

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Frank Y.C. Sam Interview Number: 60
 Chinese Name: 岑毓熾 Number of Tapes: 1
 Date of Interview: 12/24/79 Length: 1 Hour & 3 Minutes
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Wai Chung, Mee Jin Chen

Contents

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 1 | 000-008 | Frank Sam (FS) lives at 3870 Grayburn Avenue, Los Angeles. |
| | 009-011 | FS speaks mostly in English and Chinese at home and outside. |
| | 012-014 | FS came to the United States in 1920. He was about 13 years old. |
| | 015-020 | FS went to a missionary school conducted in private lessons for six months. The school was located in Chinatown, Los Angeles. |
| | 021-022 | FS did not speak English before he came to the United States. |
| | 023-026 | FS lived with his father, who was a farmer in the Pomona area. |
| | 027-030 | FS stayed there for three years, then he moved back to Los Angeles. |
| | 031-032 | FS graduated from Polytechnic High School in Los Angeles. |
| 2 | 033-040 | FS associated mostly with Chinese in high school, there were about half a dozen of them. |
| | 041-044 | There were some blacks and Chicanos in the school. |
| | 045-049 | FS feels that he is a little more American than Chinese. He is still proud to be a Chinese. |
| | 050-059 | Most Chinese did not go to school because of a lack of money. But for FS, he just worked his way through school. |
| | 060-061 | His mother could not come to the states. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|--|--|
| 2 | 062-065 066-073 | FS prefers Chinese medicine. His father prefers Chinese games. FS prefers American games. |
| 3 | 074-075 076-079 080-085 086-094 095-101 102-108 | FS did not write very often to his relatives and friends in China. Both FS and his father did not join any Chinese associations here. Wong is the biggest family in Los Angeles, then the Lee family. FS is in a minority. Before World War II, Peter (Soo Hoo) was very active in church activities. He was a city engineer before he died, was also one of the originators of the new Chinatown in Los Angeles. Before World War II, most Chinese in Los Angeles worked in restaurants, laundry houses, wholesale markets, grocery stores, and the like. During the prewar period, the average income for the Chinese was around \$100 a month. |
| 4 | 109-116 117-124 125-136 137-146 | FS felt that \$100 a month could buy a lot of things. Everything was very cheap then. One could get a seat on a car for a nickel from one end of town to another and a dozen eggs for 20 cents. FS used to work in wholesale (批發) during his school vacation. Also spent 2-3 hours in the morning before going to school. FS used to work long hours because there was no union association at that time. Most Chinese lived near other Chinese at that time and neighbors did not change very often. |
| 5 | 147-150 151-160 161-168 169-176 | Reasons was that they could associate with their own people more than anything else. Most Chinese did not save money. Even if some could save something they usually gambled their money away. His father was a citizen of the United States, but U.S. immigration forbade his mother to come in those days. Most Chinese felt an obligation to support the family in China, especially before the Communists took over. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|---|---|
| 5 | 177-182 183-191 | Chinese were also affected during the Great Depression. During FS's experience living in Los Angeles, FS experienced some discrimination against Chinese in housing, jobs, and so on. |
| 6 | 192-199 200-205 206-211 212-220 221-234 | FS felt Chinese do better than the general population in the sense that they don't expect too much and can get by with a bare living. FS felt that Jews are the best business people in the world. FS majored in mining engineering at the University of Nevada in Reno for four years. FS did not experience any problem with college students in the university. After graduation, FS went to Arizona and worked as an assessor for a mining company for a year and a half. |
| 7 | 235-237 238-250 251-260 261-280 | FS went back to work for a mining company in the province of Canton, China. FS worked for the mineral industry of the National Resource Commission for about a year and then the Japanese invasion took place. Since he was an American citizen he came back to the U.S. It was during the Depression and it was difficult to find a job because FS was not a Caucasian. When he applied for a job which he was well qualified for, the answer he got from them (employers) was "we are looking for a Caucasian." When the Second World War came around, FS was able to work for a shipyard in San Pedro for over four years until the end of the war. After that he tried to get back to the mining industry but the business was slow. So, he had to work as a bookkeeper in a grocery shop. |
| 8 | 281-298 | Since FS was not able to get back to his profession because of discrimination and also because of the depression, he was influenced by an old friend to go into the grocery business. FS borrowed some money and bought a neighborhood grocery store and operated it for 10 years. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 8 | 299-309 | After 10 years of the grocery business, FS developed some problems in his left foot and the doctor advised him to avoid standing too long. So he sold his business and concentrated on investments. |
| | 310-324 | FS has three boys. He associates with people from work and from playing games most of the time. FS loves to play tennis and was a member of the high school team in Los Angeles and a member of the varsity tennis team. |
| 9 | 325-336 | FS belongs to the Presbyterian Church and goes to Chinatown once in a while to buy food. Does know a number of people in Chinatown. |
| | 337-341 | In many ways FS feels more American than Chinese. |
| | 342-366 | In the old days, men married before they came to Los Angeles. American born Chinese who were young met their partners in school or church. In those days, men went back to China to get married because there were not many Chinese ladies around. |
| | 367-482 | Most Chinese don't think much of interracial marriages. Sons and daughters of such unions can neither claim themselves as Chinese nor American. They are half way and are in a very difficult situation. |
| 10 | 383-387 | I happen to know two families who had interracial marriages. |
| | 388-396 | Learning to speak your own Chinese dialect is very important. Kids need to go to Chinese school. |
| | 397-412 | Before the Communists took over China, most of the Chinese hoped to return to China eventually. More of the older people all returned to China. |
| | 413-418 | Most of the American born Chinese have a hard time learning Chinese. They would like to visit China some time. |
| | 419-435 | Most Chinese played very small parts in the movies, such as cooks, or laundrymen and servants. Nobody made any protest about portraying such characters. |
| | 436-445 | Older Chinese would like to have their own business to be independent. Younger Chinese who are native born, like to play and don't think about their futures. |

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 1 | 000-017 | FS's father close to do farming because he did not know how to do other things. He was a farmer in China all his life. |
| | 018-024 | He had 50 acres of land. When FS came over he and his father's brother got together and leased 400 acres in Pomona. That's a big one. Altogether three brothers got into this big farm. Their plan was to have a successful harvest and make some money and then go back to China to their family. They farmed for three years. They lost some money in the first year and broke even the second year and the third year they made quite a bit of money. I think each one of them made \$10,000 in 1920-1923. |
| | 025-050 | We hired 20-30 Mexican and Pilipino helpers. These Mexican could speak English and there was not a community problem. In those days the wages were \$100-200 per month, i.e. \$15 per week. They provided a place for the workers to live but they furnished their own food. The workers came and went. During harvesting time they needed 30-40 workers at other times, there was nothing to do. Some of the workers had families and some were single. They are regular farmers doing hard labor. |
| 2 | 051-083 | In those days they got out before daylight and worked until it was lunch time. They took an hour rest and worked hard again on the farm. They went back home late before dark. After that they cleaned up and had dinner and hit the bed because they were so tired. They did not have recreation. |
| 3 | 084-092 | There were two or three Chinese farmers who knew how to use the plough with the horse. These Chinese farmers did not have families with them. |
| | 093-098 | When living in Pomona, which is 30 miles away from Los Angeles, FS came to Chinatown almost every Sunday afternoon. His father brought Chinese groceries home and one Chinese man cooked for them. Except the Mexican and Pilipino farmers, the Chinese farmers had dinner with the family. |
| | 099-125 | Near Chino, there is another Chinese farmer which is not that big. They were growing cauliflower, cabbage, potatoes, water melon, sugar beets, tomatoes, etc. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 4 | 126-141 | FS worked in the City Market (9th and San Pedro Streets) and the Grand Central Market at one time, i.e. before 1930. (Grand Central Market on Central and 8th Streets) Between 1925 and 1930 some of the grocery stores had to be closed down. |
| | 142-169 | At the grocery store FS was an all around helper, helping to sell the stuff and helping deliver merchandise to the truck. At one time FS did the bookkeeping. In 1930 he was paid \$25 per week. At that time most of the businesses were owned by Japanese and Chinese or both. These owners were fairly well to do. |
| 5 | 170-184 | Because of the work he was doing in Arizona, there was no future, so he decided to go back to China to work. When he wrote to one of the engineers in Canton Reconstruction Department, he read about his name for a mining magazine and graduated from Tri-State University in the U.S. |
| 6 | 185-203 | After he wrote to him, he replied and said that he needed FS back there. So FS quit his job and went to China. If FS stayed in the U.S. he would not have gotten a managing position in the mining industry. The workers would not respect the supervisors except the white people above them. |
| | 204-217 | All the returned students from the U.S. were well respected as the cream of the crop and got well paying jobs, but in America they would be just some low rank worker, even though one was a qualified engineer. |
| | 218-251 | At first, FS was given a managing job in the Pirclin Mine at North River in Canton province. That was under the control of the Reconstruction Department in Canton Provincial Government. After a few months I met the Director of the National Resources Division in a hotel and he was a returned student from Germany. FS told the director what FS was doing at that time and the director asked of FS if he wanted to work for his organization. The director needed a mining engineer, although he employed a Chinese engineer six months prior but he did not do anything. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 7 | 252-276 | He wanted FS to form a surveying party to make a report on every known mine in Canton Province. After that FS told the director that FS could get the job done in six months. FS was given the Chief of Engineer's job and FS had an engineer and two other instrument men who handled the surveying machine. |
| 8 | 277-279 280-322 323-369 | All together they had 10 people in the group. We started with the nearest one and moved gradually outside Kwangtung. At that time FS did not stay with his mother in the village. She was staying alone and his father sent money to support her. FS's father went back to China after 7-10 years, after his father accumulated some money. The last time FS's father returned to China was to retire. He invested in farm land and his own home. When FS was in junior high school he wanted to be some kind of engineer. So he majored in English and a lot of math. He wanted to go to UCLA at that time but was required to take 12 A and B units. FS was thinking of USC but the tuition was very high and FS could not afford it. He happend to know the Minister of the Presbyterian Church, who was Chinese. He was a in Reno, Nevada at that time and asked him if FS could help him in his store for room and board. FS got the offer to work for him and established residence and got admitted into the University of Nevada with tuition free. |
| 9 | 370-379 380-399 | Mining was one of the best fields in the University of Nevada. So FS decided to take up mining engineering. In 1939, after he returned from China to the U.S., FS could not get any contracts in the mining industry. In the newspapers FS responded to the advertisements. But they answered that they were looking for a Caucasian and not a Chinese. |
| 10 | 400-418 | FS could not get anywhere near them. In order to support his wife and young infant, FS had to go back to the produce market to work and was paid \$18 per week and worked long hours, about 10-16 hours per day. There were no unions at that time. |

Interviewee: Frank Y. C. Sam

Page: 8

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 10 | 419-434 | FS was exempted from military work because of his family. But he had to do defense work. He applied in the shipyard. They trained him to use a burning machine, which uses oxygen for cutting steel. He did it for a few months and then told the foremen that he had a degree in mining engineering and could read blueprints. |
| | 435-469 | So they gave him a job in outlaying and other workers were cutting steel for building boats. They were getting \$60 per week instead of \$18 per week at the produce market. |
| 11 | 470-483 | FS stayed until the war ended. Then he was looking for something else to do. During the war, all the industries were converted into war manufacturing. After the war all industries were standing still. |
| | 484-493 | In order to support his family he had to pick up book-keeping as a living and helped his friend in the produce market. |

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

- Agriculture
 in China, 1B:1
 crops, 1B:3
 equipment, 1B:3
 location of farms, 1A:1; 1B:3
 profitability of, 1B:1
 size of farms, 1B:1
 workers in, 1B:1
 working hours in, 1B:2
- Character traits, 1A:6
- Children
 of interracial marriages, 1A:
 9,10
- China
 Communist takeover of, 1A:10
 continuing ties to, 1A:5
 family members remaining in, 1A:5
 returns to, 1A:10; 1B:1,8
- Chinese language
 importance of, 1A:10
- Chinese schools, 1A:10
- Churches
 education in, 1A:1
- City Market, 1B:4
- Correspondence, 1A:3
- Depression (economic 1929-1939),
 1A:5,6,8
- Discrimination
 in employment, 1A:7,8; 1B:9-10
- Education
 in churches, 1A:1
 ethnic ratios in, 1A:2
- Ethnic identity
 Chinese vs. American, 1A:2,9
 pride in, 1A:2
- Friendships
 among Chinese Americans, 1A:2
 and workplace, 1A:8
- Gambling, 1A:5
- Games, 1A:2
- Grand Central Market, 1B:4
- Grocery stores
 location of, 1B:4
 ownership of, 1A:8
 workers in, 1B:4
- Housing patterns
 Chinese American clustering,
 1A:4-5
- Incomes
 averages, 1A:3-4
 expenses compared to, 1A:4
- Interracial marriages, 1A:9-10
- Jews, 1A:6
- Lee family, 1A:3
- Marriages
 mate selection patterns in,
 1A:9
- Medical practices
 Chinese vs. Western, 1A:2
- Mexican Americans
 in agriculture, 1B:1
- Mining, 1A:6-8; 1B:6-8,9,10
- Missionaries, 1A:1
- Money
 savings, 1A:5
- Movie industry
 stereotypes in, 1A:10
- Occupation patterns
 and discrimination, 1A:7,8;
 1B:9-10
 and ideal job, 1A:10
 typical job, 1A:3
- Philipinos, 1B:1
- Pomona, Calif., 1B:3
- Presbyterian Church, 1A:9
- Recreation, 1A:8
- Religious affiliations, 1A:9

- Sam, Frank Y. C.
 children of, 1A:8
 education of, 1A:1,6; 1B:8-9
 emigration from China by, 1A:1
 employment of, 1A:4,6-8; 1B:4,
 5-8,10-11
 ethnic identity of, 1A:2,9
 father of, 1A:1,2,3,5
 friendships of, 1A:2
 health of, 1A:8
 language spoken by, 1A:1
 religion of, 1A:9
San Pedro, Calif., 1A:7
Savings, 1A:5
Sojourning, 1A:10; 1B:1
SooHoo, Peter, 1A:3
Stereotypes
 images portrayed, 1A:10

Tennis, 1A:8

Women
 remaining in China, 1A:2,5
Wong family, 1A:3