

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Marge Ong
 Chinese Name: 鄧月麗 女
 Date of Interview: 12/11/79, 12/17/79
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Sue Yee

Interview Number: 41
 Number of Tapes: 2
 Length: 1 Hour & 39 Minutes

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1 Side A</u>
1	008-010	Marge Ong (MO) came to the United States with her parents. She arrived in San Pedro when she was six months old.	
	011-025	Father came earlier. His wife was still in China. MO was born in China because they could not get papers in time for her to be born in America. She was born on June 8, 1917. She came over on December 6, 1917.	
2	026-039	Father was born about 1870. He came to the United States in 1900. He was self-educated. He came as a merchant. MO does not know too much about what he did in China. He owned his own land.	
	040-048	MO is from Hoi Ping (開平), Che Ham (赤坎) Village. Went back in 1927. Stayed a year.	
	049-058	MO does not know too much about the background of her parents. Parents did not talk too much to children about it. MO has brothers and sisters.	
	059-064	MO's mother passed away in 1978 at the age of 84. Was about twenty years younger than MO's father.	
3	065-070	MO is not clear about when her parents were married. Father already has his restaurant when MO arrived in America with her parents at six months of age.	
	071-076	MO's father had come earlier and was in business with his uncle, probably. MO's father brought MO's mother, MO's brother, and herself. Second brother was born here.	
	077-084	Restaurant was called Tvey Far Low (翠花樓) on Alameda and Marchesault Street -- on the corner, in the heart of Chinatown.	
	085-090	MO's father ran the business with his brother. Later, his brother went back to China and father was probably the sole proprietor.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	091-101	MO grew up in Los Angeles Chinatown. She went to American school and Chinese school. Attended Chinese school for about ten years.
4	102-109	She attended Mei I Mei (美以美) first and then Jung Wah. Mei I Mei is the Methodist Church located on Los Angeles Street. MO also went to Sunday School there. Father was non-religious. The Church recruited children such as MO.
	110-114	MO has nine brothers and sisters. She has an older brother and an older sister. MO is the third child. As a child, MO helped at home.
	115-122	She was a second mother to the younger ones. At the age of twelve, father recruited her to act as a cashier at the restaurant. She acted as a cashier until she got married.
	123-133	Restaurant stayed in the same spot until it was torn down to make way for the Union Station in 1936 or 1937. MO thinks that they moved to a new location in late 1938.
5	134-146	Father was one of the founders of New Chinatown. MO thinks Christine Sterling owned the land in Old Chinatown and sold it to Union Station because Mrs. Sterling was always the one who collected rent from Chinatown. She also owned China City and part of Olvera Street.
	147-159	A group of merchants got together. MO's father, Mr. Hu of Man Jen Low (萬珍樓), Mr. Lee of the old Yee Sing Chong (裕成昌), Norman from Grandview Gardens, Yee Hian Guey (義香居) and Tsui Hing Low (叙賢樓), all got together and started New Chinatown.
	160-179	Herbert Lapham, an agent of the Santa Fe Railroad, who owned land. They arranged for the purchase as "Los Angeles Chinatown Association." Then the individuals purchased and built their own buildings. Peter SooHoo helped a lot on the purchase.
6	180-193	There is a book entitled "The Chinese in North America -- their Life and Progress" by Ling Lew (劉令) which was published in Los Angeles in 1948. The book has an introduction on MO's father. MO's father was an executive member of KMT (國民黨) and the Four Family Association (龍崗親義公所) Treasurer. He was often the treasurer of organizations because he was so honest -- everyone trusted him.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	194-208	MO's father was on the Board of Jung Wah Chinese School (中華學校). It used to be on Los Angeles Street, now it is on Yale Street. Everything on Los Angeles Street was torn down to build the freeway.
	209-214	MO's father was also the treasurer of the New Chinatown Association (新華埠). He was the co-founder of the New Chinatown Association as well.
	215-225	During wartime, MO had to do all the treasurer work so that her father could run around the town. Father was the treasurer of an anti-Japanese committee (抗日協會). Tuey Far Low Restaurant catered to both Chinese and Americans. It was one of the largest in Old Chinatown. It had lots of banquets -- for movie actors and actresses. Jack Dempsey and his girlfriend came every Sunday.
7	226-245	James Cagney, Anna May Wong -- MO saw her films. MO remembers she once made a movie and the Chinese government would not allow her to go back to China because they felt it was derogatory -- that was some time in the 1930's.
	246-261	Barbara Jean Wong was also in the movies. Her mother, Mrs. Maye Wong, was a prominent figure in Chinese social life -- she helped in weddings.
	262-270	Mr. Y. C. Hong was a Chinese attorney who handled a lot of immigration matters.
8	271-303	Dr. Samuel Eng was the first Chinese American doctor. He was a general practitioner near Ninth Street market. He later had a sanitarium on Ingraham Street. MO's family went to him when their illnesses were beyond the capabilities of MO's father to doctor. Sometimes he took them to a Chinese (medicine) doctor.
	304-310	MO's father bought Chinese herbs in Chinatown herb stores. T. B. Chew catered to both Chinese and Americans.
	311-324	Mr. and Mrs. Leong Jung -- 梁長 was the minister of the Methodist Church. His wife taught Chinese classes. MO attended that until the Jung Wah School (中華學校) started. Then MO's father transferred his children to them. They had a broader curriculum. Not only reading and writing Chinese, but also history, geography, and everything. Classes were from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. from Mondays to Fridays, and 9:00 to 12:00 on Saturdays.
9	325-332	Chinese school started in Old Chinatown on Apablaza Street.
	333-357	MO remembers the 1932 earthquake. She was in class at the time. She saw a building swaying and thought, "Is this how I'm going to die?" MO was very frightened

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	333-357 358-379	during the after shocks. MO's little brother was ill for a long time from that. Mrs. Maye Wong was the founder of Mei Wah Women's Club. Her daughter, Barbara Jean, was one of the main entertainers in the Chinese community -- she did acrobatics and dance.
10	380-383 384-392 393-410 411-418 419-427 428-439	Mr. Albert Quan of Quan and Quan Export Firm is of no relation to MO. Four Family Association (龍崗親義公所) consisted of: Lew, Quan, Chung, Chu (劉關張趙). The association started a long, long time ago. Family associations and district associations were started in the early days of miners and railroad workers, for protection, etc. Discrimination was practiced against the Chinese. These prominent people were active during the 1930's, 1940's, and later. Mrs. Wong is still alive today. Bessie Loo was a casting director. She helped many people get parts in movies. Dan Louie owned the Louie wholesale produce markets. Dan Lee owned the Lee Produce in Ninth Street Market. Henry Woo owned the E & L produce.
11	440-466	MO's family always lived in some part of Chinatown. At four years of age, she lived near Pico House. Then they moved to Old Chinatown. They lived in one of the very few houses in Chinatown. They never lived in the same building as the restaurant. After they came back from China, they moved to Napier Street.

END OF SIDE A

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	006-014 015-022	MO's father's name is Quan Shung Doon (關崇俊). Sze Yup was spoken at home. The whole family returned to China in 1927 to become "real Chinese." The children would be left in China to go to school. But all the children got sick. MO's little brother almost died twice. MO's father decided that China was not for them. They were able to return to the United States with their one year visas.
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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	023-043	Kung Fu Gee Gow (孔夫子教) was MO's father's religion. In China, the local people treated MO's family well. Twice every year, MO's father sent money back to China to support the whole clan. Naturally, when they went back, he was like a hero to the villagers. MO's father also built another house while they were there. There was a big house warming event. Men ate first -- women ate later.
	044-048	MO went to a cousin's wedding. MO and her brother, Bill, went to school there for about six months.
	049-054	When MO came back to the United States, she did not know any English at all, so they put her back in American school (third grade instead of fourth grade). It delayed her education. MO graduated at an older age than she should have.
	055-064	During the war, when they met soldiers who had come from China, MO discovered that China had progressed more than the Chinese families who lived in Los Angeles because they observed everything they had brought over in the 1800's and early 1900's.
3	065-073	MO was never resentful of having to go to Chinese school, except in high school. MO wanted to go to football games. MO quit for awhile, but her father made her go back. MO graduated from junior high school. MO went on and off for about ten years.
	074-084	When MO went back to China, she did not like the toilet facilities over there. MO liked the food. The relatives were friendly. They used to get big mosquito bits. All the children took turns being ill.
	085-086	Later, MO's father wanted to send MO and her brother back to China for school. Mo did not go but her brother, Bill, did. He stayed there for many years -- going to school in Hong Kong.
	086-089	MO's father also sent MO's nephew back and he went to the University of Shanghai.
	090-095	Father was the treasurer of the Four Family Association and every association he belonged to. MO did not know what other positions he held. MO had to be the cashier when he went to the meetings.
4	096-107	When MO and her siblings were children, they used to tag along to the parties, but MO was never a member. Edith, Mary, and some of the others, always went back for New Years banquets, and everything -- they still do. But after they moved out of Chinatown, they lost most of their contact with the Chinese community.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	108-112	MO's father did not believe in telling his wife and children what was going on in his life. That is a typical Chinese behavior.
	113-118	When MO was a child, she really did not know what the word "discrimination" meant because she was going around with Chinese all the time. Their grammar school had mostly Chinese, Mexicans, and some Jewish people.
	119-122	The Chinese mostly lived in the poor areas, the wrong side of the tracks, so MO had no ritzy white friends. In school, MO played with the Chinese kids, then went to Chinese school.
	123-132	MO knew nothing about discrimination until after she was married and went out to work. In high school, Belmont, there were lots of Chinese. They stuck together at lunch and walked home together. MO belonged to the Chinese Club. She had no time to be involved in extracurricular activities.
	133-140	MO's father saw to it that she came home and then went to Chinese school. MO went to the restaurant to help him. She had to help her mother with housework, as there were seven children after MO. She had no chance to do school work.
5	141-145	When MO's daughter went to school, she mixed with everybody and was very popular.
	146-149	When MO was a girl, they were clannish -- which was good in a way since it was a way to keep their Chinese language. They still all speak Chinese to each other. All of MO's girlfriends too.
	150-165	When MO worked for the City of Los Angeles, she found that they kept her from being promoted. MO's Chinese friends told her, "Don't try to hit your head against the wall. Don't try for the higher promotions." After MO was number one on the list several times for principal clerk, in which MO would have supervised the whole office, the white people in her office went to the head of the office and said that they did not want a Chinese girl to be their boss. It was shocking to MO. That was in 1960. But before that, MO had a hard time to get up to that position.
	166-174	When MO went out to find a job, it was during the war so they were short of people. The L.A.P.D. took MO on temporary. MO was unaware that a friend of the family was a police sergeant. MO worked for six months and then had to take a test to get on the regular list.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	175-211	MO's brother, George, called this family friend. He asked MO if she would like to work under him in the Police Commission Department. MO could do nothing about the discrimination. After MO was number one on the list several times, they were forced to give her the job as principal clerk. MO's assistant was a white girl. MO's "higher ups" tried to make MO do what her assistant wanted, not what MO wanted her to do. MO finally had to go to the City Clerk himself. After that visit, they were nicer to her.
	212-223	Before World War II, not many Chinese women were working. MO attended night school at East Los Angeles State College to improve herself, so that they would have no excuse to promote her.
7	224-237	Before World War II, most Chinese women did not work outside. In 1940, MO's husband helped her husband and brothers set up a restaurant business in New Chinatown. When the War came, MO's brother went to aeronautical engineering.
	238-244	MO and her husband gave the restaurant back to MO's father. Her husband then went to work in the shipyard and got burnt very seriously. He was in the hospital for many months. After he got out of the hospital, he was drafted right away. He went into the Army, so MO went to work in the produce market in 1942.
	245-255	She worked for Dan Louie at first, as an office worker. After a year, she worked for Henry Woo at E & L. At Louie Produce there were five or six workers in the office. There were a lot of salesmen.
	256-268	After a year, MO went to E & L and worked for Henry Woo. Mo worked there until 1947 when her husband came back from the service. Then MO and her husband went into the grocery store business for about a year. MO did not like it. They sold it in 1949.
8	269-281	Then MO worked for a fellow who owned a whole chain of gas stations. Mo was a one-girl office. She did the bookkeeping, and every morning she went to every station and collected all the money, banked it, and wrote checks to pay for all his oil and things like that.
	282-312	When MO was working for Sun Lite gas stations, he paid her \$50 per week plus gas. She worked there for nine months.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	282-312	At the produce market, MO started at about \$90 per month. Annie Han and MO started at the same time. They were doing such good work that the first month, they were paid \$100. When the War started, the Japanese all left, so the Chinese took over. Some of them must have done very well, because they are still operating. MO went to work about 7:00 and left after 2:00 or 3:00. MO liked the hours and the business.
	313-322	MO tried to get jobs with other firms. In 1950, the Korean War started, and no one would hire MO because MO was Chinese.
	323-324	Once MO called Forest Lawn to get a couple of plots and they talked to her over the phone. MO had it all set up. MO did not realize that Ong is also a Norwegian name.
9	325-335	When MO told them that they were Chinese, they cancelled it right away. They said that they were sorry but they could not allow Chinese to be buried there. That was some time in the 1950's.
	336-345	When MO was still working at the market, her friends told her that they bought a house on the west side and before long they were stoned. In fact, several Chinese families who bought homes on the west side were abused by their white neighbors.
	346-370	When they tore down Old Chinatown, MO's father bought a house on East 20th Street. He continued renting it to a couple of ladies who already had been living there because he was reluctant to give up living in Chinatown. In 1938, MO's father moved to his house on East 20th Street. That was after MO was married. He did not have any trouble buying that house because it was in a low income area.
	371-373	In 1951, MO's family bought a house in El Sereno district. Everywhere they went in Los Angeles, the agent would say,
	374-377	"Let me go check to see if they will receive Chinese in this community." MO said, "If they don't want me, I don't want to live here."
	378-381	MO found out that Jennie Lee of Lee Travel was living on that street in El Sereno, so MO said, "Okay, I don't have to worry," so they bought their first home there.
10	382-395	Later on, MO bought her present house, but by then there was no problem. MO understood that when they first built the area, they would not sell to the Chinese. MO bought the house in 1966.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	396-403	The Chinese tended to stick together. A lot of Chinese lived near MO's father's house on East 20th Street, Adams, Ninth Street, which was considered the third Chinatown.
	404-417	MO grew up in Old Chinatown before it was torn down for the Union Depot. Most people there were merchants and their families.
	418-433	By the time they built New Chinatown, some of them built living quarters upstairs. Chinese also lived in the produce area.
	434-436	Prejudice against Chinese was both misunderstanding and hostility. They felt that Chinese were not good enough for them to associate with.
11	437-469	Around 1940, when MO's daughter was three years old, MO was going to Phoenix, Arizona by train. She walked down the aisle to play with a white child. The mother grabbed her little daughter and held her as if MO's daughter was poison.
	470-473	That was the first time MO felt discrimination. If they feel that way now, they do not show it.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

1&2	005-038	Regarding discrimination against Chinese, there is much improvement after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965, according to MO's husband. The problem was also improved with the enforcement of the affirmative action rules. Of course a certain amount of bias will still exist in social life against minority life. Lately, Caucasians have become more knowledgeable about Chinese history and culture.
	039-045	Bias will eventually be eroded. Today it is not as discernable as in prior years. Chinese coming to the United States today have better opportunities to get ahead in many professional fields, not just in the stereotypical businesses -- like restaurants, laundries, curio shops.
	046-053	In the past, these were the only opportunities available.
	054-061	Most Chinese had their own business in Chinatown. The children are expected to work for their father, so there are not many outside jobs they are allowed to go to. In addition, not too many Chinese were allowed into college so they could learn a profession like in the recent years.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	062-070	Those who did go to work for Caucasians got jobs as house boys and maids. Most worked in family restaurants or in laundries.
	071-077	MO does not know of any Chinese in good jobs here in Los Angeles. MO knows that there were highly educated people from China in the colleges, in the sciences. Some Nobel prize winners as well. But MO does not know of any of her friends doing anything, not even clerks in the dime stores. Most worked in family groups.
	078-087	MO's sisters never worked. MO's brother, Bill, worked at the restaurant. MO's older brother did so too. None of them worked until later in life when things got more modern and there was less discrimination.
	088-091	Supporting MO's father's relatives in China was MO's father's job. MO's father would not expect his children to do that. It was his job to support everybody. For MO to work for somebody else would be beneath the dignity of his family.
	092-099	Only after MO was married and her husband was in the service did MO get her first job -- that was in the produce business.
4	100-104	Since MO spoke Chinese at home and at the business all the time, she had a slight accent when she got her first job.
	105-109	Although MO's father sent money back to China, he must have been able to save some as well. He also brought many relatives over to the United States and gave them jobs at the restaurant until they were self-supporting. Sometimes he would help them start their own businesses; he would loan them money.
	110-126	Father put the money he saved in the bank. MO does not know if saving money in a bank was typical among Chinese of that time. MO's father was typical. He considered himself a sojourner and always wanted to go back to China or at least to be buried there. But he could not because of World War II and then the Communist take over. MO thinks that most Chinese felt that way. MO's father-in-law felt this way very strongly. He went back in 1949, sold the family grocery store in Phoenix and used the money to buy property in Kwan Chow (廣州). The Communists were getting after him so he fled to Hong Kong and died in Hong Kong.
	127-129	
	130-133	MO and her family went back to China but returned. Mama Quan's family went back and stayed several years until the Japanese War chased them back.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	134-139	Father brought a lot of relatives over to the United States. Some of them are not even close relatives -- several cousins. Two of them lived with MO's family just as if they were MO's brothers. They worked at the restaurant as well. In fact, MO's father took them back to China and both of them got married and were brought back to the United States again.
5	140-149	Their grandfather and MO's grandfather were brothers. Another one was even one generation back -- he lived with MO's family too and grew up with MO. At the time, MO's family was living with Mama Quan's family in one house.
	150-156	Chinese men usually came to the United States to work and returned to China to get married. MO's husband came to Los Angeles to see another girl and a friend introduced him to MO. He was very handsome to MO because she had never seen a Chinese so tall. In the old days, there were a lot of family-arranged marriages.
	157-159	MO's mother was worried that MO was not going to get married. MO's parents were so happy when MO did get married. When MO was growing up, her parents were very strict. They would not let her go dating or partying.
	160-163	MO does not know how they expected to arrange something.
	164-174	MO knows that her mother passed out MO's picture to ladies. MO got so mad when she found out about this. MO's brothers and sisters did not have arranged marriages either. After MO's days, they became very modernized.
	175-181	There were American born Chinese that went back to China to get married. MO's husband's brother did. Mostly men did. Chinese girls born in the United States did not like "F.O.B."s because their social and cultural life were so different. They did not get along that well.
6	182-189	Not many American born men would go back to China to get married. American born Chinese men usually married American born Chinese girls. A lot of men came from China when they were young and because of that, they have such a Chinese way -- old fashioned. American born Chinese girls do not want to live that way.
	190-195	MO did not prefer having sons. She does not think the younger generation cared that much although the older generation did.
	196-200	MO has an international family. MO's daughter was married to Caucasians twice -- the first was an Englishman, the second was a German, but she is divorced now. One of

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
6	196-200	MO's brothers, George, happened to marry a Korean girl.
	201-212	George and his wife had the first marriage between a Chinese and a Korean in Los Angeles. MO's parents would have killed MO in her days, or disowned MO anyway if she had married a non-Chinese. The first three children of the Quon family married Chinese. Then George was the first to marry outside the Chinese race.
	213-215	MO's mother had fits, but her father did not mind too much. MO was surprised, she had expected it to be vice versa.
	216-221	Later one of her sisters married a French descent, one married a German descent, and a younger brother married an Italian girl. By then it was okay.
	222-226	MO's nephews married Japanese girls. Mama Quan's family also has Japanese girls in the family.
7	227-231	Even if MO's mother did not like the idea of interracial marriages, she had to accept it. After World War II, MO's brother married the Korean.
	232-243	One of MO's daughters went to Chinese school. She had a lot of activities in regular school that MO never had a chance at, so MO did not push her to attend Chinese school. At about the age of eight, she decided she wanted to go -- after three months she was reading Chinese to MO in a sing-song voice. MO laughed.
	244-255	She quit going. When she was a baby until the age of four, MO's mother raised MO's daughter because MO was working. Thus, MO's daughter has a good Chinese background. When she went to kindergarten, she knew Chinese only -- no English. Later, by the time she was in third grade, she was losing her Chinese and wanted to go to Chinese school. She started late -- she was older than the others.
	256-259	When she went to USC, she lived with MO's mother again since she lived close by. MO's daughter stayed with MO's mother for four years.
	260-261	MO thinks that many Chinese feel that it is important to send their children to Chinese school. Otherwise there would not have been so many Chinese schools.
	261-269	There was Jung Wah (中華), Methodist (美以美), Presbyterians, another Church school at 26th and Adams. All MO's sisters and brothers went. Younger ones did not learn as much.
	270-271	They were not very interested in Chinese history, culture, or even the language.
	272-277	MO definitely feels more Chinese than American. She does

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	272-277	not feel American at all. MO only claims to be an American when she goes out into the American world and have some of the American privileges and advantages that are sometimes denied to Asians. But MO feels completely Chinese.
8	278-303	MO's generation did not say that they wanted to be Americans. Only the much younger generation, like MO's nieces and nephews. They would not even own up to being Chinese if they did not look Chinese. MO's niece who is married to an Italian, has a child who does not even know that she is Chinese. They all consider themselves Americans. They do not care about their backgrounds.
	304-321	MO's daughter wants to trace her roots. She was embarrassed when she was in Taiwan because she could not speak Chinese. MO thinks that her daughter feels more Chinese -- she is in the older group, she is 40 years old.
	322-324	MO played mahjong in her younger days, but not anymore. MO's mother was a mahjong fiend.
9	325-334	When MO was young, her family went to Chinese operas every Sunday. They observed Chinese New Year. They got dressed up and went visiting. They made and served those Chinese dim sum.
	335-338	In Old Chinatown, they observed August 15th (八月十五), July 7th (七月七日).
	339-345	Since MO started working, she did not have any time to play mahjong. For recreation, MO watches television and takes disco lessons.
	346-357	Before World War II, MO did go to American movies. Her parents did not. When MO was young, she was not allowed to go as often as her brothers were. As a girl, MO was supposed to stay home and learn how to cook, sew, etc. MO's father was very old fashioned.
	358-366	During high school, if MO's father objected to after-school activities, MO was old enough by then to know her own mind and at least try to get a little freedom for herself. MO's father really appreciated MO's help and did not mind.
10	367-383	There was one Chinese opera house near Old Chinatown. It was near the place Kaza (Dong) used to live -- near Japanese town, First Street. It was packed. Only Chinese went -- with all their children. There would be a lot of noise and music. The kids loved to go. Their parents would buy things for them to eat to try to keep them quiet. Later, MO got interested in the stories.

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10	384-392	The opera players were from China. When they were in town they might have performed every night for two or three weeks and then move on to San Francisco. Later on, another group would come.
	393-404	MO was not aware of any American born Chinese in Los Angeles that learned Chinese opera. But there was one in San Francisco although MO was not sure whether the performer was born in China or in the United States.
	405-429	MO did not know the existence of American holidays, except on Christmas, MO's father would prepare gifts for MO's teacher.
	430-438	MO does not know any of her relatives in China.
11	439-446	When MO was young, her father always prepared all kinds of herbal teas. That is why MO did not like black tea -- because it reminds her of the herb tea.
	447-479	MO's father educated himself as a herbal doctor. He just wrote the prescriptions for MO to pick up the herbs from the store.
	480-481	In recent years, the Chinese in the United States have done very well.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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