

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Robert F. Lee Interview Number: 126
 Chinese Name: 李錫藩 Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 8/4/80, 8/21/80 Length: 1 Hour & 15 Minutes
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam
 Others Present: _____
 Language: Chinese & English
 Summarizer: Kaza Dong

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	001-012	Robert F. Lee - Los Angeles. Chinese name Lee Sik Fun. Business in Los Angeles.		
	013-026	Born in 1918 - 62 years, in Canton, China - Tai Shan Tung Wo Village (台山). Came to America when he was 17 years old. Went to school for ten years - high school level.		
	027-028	Father was in the United States in laundry and restaurant work.		
	029-030	Spoke Tai Shan dialect at home. Has two brothers.		
2	031-070	Village - own home - 2 bedrooms - large living room. The house was square shaped, fifteen feet high with two kitchens (cooking areas). Mother did all of the cooking. Kept animals in the house. Farmed own rice fields. Had two acres.		
3	071-086	Father sent money home periodically. Came to the United States in 1934 when his father sent for him. Father was an American citizen. Came for the sake of survival.		
	087-090	Finished high school in the village "Tai Shan Yuan Established Teachers School."		
	091-129	Arrived in the United States first at San Francisco. Confined 47 days on Angel Island. He came with a cousin. After 40 days was interviewed for four days, eight hours a day. Was questioned about everything, about each room in the house, how many steps to enter the house, the neighbors, names and description of each, describe the village. If he made a mistake they (the examiners) will not pass him. Questioned father, cousins, etc.		

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	130-172	Life on Angel Island - approximately 200 people. Men and women were separated. Some men were well educated. There was a good library, good Chinese books - "Four Books" (四書). History books - Han Dynasty books one book was written by Chun Took So. This man was taken by Chiang Kai-Shek and confined. He was accused of being a communist. He was a very noted author. The Island had a volley ball team. He read and played while on Angel Island.
5	173-178	Most people who stayed there were afraid - uncertain whether they will pass questioning. Some people died. Even some committed suicide. Stories of ghosts haunting the building.
	179-194	All kinds of writings on the walls. Poems on the walls written by some educated men - some by ones ready to be deported or some ready to commit suicide. Own feelings - depressed and was uncertain whether he would pass questioning.
6	195-220	It was shameful to be sent back to the village. It was a sign of not accomplishing one's objective. Felt rejected by the villagers and one's own family.
	221-226	Other people felt resentment being confined whereas Japanese or other nationalities just came and literally walked right in. Resented the United States for confining Chinese.
7	227-235	Many came with false papers. Ninety-five percent had false papers.
	236-240	Food was cafeteria style in 1934, 46 years ago.
	241-249	Learned to cheat the immigration officers. Used a description of the village that was handed down by the elders who came before him.
	250-255	Feels that treatment of the Chinese was worse than the Japanese in concentration camps. Resented the white government.
	256-257	These feelings changed when they entered into the United States.
	258-270	Stayed in San Francisco until 1941. Came to Los Angeles for aviation school and started to work at Douglas Aircraft when World War II broke out. Also Hughes Aircraft.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	271-303	Schooling was in Alameda. Graduated high school and attended Boeing Aeronautics School. Liked to study aviation.
8	304-307	Worked as a draftsman in Los Angeles for seventy-five cents an hour for seven months at the beginning of the war in 1942 at Douglas Aircraft.
	308-318	Then worked at Hughes Aircraft as an Aero-Dynamicist. Flight performance of an airplane until 1956. Stayed in aircrafts instead of going into active service.
	319-328	Curtiss Wright in Santa Barbara - missile program - stayed until 1958. Eisenhower was President and cut the defense program. All contracts were cut off. No jobs were available until 1958-1962. While working at Hughes, he was treated well.
9	329-394	Job was good. No discrimination. Equal opportunity.
10	395-418	Worked in a market with his father and younger brother. Decided to buy a market in Los Angeles and worked in it for about ten years. Did not like working in the market.
	419-437	Worked in the Hopkins Company, an electronic company in San Fernando for one year.
11	447-487	Saw the business of auto parts store in San Fernando Shopping Center was good. He decided to open an auto parts store next to the Capital Market.
END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B		
1	009-042	Married and has six children. Spoke Chinese and English at home. Sent his children to two to three years of Chinese school. Has lived in America for forty-six years. Still feels more Chinese than American. He still sees racism against Chinese.
2	043-062	The white people still act superior toward Chinese. Still had bad experiences with the whites.
	063-082	In November 1947 he moved in to a house in the Silverlake area. Everyone in the neighborhood signed a petition against him moving in with the exception of one. He didn't know that the neighbors were against them moving in until the neighbor next door informed him that they were the only ones who did not sign the petition because they used to have a Chinese cook and he was very good to them.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	083-096	When they moved in everyone in the neighborhood came out to watch, not as a welcome party, but showing their curiosity. Got funny phone calls.
	097-108	He has lived in the house for 33 years. All original white families have moved away. The neighborhood is now mixed, Chinese, Japanese, and whites.
4	109-116	Mother came to America 10 years ago, living with younger brother. She is now 90 years old.
	117-133	When someone in the family got sick, they did use some Chinese herbs, like for colds. Used Chinese herbs for beef stew and for wintermelon soup.
	134-143	For recreation they liked to watch football games on television. Did not like baseball because he dislikes the baseball players spitting on the ground.
5	144-158	Do not have any friends and relatives back in China. All perished when Mao Tse Tung took over China. Would not like to return to China to visit because he does not like the present government. He fears if he went to China they would not allow him to leave China.
	159-181	He has written a book in Chinese on aviation and sent it to Senator Knowland to publish in Chinese. Senator Knowland sent the book to Taiwan. Taiwan sent him a medal of honor. They used his book for training those in the Chinese air force. The book was never published but is used as a training manual.
	182-201	The Taiwan government sent him a certificate of recognition and a distinguished medal of honor in gold.
6	202-206	Married in San Francisco to an American born Chinese girl.
	207-216	Never intended to return to China to marry because he did not want to be like his father - marry in China and leave his wife there to return every few years to visit his wife.
	217-233	Mother had a wife picked out for him in China but he did not want to marry in China. Mother does not get along with his wife because she was American born. Mother gets along with younger brother's wife because mother picked her out.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	006-017	Father named Lee Sai and returned to China three times, once in 1906 and 1929-30. He passed away in 1975. Buried at the Chinese cemetery on Eastern Avenue in Los Angeles.
	018-021	In 1958 his paycheck was \$770 per month.
	022-024	Goes to Chinatown once a week to shop for groceries.
	025-030	Before the second World War he got along with the Japanese in Alameda.
	031-037	After the war started he hated Japanese for killing Chinese on the Mainland.
2	038-042	After the war ended his hatred faded.
	043-061	He has written a book on aviation in English on rockets and supersonic airplanes and also has written a Chinese book on "sub sonic" airplanes.
	062-083	The best period of his life - his marriage was his best years. The most difficult period of his life was after he left the aerospace industry in 1959-1960 when he was changing from one kind of work to another - going into a market business.
3	084-106	He has four sons: the first son is a colonel, second son is in school in Belgium and the third son teaches at Cal State Los Angeles. His fourth son is an architect.

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END OF INTERVIEW

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	234-255	Children - first boy is in the army. He is a colonel-medical doctor at the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington D.C. The second is in school in Belgium and just married a Taiwan girl. The third is a professor (Howard Lee, PhD) at Cal State, Los Angeles and Pepperdine and also a consultant for Ralph's grocery stores. The fourth is studying architecture. There are four boys and two girls.
	256-271	He belongs to the Lee Association but is not active. He pays yearly donations to help expenses but never attends activities.
8	272-312	The most prominent person he respects in Chinatown is Calvin Chang (張喜洲), an accountant, clean talker and not crooked.
	313-352	Before World War II, in San Francisco, most people had jobs with American families, Chinese laundries, cooks or restaurants and others dealt in gambling. In 1934-1936 the income was approximately \$6 to \$10 a week. An average of two out of twenty people were working at that time. In 1937 one made \$15 to \$20 a week. During the war one made more in the shipyards at 75¢ an hour. When he first came to the States, the village people had a room in San Francisco. Two out of twenty had work. He and his father crossed over from Alameda and took the village people to dinner on Sundays.
9	353-408	Most men were single here with no families. When he got married he was the first one out of the hundreds of fellow villagers. When the men saved money they went back to China. It was \$130 for a third class ticket back to China.
10	409-416	American Chinese are just as eager to have sons because they have more of a chance to make a name for their family. Girls marry and change their names.
	417-460	He objects to interracial marriages but sees more interracial marriages in the future.
11	461-472	His children would like to visit China.
	473-490	American Chinese movies - Chinese portrayed in the movies look phony.

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