

Historical Exercises

Primary sources are first-hand accounts or direct evidence about the past, such as diaries, letters, photographs and oral histories. Historians use primary sources to answer many different kinds of questions about the past. Historians analyze and interpret evidence from primary sources to build historical knowledge. Some of the questions that historians ask about the past are easier to answer than others. For instance, it might be easy to find out when a certain event occurred, but it is likely harder to determine what significance the event had for the individuals who experienced it.

The following historical exercises will guide you in analyzing and interpreting primary sources, using examples from the *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967: Inspiration-Innovation-Ingenuity* website.

Working with Oral History

Broadly defined, oral history is an account of the past communicated verbally. The oral histories collected for this project were produced by recording an interview between a narrator and an interviewer.

The following pairs of audio clips reveal different perspectives on the same topic. Listen to the clips and think about what they tell you about the topic. Use the follow-up questions for each pair to help you think like a historian and interpret the clips as primary sources.

A. Cultural Identity

Audio Clip 1: Alice Yeh used Chinese cultural performances and food to combat prejudice
This clip has been edited for brevity. The full clip is featured in the Exhibit *'I thought I was a Canadian, but they didn't recognize me as Canadian': Legislation and its Impacts*.
You can listen to Alice Yeh's full interview in the Collection.

Audio Clip 2: Germaine Wong describes learning Chinese folk dances
This clip is featured in the Exhibit *'One foot Canadian, one foot Chinese': Family and Community*.
You can listen to Germaine Wong's full interview in the Collection.

Guiding Questions:

- What do these clips tell you about the cultural identity of each of these women?
- What do they tell you about the cultural identity of Chinese Canadian women?
- Is there a historical conclusion you can make based on these clips, or do you need more information?
- What additional information would you want?
- In what types of sources might you find that information?

B. Education

Audio Clip 1: Anita Wong discusses the value of education
This clip is featured in the exhibit *'They gave themselves for the next generation': The working lives of Chinese Canadian women, 1923-1967*.
You can listen to Anita Wong's full interview in the Collection.

Audio Clip 2: Victoria King explains her educational pathway

This clip is featured in the exhibit *'They gave themselves for the next generation': The working lives of Chinese Canadian women, 1923-1967*.

You can listen to Victoria King's full interview in the Collection.

Guiding Questions:

- What do these clips tell you about these women's views on education?
- What do they tell you about the views of Chinese Canadian women on education?
- Is there a historical conclusion you can make based on these clips, or do you need more information?
- What additional information would you want?
- In what types of sources might you find that information?

C. Racial Stereotyping

Audio Clip 1: Emma Quon discusses her friend's childhood fear of the Chinese

This clip is featured in the Collection.

You can listen to Emma Quon's full interview in the Collection.

Jan Mah discusses racial stereotyping

This clip is featured in the Collection.

You can listen to Jan Mah's full interview in the Collection.

Guiding Questions:

- What do these clips tell you about racial stereotyping in general?
- What do they tell you about the racial stereotyping of Chinese Canadians specifically?
- Is there a historical conclusion you can make based on these clips, or do you need more information?
- What additional information would you want?
- In what types of sources might you find that information?

D. Oral History

- What do individual testimonials contribute to our understanding of larger historical issues?
- How should historians balance individual accounts within the larger historical record?
- Do you think that the views expressed in the above clips are specific to women in the Chinese Canadian community? Specific to the time period they describe? What other factors might affect how we evaluate the information provided by oral history?