

Excerpt in which Rev. Shepherd  
describes his Sunday "Coca Cola"  
store visits to meet Delta Chinese

The  
Chinese  
of  
Greenville,  
Mississippi

by

Ted Shepherd

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Delta Chinese. Ed Pang took a morning off from work at his store, which was at 901 South Delesseps Street in Greenville, and I began my step by step learning process about Mississippi Delta Chinese. He did this once a week for several months until I had developed a thick book of names and addresses. I am forever grateful to Ed Pang for his help throughout my ministry. I will never forget these first visits. At that time C. W. Sidney, S. K. Wong, Lucky Chow, Eugene Cha, and Johnny Cheo were about the only Chinese that lived in residential neighborhoods, all the rest of the Chinese called their stores their home. They usually lived in the back or upstairs or had a passage way attached from the store to a house next door. The George Seas and Joe Ting had this arrangement. Therefore, when we visited the store, we were visiting the home.

On these visits Ed would go in ahead of me. He would be greeted by the husband or wife or both as we entered. He would talk in Chinese for a minute and then introduce me. They already knew who I was, because Ed had told me that word had gotten around that the Mission had a new pastor. I later learned that the Chinese have a telephone "hot line" that you wouldn't believe. Since they are pretty well confined to their stores, and wouldn't see one another until Sunday at the Mission or at the Mah-Jong party (a game of Chinese origin, played with 136 or more small tiles), they called each other during the week, passing on tidbits of Chinese news or receiving it. No doubt as we visited, word was sent ahead by telephone that we were coming.

After the introduction, either the husband or the wife would rush to the cooler, select two bottle Cokes, snap off the tops and ceremoniously wrap them in a paper towel or napkin, give them to us and invite us to be seated, usually on a worn stool behind the counter or on a stack of newly received merchandise close by. Then the conversation would begin. Some current news or item of controversy running the "hot line" at the moment would be discussed by Ed and the owners in Cantonese, while I sipped my coke. All the while the husband and wife were waiting on customers, sometimes going to the meat counter to slice bologna or weigh up some neck bones. After a while, Ed would explain my desire to obtain names and addresses and in broken English they would give me the information I wanted. Invariably, as we listed the children, they would go back into Cantonese, and begin to tell Ed how a son or daughter was doing in college, or about an uncle or aunt or brother or sister. I quickly learned that "family" is

the big thing among Chinese.

We would go from store to store in this manner and my visitation book began to take shape. It took two or three months of visitation to complete my book, a book of names, addresses and facts that became very valuable to me in the early years of my ministry.

Soon I was on my own and my pattern would be to visit the north end of town one week and the south end the next week. At that time there were about two hundred and fifty Chinese in Greenville. I had in the neighborhood of thirty-five to forty families to call on. Looking back it was a delightful experience; an exciting adventure, because I would find a mixture of the old and the new.

I found old grandmas behind the counter shelling peas or in the kitchen in the back of the store cooking the evening meal, or sweeping the floor, and of course taking care of the babies. I never will forget how shocked I was one time to see an old grandma chew a bite of food, then take it out of her mouth with chop sticks and give it to a child to eat. It seems that this was a major task for the old grandmas; take care of the kids while mama and papa ran the store. Sometimes I'd find the grandpa helping in the store; putting up merchandise, checking in an order or running the cash register. But he too would cook, sweep and shell peas. Many times my visits would find an older person in the back of the store sick and in bed. He or she was cared for with devoted tenderness. Older Chinese are always given extreme respect, love and attention. It is a characteristic I found throughout my ministry.

Chinese children learn early in life the meaning of the word "work". They are taught how to run the cash register, make change, check in merchandise, put up stock, etc. On one occasion in my ministry I entered the Seid grocery on North Shelby and Union Street to find Edward Seid, then about twelve years old, running the store by himself. He told me his dad was on a trip and would be gone a week. Of course, his brother Frank, Jr., a Pharmacist, was in town working at the King's Daughters Hospital. In the Chinese family every family member works.

The Chinese grocery is a business/home arrangement. The store is in the front and the family living quarters are in the back, attached, or upstairs. With this make-up there is one billing for utilities. The food they need comes from the grocery store. The