

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: CHEN SHEE CHUN, housewife and retired butcher

Chen Shee Chun was born in Kwangtung, China in 1894. Like most Chinese women her age, she had no formal education. At age 18, she married Chun Tim who took her back to Hawaii with him.

Chen Shee worked for 15 years as a meat cutter in the family grocery store. In addition, she raised eight children. Her husband passed away in 1968. At present she lives alone in Haleiwa where her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren occasionally visit her.

Notes No. I-N2-1-76

NOTES FROM AN UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Chen Shee Chun

June 29, 1976

Haleiwa, Hawaii

BY: Vivien Lee

(The following notes are from an unrecorded preliminary interview session.)

Chen Shee Chun was born in China, Kwangtung Province, Yen Ping, in 1894. Her father was a "poor man" who grew rice and cotton. Although her mother sometimes helped in the field, she herself was never allowed to. Chen Shee "no sabe" field work. She was kept indoors all the time. She and 14 to twenty other girls used to stay with an unmarried woman. They would sew or sing together. Other things Chen Shee used to do (not sure whether this was with the group of single girls or not): weave cloth on a loom (for their own use, not to sell), embroider tiny flowers (also unpaid), make shoes, hair ornaments, and cut grass in the mountains all day long for 25¢. She said she had been smoking for nine years by the time she left China, so that means since age 14.

Chen Shee's husband-to-be had been living in Hawaii and went back to China to get married. Her mother arranged their marriage: he was 41, she was 18. Supposedly, her father cried because he thought she should marry a younger man. But her cousin, also 18, was even more unfortunate in having to marry a fifty year old man. Chen Shee did not want to come to Hawaii. When her husband threatened to get another wife (an addition, not substitution) she said go ahead, she didn't care because she would be number one wife and could "boss" the other. However, he did not carry out his threat.

When she first came here, she did not like it at all. She was always sick with colds and wanted to return home. Her mother did not want her to return to China.

Her husband only made one dollar a day on the plantation. She used to make buttons for the Japanese, make wrist protectors for the field workers (sold for 15¢ a pair), and pants from washed rice bags (sold for fifty cents). Apparently, her husband had a "name" in Chinese society and "no likee (her) carry cane."

Chen Shee had eight children, four of whom are now living in California. She sewed all their clothes for them, did all her own washing and ironing, (with charcoal iron), besides doing laundry for the field workers.

In addition to raising a family, she worked in the family store in Haleiwa cutting meat for 15 years. She used a hand saw, not a machine,

to cut the meat and is proud of her expertise on meat cuts. All of her children have been taught this art, too. After cutting, the meat was put in the icebox.

They had a five hundred dollar electric walk-in refrigerator that could hold up to two thousand pounds of meat on meathooks. A whole cow could be stored in it. The meat was delivered to them outside the store. Later (before World War II) they bought a truck and her sons delivered the meat. Their store also sold canned goods, hasu, cabbage, bananas (five cents a bunch), potatoes, onions, etc. C.Q. Yee Hop, Theo H. Davis, American Factors and Chun Hoon sold them their goods. Pork was 25¢ a pound and sirloin or tenderloin was 75¢ a pound. Filipinos would buy the head, feet and intestines of the pig. Chen Shee said that Chinese like those parts, too, but "they clean them." She claimed that purchasing meat was not reserved for special occasions. Everybody bought meat, "only War time, no more sale."

Once, a Mr. Souza, a good friend of hers, asked her if she could refrigerate a whole cow for him. She consented, but he left the cow in her refrigerator for two weeks; in addition, she cut the whole cow into pieces for him. He wanted to give her seven pounds of the meat, or money, but she refused. But instead of fighting, she accepted two pounds of meat. She said Souza was friendly with all the Japanese.

I think her relations with people of other ethnic groups was good. Her store serviced customers of all races. Although she could not communicate that well, her husband spoke English, fluent Japanese and Hawaiian and some Filipino. Ng Fong could speak Hawaiian. According to Yee Hop, there are "some nice Filipinos." They were single men, but "no sassy, no fool around, no anything." There was one who helped around the store for free, so she gave him food. A couple of Filipinos were "shame" to come to the parties she gave. One was "shame" because of his short pants.

There used to be many Chinese workers on the plantation. Some have left for town, most of them have died. They ate at her store for free. When they retired, they used to come daily and play Chinese Dominoes. She would feed them lunch and often dinner. They would smoke her husband's water-pipe and use his tobacco.

One half-Hawaiian, half-Japanese person told her that he wanted to become a butcher because then he could eat all the steak he wanted. But she replied that she saved the good cuts for sale and ate only the cheaper cuts of meat.

MISCELLANEOUS

Hasu ground into powder is medicinal.

Soup made out of turtle flippers, Chinese mushrooms and pork is good for one's health. Nowadays, it is really hard to buy turtle.

Buddhism is her religion. A ceramic Buddha sits in her living room with rosary beads around him. She prays daily.

She had all her babies at home. All but two deliveries were done with

the help of a Japanese midwife. With her second baby, a friend helped. With her fifth boy, there was no help except for her husband, but he "no sabe," he just brought her water. She delivered, cut the umbilical cord with scissors and washed the baby. Then she fried rice and ate, Chinese style. Later, the midwife came and was paid \$15 for her follow-up services. Normally she charged Chen Shee and Mrs. Ng Fong twenty dollars and other people \$25. The hospital just cost too much money for her to have her babies there.

Notes No. 1-N6-2-76

NOTES FROM AN UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Chen Shee Chun

July 16, 1976

Haleiwa, Hawaii

BY: Vivien Lee

(The following notes are from a second conversation with the interviewee. She preferred not to be taped because she "can't speak English.")

Chen Shee's husband, Chun Tim was born in China about 1872. When he was 22 years old, he came to Hawaii on a three year contract for \$11 a month, and worked on the plantations for 18 months. Sometime later (unsure of what year, but it was before 1912), he opened a store. When he was forty years old (1912), he went back to China to find a bride. In 1912, he married Chen Shee. They lived with his parents for about four months before Mr. Chun went back to Hawaii. Chen Shee stayed with her in-laws for about five years before leaving for Hawaii. During that time, she visited her mother often. She also cooked for her in-laws.

She did not want to come to Hawaii because it was "good fun" in China, "no work." In "Chinese style" no girls went to school. At about age nine she went to live with a group of girls. They never learned to read, but they sang a lot. Chen Shee says she can sing "any kine." They also sewed clothes, wove cloth, made shoes and hats and embroidered. They (?) would go into the mountains in the early morning to cut grass and stay until evenings. For this they earned twenty cents a day.

Chen Shee worked hard in Hawaii. When she first got here, she grew flowers and cabbage. (See notes from first interview about sewing for the Japanese.) She took apart old pairs of pants to make patterns for the new. Money was short: "How can get money, only make one dollar, one day?"

STORE

(Unsure of dates.) Two friends, Wong and Chun (Chen Shee's husband), made the store and called it Yee Hop. Apparently, they offered Ng Fong a share, but because he was working for the plantation, he didn't have any money and couldn't buy in. However, he eventually did become a partner.

They used to deliver meat by horse and buggy. (They had three horses.) After cutting it with a saw, they put it in a basket in the buggy and delivered it on Saturday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. They would not return from delivering until 8 or 9 at night, so she used to eat alone. Sometimes when her husband returned, he was too tired to eat so he used to drink some whiskey and go to bed.

Later, she lived behind the store. When she lived in the back of the

store, her cooking was done chiefly in two large woks, over burning firewood. When her oldest son married, she and a group of ladies spent a whole week preparing and cooking a nine-course dinner for one thousand guests.

She had a big yard in the back of the store; there was a large banana field, a bamboo grove, and her garden of vegetables and squash. She also raised chickens, turkeys and pigs.

All of her sons learned the art of slaughtering the pigs that they bought from the Japanese or Filipinos. Every week they would buy a whole cow from Kahua Ranch in Ewa.

Apparently she used to cook for her husband's friends. Once she cooked three tables of food and the friends drank two five dollar bottles of whiskey in one night and someone criticized her for it for some reason.

Their store used to serve all races and she could understand the Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans, etc. She says her talk is all "mix up" and indeed it is because she uses Japanese, Hawaiian and pidgin to communicate.

Someone once tried to sell (or someone tried to get her to sell) the good meat to the Japanese and the bad meat to the Filipinos. But she felt that was not right, that whoever came first should get the good meat.

Some words she used and her definitions:

<u>Word</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Language</u>
kaukau	food	Hawaiian
pilikia	trouble	Hawaiian
kanaka	Hawaiian person	Hawaiian
manong	Filipino person	Filipino
make	to die	Hawaiian
patay	to die	Filipino
makule	old person	Hawaiian
katai	hard (meat)	Japanese
yaoi	soft (meat)	Japanese
babayet	guts	Filipino
singasing	heart	Filipino
dalum	liver	Filipino
bindongo	tripe	Filipino
baboy	pig	Filipino

The Filipinos used to come in and buy a mixed bag of guts, heart, liver, etc. for three dollars.

People called her "Ahmoo" and her husband "Ah Sook."

WAIALUA & HALEIWA

The People Tell Their Story

Volume I

CAUCASIANS

CHINESE

HAWAIIANS

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, MANOA**

May 1977