There was a difference between games boy played versus games girls played. The boys played tag, ball, the rougher sports. She was content to play girls games, not the rougher kind like boys.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	042-062	Religious activities--she and her family did not attend American churches. They were not Christians. Her mother was bison () combination Buddhism and ancestral worship. Her mother burned incense. A picture and incense was placed at the corner of the house--Jon Hiang (). They did this (Hiang) before each meal, not just on special times of the year. Ida's father had no religious inclination, not even bison.
	063-076	Family responsibilities at home. Girls washed the dishes, cleaned the house, swept the floors, helped cook. The boys--older brother worked at the family market. The younger brother did not have assigned chores. Ida was assigned to take care of her younger brother. She resented doing it.
3	077-086	Family activities--they did things as a family unit, such as going to Lincoln Park. Her father worked long hours so he wasn't home much. The kids played mahjong and other games.
	087-098	Relationships (family)--Ida had good relations with her mother. No major family problems.
	099-128	Sex education at home--prepared Ida for menstruation but not in great detail. Therefore she was not frightened the first time menstruation occurred. Material used was kotex. Her mother used "grass paper" which was attached by a belt (ribbon). Caucasian women probably used linen.
4	129-142	Sex education at school (high school)--When she was 16 years old classes taught were segregated by sex. Ida thinks that sex education at school was probably common. The class was not a semester long. That was probably the extent of her formal sex education.
5	143-175	Other sex education--At times Ida and the other girls discusses serious topics like reproduction among themselves. Other sources of information came from the gym teacher.
	175-185	Premarital sex--Not common but there were incidents of course.
6	186-200	Reading matter--Ida read novels, particularly historical novels by American authors, Book of the Month.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	201-206	Clothing--Ida sewed her own. She learned how to crochet, knit and sew from her mother.
	207-208	Physical activities--not sports minded.
	209-217	Fashion--Ida took an interest in fashion but couldn't afford it even after she got married.
	218-222	Family planning--no family planning. Just had one child, a son.
	223-249	Expectations of the future before marriage and while she was in late adolescence to get married and not have too many children were her objects. She felt sorry for the poor Chinese women with several children. She still feels sorry for those women who are burdened with several children even today. Her father was disappointed that Ida only had one son.
7	250-265	Expectations regarding work--not career minded and did not seek a position with a firm. Initially she worked out of financial necessity but she does enjoy bookkeeping.
	266-271	Community group involvement--none before and none now. She isn't a joiner.
	272-298	Chinese men and women relationships--Men had a superior attitude. Women were supposed to follow. Her husband has more to say about family affairs. Ida has control over earnings because her husband won't do it. On major items of investment, etc she would talk it over with her husband.
8	299-312	Unmarried Chinese women--Ida's sister, who is a career woman, is single. This situation was not common earlier. Ida surmises that her sister remains single but not out of a conscious effort.
	313-322	Expectations of marriage--Ida had a realistic idea of marriage. Nonetheless there was a few disappointments.
	323-359	Typical day in her life (prior to 1945) after marriage in her early 20's to 30's. She spent a quiet day with her baby. Took the baby to the park in the afternoon and met with a few other mothers who brought their children too. On a nice day she would spend three hours in the park. When she got home, she would have dinner, give the baby a bath and put him to bed early. When she went to work, her son was going to school. When she got home from work, she prepared dinner. Although her husband is a good cook, he came home later than she did.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	360-415	Leading up to marriage--Ida dated only one man, her husband to be. They met through a relative. It took one year to decide to get married. They were married in "C Hall" [sic] in a civil ceremony followed by a Chinese banquet. She wore a Chinese quack. The groom wore a dark suit-Western style clothes. There was a dowry and shu-ju. Her younger sister, Mildred, was married in a church, dressed in a white wedding gown and veil. This is a contrast with Ida's civil ceremony where she and her husband wore street clothes.
10	416-441	Life after marriage. Adjustment period was no problem. No major property or money transferred from one person to another as a result of the marriage. Parents-in-law got along. Groom's father had died and his mother was in China. Therefore there was no conflict. Groom got along with his in-laws.
	441-463	Ida's new family life. They played mahjong with neighbors and friends. No major activities as husband and wife except for the occasional trips to take the child out, take a night drive ten miles perhaps to get an ice cream cone or attend baseball games.
11	464-466	Settling disagreements or conflicts.
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1	004-005	Settling disagreements or conflicts. They didn't fight much. Ida gave in more.
	006-009	Nature of arguments or conflicts--minor problems.
	009-012	Closeness of their relationship--very close.
	013-019	Ida's relationship with other women--She had some close women friends, whom she confided in. They were long time friends--all kinds of races.
	020-033	Knowledge of birth control--Ida had little such knowledge. She learned about diaphragms from the doctor after childbirth. The IUD wasn't around then.
2	034-061	Pregnancies--The first pregnancy was not planned. She was embarrassed to be seen pregnant in public. She felt relieved after childbirth. Her husband wanted a son. Her son Richard was a premature baby. She never experienced a miscarriage.
	062-074	Prenatal maternity care--she learned this from the doctor. Helped both parents made the decision regarding child rearing. Doctor was a help too. Husband spent little time with the child. She also read Dr. Spock on child rearing.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	075-082	Back to work when her son was four years old. While she worked in her mother's restaurant, her son played with the neighbor's kids.
	083-106	Her mother had a restaurant around 1943-44. She was a partner with a man, not her husband. Ida's mother was a good cook and the children were grown so that is how the restaurant came to be. Ida helped out in the business too when her son Richard was three years old. Ida worked for three to four years and then went into bookkeeping. Coworkers were mostly Caucasians and she had no conflicts.
4	107-123	Richard, Ida's son, was born in 1939. From 1939-1941 Ida was not involved in community affairs, not even the PTA, which Ida claims was not active then. After Richard grew up and left the house, Ida was busy with her job.
	124-129	Most young people stayed with their parents until they got married back in the 1930's and 40's.
	130-142	Discrimination at work--Ida feels that there were none in promotions or raised. Most of the co-workers were women.
5	143-155	Most fulfilling moment of her life--recently she spent time with Danny, who is six years old and his friends. Unhappy times--a divorce at the time of the interview [Ida doesn't say whose].
	156-163	What would Ida do differently? Philosophically she would do everything differently except that she would do everything the same. She admits it conflicts but she firmly believes in destiny, i.e. no matter what she did it would have happened the same way.
	164-172	Changing roles of women--Ida is against the extremes of wome's lib, i.e. climbing telephone poles.
	173-192	Definition of an ideal job--not necessary for Ida but her friends. An accountant (CPA), a lawyer, doctor--these professionals are at the top of the heap. Private enterprise such as running your own restaurant is too demanding.
6	193-211	What affect did the Depression have on Ida? It influenced her spending habits, made her more conservative. She would rather have the money to spend instead of charging the items on a credit card.
	212-220	What affect did the Depression have on Ida's father. None stated.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	221-234	How did World War II affect Ida? None stated.
7	235-242	The family (she and her parents) bought war bonds. Chinese American were just as patriotic as other Americans.
	243-275	American Attitudes toward Chinese Americans as a result of World War II. Americans accepted the Chinese more than before the war. For a long time the Chinese could not return to China because of restrictions, etc. However when the restrictions were lifted or relaxed, the Chinese could apply for citizenship. That made the Chinese feel accepted in this country and also by that time more Chinese were born here (America) so they felt more American.
8	276-287	Ida knew of a divorce between Chinese Americans, even though she admits it wasn't common then. This occurred before the war.
	288-305	The Chinese were ostracized by other Chinese if they were divorced or married outside of their race. Chinese women were more criticized about these things than were the men. A double standard existed and still exists today says Ida. There is more interracial marriages today.
	307-341	More Chinese men had interracial marriages (with Mexicans, Caucasians, Blacks) than Chinese women during the period.
9	342-357	What would Ida have done differently? Pursue college and get married later.
	358-433	Career choice--Chinese women had little career choices. First they were Chinese, next they were women. A double discrimination. Jobs available to women were clerical, typists, and bookkeepers. Ida was lucky to have a father who had a business. Ida was able to learn bookkeeping from her father. Most women could get experience as a bookkeeper. Not many Chinese teachers or nurses.
10	434-445	The house in Boyle Heights was not paid for in cash. No loans either. Business took place between the seller and her father.
11	446-487	Ida's father died in 1946. He retired prior to his death. He worked in the meat business all of his life. Her mother kept the restaurant five years after the father's death. The restaurant is located in Santa Ana.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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