

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Edwin S. Luke Interview Number: 24  
 Chinese Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Tapes: 2  
 Date of Interview: 4/3/79 Length: 1 Hour & 3 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Jean Wong  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u>
1	021-022	Edwin S. Luke (ESL) was born on July 23, 1911. He was born in Seattle, Washington.	
	023-025	ESL returned to China once when he was eighteen months old. He stayed there for about a year and a half. He does not recall anything about the trip.	
	026-031	ESL grew up in Seattle. He attended Pacific Grammar School from kindergarten up to eighth grade. He attended Garfield High School and graduated in 1929. After high school, ESL worked for five years since his father died.	
2	032-035	ESL worked for five years at the restaurant and at other jobs in order to attend the university. He then went to the University of Washington in 1933 or 1934. He graduated with a journalism degree in 1937.	
	036-037	At that time, there was the Depression and jobs were scarce especially for Oriental reporters.	
	038-041	ESL came to Hollywood after being unable to obtain work in Seattle and in San Francisco. ESL got a job with the <u>Hollywood Reporter</u> because his brother, Keye knew the publisher, Billy Wilkison.	
	042-047	ESL's brother had done some work for Billy Wilkison. He told ESL that experienced reporters were a dime a dozen. Nevertheless, he gave ESL a job in the backshop and said that he would offer him a job in editorials or in reporting if an opening came up.	
	048-050	ESL started in the printing plant of the <u>Hollywood Reporter</u> . Seven years later he was the superintendent of the printing plant and also a member of the International Typographical Union.	
	051-056	The <u>Los Angeles Citizen</u> , the labor paper, stated during ESL's induction that he was the first Oriental to be a full-fledged member of the International Typographical Union.	

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	057-065	ESL ws the first Asian member probably because Asians had not ventured into that trade, not because of discrimination.
	066-075	A man named Bob Johnson was working for ESL as a machinist in the printing plant. He lived in Glendale which is a very conservative town not used to minorities. Bob mentioned to his family that his boss was Chinese. His grandfather exclaimed in disbelief and was quite offended that he was working for a "Chinaman." Bob related the story to ESL and both of them found it to be humorous. Nevertheless, that was the way people were in those days.
3	076-080	When people came in to look for work, they were quite startled when they were referred to ESL. They expected the boss to be white. This was in 1945 to 1947.
	081-083	ESL had a chance to return to the editorial end while he was working there but the difference in pay was too severe to lose. He was getting a lot more money working in the printing plant.
	084-092	ESL worked in the printing plant for fourteen years. That was from 1937 to 1951. ESL left that job due to some shake-up in management and he felt that he had spent enough time in one place.
	093-095	ESL then became the superintendent at Fox Printing Company for a few years. They wanted him to stay but ESL was involved in a couple of other printing firms.
	096-100	During this whole time he had been working in the movies on the side. ESL as in Charlie Chan movies as Charlie Chan's number four son. During World War II, ESL also picked up some good parts here and there.
101-116	In 1955, ESL got into John Wayne's "Blood Alley" and had a long run eight or nine week supporting role. ESL was receiving around \$300 a week. Then faced with the possibility of sending three children to college, ESL felt that he needed a steady job and gave up acting entirely.	
4	117-126	In 1956, ESL went to work for the Department of Social Service of the County of Los Angeles. ESL was a social worker. ESL felt that he had more to contribute to society than just chasing printing deadlines and newspaper deadlines.
	127-137	As a social worker, ESL made it a point to work in every category of aid. He worked with old people, disabled people, blind people, children, AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and then rose up to be a supervisor.

## Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	138-141	In his last ten years, ESL became a specialist in Protective Services of Dependency and Placement. ESL's specialty was battered and abused children.
	142-144	ESL's staff prepared cases to take to juvenile court against the parents.
5	145-148	ESL retired from the County of Los Angeles at the age of 65 in 1976. Retirement was mandatory at that time.
	149-157	ESL cannot speak Chinese well enough outside of every day conversation and he became rusty that he could not use his knowledge of the language in order to work with Chinese children.
	158-168	ESL's wife speaks a different dialect since she is from Hawaii. ESL's own children do not speak Chinese at all. ESL's family has always been in the economic mainstream neighborhoods and has never lived in the Chinatown area. ESL's family was the first Asian family in their neighborhood although there are about half a dozen Asian families now.
	169-171	ESL lived in his present home for the last thirty years. ESL's children attended the local schools.
	172-186	ESL attended Chinese school for three or four years. They would go after American school. They did not continue going to Chinese school because their father passed away. Their father was a stickler for being bilingual in Chinese and English. He felt that his children should learn to read and write Chinese. With his passing, the children overpowered their mother and refused to go to Chinese school. At that time, there was a great desire for them to identify with the mainstream and become American. Today, there is a reversal among the younger generation.
6	187-195	ESL did not enjoy going to Chinese school because he wanted to participate in the school activities after school. ESL could not play in any of the sports teams because he had to attend Chinese school from four to six o'clock. They also had to go to Chinese school on Saturday mornings from nine to twelve.
	196-202	Whenever they played hooky from Chinese school they would get a beating from their father.
	203-209	When ESL was young, he understood Chinese perfectly. He still understands a lot today. Nevertheless, ESL finds speaking Chinese very awkward and feels self-conscious when he speaks the language.

## Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	210-226	ESL and his wife just returned from a trip to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand. They hardly spoke Chinese on the trip. They felt like strangers. They really were not Asians over there although when they are in the United States they are Asians in other people's eyes. It is a strange feeling not belonging to either culture.
7	227-241	ESL does not regret not teaching his children how to speak Chinese. ESL's wife was brought up in a Hawaiian community. ESL was basically growing up in an American community although he had associations with several Chinese groups.
	242-260	When ESL and his wife had children, since neither one of them spoke Chinese, they decided to just teach their children how to speak English well. ESL has close Chinese friends that taught their children how to speak Chinese but ESL never hears them speaking Chinese.
	261-268	ESL's oldest daughter married a Japanese man that she met at Berkeley. He is from Westwood, California. He is an attorney in Portland. He was in the Air Force for five years. They speak English all the time. They do not have any children although they want children.
	269-275	ESL's second daughter married a white American boy from La Canada. His mother was a concert pianist and his father was an engineer. They met at UCLA. He is a brilliant electronics engineer. They have two children. There is no Chinese spoken in their household.
8	276-286	ESL, his wife, and Marilyn's family have just returned from a trip to Boulder, Colorado. Marilyn is ESL's daughter. His grandsons are Danny and Kevin. They went to Colorado to visit his son-in-law's grandparents. The grandfather is 90 and the grandmother is 86 years old and still teaches piano. It was a very pleasant visit.
	287-292	When Marilyn was introduced as their grandson's wife, their friends were started because although they heard a lot about Marilyn, they never thought that she would be Chinese.
	293-315	Some white Americans will always introduce ESL as "my Chinese friend, Ed," even though they have known him for many years. Such action amuses ESL. ESL was never bitter about discrimination against Chinese. He looked at it as the conditions he had to adapt to.

## Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	316-320	When ESL was first married, they rented an apartment in Hollywood Hills and the landlady was very pleasant. Yet she objected to ESL's typing in the daytime so they moved out.
	321-325	It was very difficult for them to find an empty house. With the help of some white American friends, they found a house finally. The landlady was very glad to let them have it.
9	326-331	When their family outgrew that house, they found difficulty renting another apartment. ESL finally bribed a landlady by offering \$5 more. All the other tenants were Caucasians who got used to ESL's family. This was before the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1947.
	332-339	In 1946 ESL tried to buy a house north of Los Feliz in Edenhurst. The owner was willing to sell but they found a restriction clause in the escrow, so ESL lost the house.
	340-345	The restriction clause was an agreement among all the owners in that neighborhood that none of them would sell to non-Caucasians. This was in 1946.
	346-354	In 1947, ESL found a house where the neighborhood did not openly object to non-Caucasians moving in although they felt bad about an Asian family moving in. This was hardly an exclusive area but it was a nice neighborhood. After ESL moved in they passed the Fair Housing Act although that was circumvented in many ways for many years.
	355-357	In ESL's opinion, there is no housing discrimination today.
	358-364	ESL explained his problem of finding a house to one of his employees at that time. His employee was surprised that ESL could not find a house. ESL pointed out to him that he was Chinese. The employee replied that he was not aware of that.
	365-368	Thus there are people of all descriptions. Some people were not aware that minorities were having housing problems.
	369-380	People of ESL's generation were not ones to holler that they were robbed or discriminated against. If they found one door closed, they would just look for one that was opened.
	381-382	ESL always handled his problems, housing or otherwise, himself.

Interviewee: Edwin S. Luke

Page: 6

1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	383-411	When ESL was a social worker, he had to make house calls. Most of ESL's clients were Caucasians and many were Chicano since ESL was working in the Glendale area. Most of ESL's clients were receptive. ESL had a very good reputation.
	412-435	Nevertheless, ESL would encounter people that were afraid to open their door to people of a different race. As far as ESL knows, he was probably the only male Asian that worked with families with dependent children. ESL knows that he was the only Chinese supervisor in Protective Services, Battered Children, Dependency and Placement Services. ESL knew some Chinese that were in Adult Services.
	436-452	When ESL tried out for a movie role at one time, they said that they would like to use him for the part but that they could not have a young Asian living so closely to the young teenage girl in the family. If ESL was older, then it would be better because it would look like a fatherly relationship.
11	453-468	ESL was married in 1940. ESL met his wife in Los Angeles. They had a newspaper contract which ESL had to meet. Her name was Margaret Cam and she was from Hawaii. She told ESL that she had the perfect girl for him. ESL went along with it although he was prepared to be the eternal bachelor.
	469-478	One day there were a couple of girls to see ESL at the <u>Reporter</u> . One of them was Leny, ESL's present wife. The other lady was a friend of hers, a music critic from the Honolulu <u>Star Bulletin</u> .
	479-482	Leny ran the Classified Advertising Department of the Honolulu newspaper at that time.
	483-488	ESL suggested that they go to the UCLA football game the next day. That was it. They were married a few months later.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

1	011-017	ESL and his wife were married a few months after they first met. They were married in Carson City in Nevada. They then rushed back so that ESL's mother could give them the traditional wedding banquet. They have been married ever since.
---	---------	---

## Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	018-019	ESL has two daughters and one son.
	020-027	ESL thinks that at first there was a preference among Chinese Americans of his generation to have sons. But when the children arrived and as the status of women improved, there became little preference for sons. ESL realizes that the desire to follow Chinese traditions are strong.
	028-040	ESL personally felt that it was important and was happy to have a son. Now ESL's son is married to a Canadian/German girl and she told ESL that they do not intend to have any children. ESL was not frightfully disappointed that his name may not be carried on. ESL feels that grandchildren, no matter what shape or size, are a great blessing.
2	041-042	ESL feels that the traditional Chinese of his generation were more conservative than he is and would feel that family lineage was very important.
	043-048	ESL observed that the barrier against interracial marriages is slowly breaking down today. The older generation makes the best out of the situation.
	049-056	ESL knew of some cases of interracial marriages before the war. It was no big problem at that time because there were only rare cases of interracial marriages. Nowadays, practically every family has at least one interracial marriage.
	057-074	ESL belongs to an association of 25 families called the Chinese Family Fellowship Group. They started the organization 25 years ago in Los Angeles. They were all young families and they hoped that their children would get to know one another through family group activities. They felt that by starting this group they would be able to cultivate friendships among their children. Twenty-five years later, out of that whole group, they only had one marriage. There are well over a dozen interracial marriages among people in that group. The group is no longer active today since their children do not care to come to the activities. Thus the older generation just has one or two meetings every year.
3	075-088	When the children were small, they used to have Christmas parties, puppet shows, Easter egg hunts, ball games and outdoor sports, and other activities geared towards the children. Now when they try to have a family gathering, the response is very poor among the younger generation.

## Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	089-099	Elsie Ho from Honolulu, Nellie Hong from Portland, and Mary Fong from Idaho by way of Seattle, all had young children. Each one of them contacted their close friends who contacted others in turn and they gathered around 25 families to have a working nucleus.
	100-111	Now, 25 years later, about 15 families are still interested in the group. Some have moved away. The young children are not interested. Now they just have a couple meetings a year. They try to raise a small sum of money to give Teen Post or some other cause. They just try to get together to see each other. There are some very close friendships within the group.
4	112-117	This Family Fellowship Group has officers, dues, and simple by-laws. The officers and dues are annual. They also have yearly charity drives.
	118-124	This Family Fellowship differed from other Chinese Family Associations because it was purely social and purely for the children. The entire aim was to foster friendships among their children in hopes that they would marry their own race.
	125-128	ESL is also a member of the Chinatown Optimist Club. It is a service club like the Rotary, Elk, and Lions Clubs.
	129-143	The Chinatown Optimist Club was started in 1957. ESL was not a charter member. ESL has been a member for about twelve years now. It is a regular service club and has all kinds of members. Originally they had a strong nucleus of Chinese members but they have lessened their participation. Now they have Jews, Chicanos, and Chinese members. They meet in Chinatown and sponsor three or four events every year. They are not an active and strong club.
5	144-156	ESL has never been a member of a Family Association. ESL knows very little about these associations. The Lukes are a very small clan. They had a Luke Association in Seattle but it was a very small organization.
	157-162	ESL was part of the movie industry from 1943 to 1946 and through the war years. ESL never gave up his main occupation. He would just take a day off now and then.
	163-169	ESL was never an extra, he always had a big part and lines to say. ESL probably started off at around \$125 a day. He got as much as \$200 a day.



Interviewee: Edwin S. Luke

Page: 9

1 Side B  
Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
	170-179	ESL was very close to the movie industry since he worked for a newspaper. The movie industry was no wonderland for him because he knew how people would step on each other. ESL never had any problems with the acting but he disliked working in the movies because he did not like the way they treated the Chinese.
	180-188	The roles the Chinese played were very demeaning at times. When they called you in for an interview they would line you up like cattle. ESL realized that he did not have to do that kind of work since he was a college graduate in journalism.
6	189-193	ESL was in "Blood Alley" but they cut out most of his scenes. After that ESL left the movie industry and never had any regrets for doing so.
	194-210	ESL does feel that Chinese were only portrayed in stereotypical roles in the movies. There was a "laundryman syndrome." Even today a lot of commercials show Chinese as laundrymen and cooks. They still do not show the Chinese holding professional jobs. They do not give Chinese Americans what they are due.
	211-214	There were some feeble protests against these portrayals in the movies by the actors themselves. Otherwise there were no protests.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Tape 2 Side A

1	013-015	ESL does not recall any protests against the portrayal of Chinese in the movies. Most of the people were working and since they were working, they were not going to protest about their earnings source.
	016-034	Today, the Asian actors and actresses are very different from those of the 1940's. There were very few college graduates working in the movie industry at that time. Nowadays, the people are quick to protest. It is a good thing since it made things better for them. The images that Hollywood has portrayed in the past are poor when considering the Chinese. There is great need to awaken the producers and that is what the younger generation is doing.

## Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	035-048	ESL thinks that the Chinese have done better than average. They definitely have done better than the other minorities. The Chinese do not make a lot of noise about their successes. The Chinese are involved in all walks of life. The Chinese will be making vast drives from here on because they have the industry, the talent, and the tenacity.
	049-050	The recognition of Chinese contributions is there. Once a Caucasian employer has had a Chinese worker, he or she wants another one.
	051-059	When ESL left the department, his district director was very anxious to have ESL steer any Chinese social workers that he knew of to his office. He found Chinese workers to be cooperative, industrious, and competent.
	060-061	There are Chinese white collar workers everywhere today.
	062-065	During ESL's 14 years with the <u>Hollywood Reporter</u> , he did not hire any Chinese because there were none in the business. There were no job applicants.
	066-073	The reason for the lack of Chinese in ESL's field was probably because the Chinese wanted to get into business instead. People in business make a lot more money in the long run.
3	074-084	A lot of people get into the printing business because they were able to get a job as an apprentice. In ESL's time, they would not hire Chinese as an apprentice so the Chinese did not move into the printing business.
	085-096	ESL experienced job discrimination when he first applied for a job in the newspaper business. This occurred once in Seattle and once in San Francisco. Those were the only two occasions.
	097-110	When ESL is in a group entirely of Chinese he feels Chinese. On the other hand, when he is in a group of American born Chinese, he feels perfectly at home. He is also perfectly at home when he is with his Caucasian friends.
4	111-127	ESL used to always say to people who felt bitter about the discrimination that if it was them that were in China, it would also take the Chinese there a span of time to get used to the foreigners. If the discrimination is bad now, at least it is not as bad as it was in the 19th century when the cowboys would physically harrass the Chinese. The Chinese have come a long way from then.

Interviewee: Edwin S. Luke

Page: 11

Tape: 2 Side A

Contents (cont'd)

---

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	128-137	ESL has never felt embarrassed for being Chinese. ESL never had an inferiority complex after he matured.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

- Aid to Families with Dependent Children, 1A:4  
 Americanization, 1A:5  
 Blood Alley, 1A:3; 1B:6  
 Cam Margaret, 1A:11  
 Celebrations and holidays, 1B:1; 1B:3  
 Charlie Chan  
   number four son, 1A:3  
 Children  
   and language barriers, 1A:7  
   preference for sons, 1B:1  
 China  
   return to, 1A:1  
 Chinatown Optimist Club, 1B:4  
 Chinese Family Fellowship, 1B:2-4  
   dues and donations to, 1B:4  
 Chinese language  
   attitudes toward, 1A:7  
   in works, 1A:5  
 Chinese schools  
   attitudes toward, 1A:6  
   hours spent in, 1A:6  
   years spent in, 1A:5  
 Conflict of generations  
   and Chinese schools, 1A:6  
 Department of Social Service  
   Los Angeles County, 1A:4  
 Depression, economic (1929-1939)  
   1A:2  
 Discrimination  
   Chinese American response to  
     1A:8; 2A:4  
   decline in  
     after World War II, 2A:4  
   in employment, 1A:2; 2A:3  
   in housing, 1A:8-9  
 Ethnic identity, 2A:2, 3  
   Chinese vs. American, 1A:6, 8  
   pride in, 2A:4  
 Fair Housing Act, 1A:9  
 Families and family life  
   and death of father, 1A:1-2  
   language spoken in, 1A:7  
   size of, 1B:1  
 Fong, Mary, 1B:3  
 Fox Printing Company, 1A:3  
 Friendships  
   among Chinese Americans, 1B:2-4  
   with other ethnic groups, 2A:3  
 Garfield High School, Seattle, 1A:1  
 Ho, Elsie, 1B:3  
 Hollywood Reporter, 1A:2; 2A:2  
 Hong, Nellie, 1B:3  
 Housing patterns  
   and discrimination, 1A:8-9  
   integration of, 1A:5  
 Incomes, 1B:5  
 International Typographical Union  
   1A:2  
 Interracial marriages, 1A:7; 1B:1  
   attitudes toward, 1B:2  
 Johnson, Bob, 1A:2  
 Los Angeles Citizen, 1A:2  
 Luke Association  
   in Seattle, 1B:5  
 Luke, Edwin S.  
   birth of, 1A:1  
   childhood of, 1A:1  
   children of, 1A:7; 1B:1  
   courtship and marriage of, 1A:11  
   education of, 1A:1-2  
   ethnic identity of, 1A:6; 2A:3  
   friendships of, 1B:2-4; 2A:3  
   grandchildren of, 1A:8  
   occupation of, 1A:2, 4  
   organizations involved in  
     1A:2-5  
   recreational activities of, 1A:6  
   retirement of, 1A:5  
   return to China by, 1A:1  
   spouse of, 1A:5, 7, 11,  
   working experiences of, 1A:2-4;  
     1A:10; 1B:5; 2A:2  
 Luke, Keye, 1A:2  
 Marriages  
   ceremonies, 1B:1  
   mate selection patterns in, 1A:11  
 Movie industry  
   Chinese Americans in, 1A:3, 10;  
     1B:5; 2A:1

- Movie industry
  - stereotypes in, 1B:5-6; 2A:1
  - workers in
    - wages earned by, 1A:3; 1B:5
- Neighborhoods, 1A:5, 9
- Occupation patterns, 2A:2
- Pacific Grammar School, Seattle
  - 1A:1
- Prejudice, 2A:3
- Property ownership
  - residential, 1A:9
- Protective Services of Dependency and Placement, 1A:4
- Recreations, 1A:6
- Retirement, 1A:5
- Seattle, Washington
  - Chinese Americans in, 1A:1
- Social activities
  - among Chinese Americans, 1B:2-3
- Social workers, 1A:4, 10,
- Stereotypes
  - changes in, 2A:1
  - images presented, 2A:1
  - in media, 1B:5-6
  - protests against, 1B:6; 2A:1
- Teen Post, 1B:3
- University of Washington, 1A:2
- Wayne, John, 1A:3
- Wilkison, Billy, 1A:2
- World War II
  - occupational changes brought about by, 1A:3