

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Frank York Lee Interview Number: 117  
 Chinese Name: 李煜榮 Number of Tapes: 1  
 Date of Interview: 7/21/80 Length: 54 Minutes  
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam  
 Others Present: None  
 Language: English  
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Contents

| Time Segment | Counter Number  | Summary   | Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u> |
|--------------|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1            | 001-006<br>007-012<br>013-015<br>016-018<br>019-020<br>021-026<br>027-034 | Introduction.<br>Frank York Lee (FYL) is an M.D. His office is at 4282 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles 90010. Residence is at Los Angeles Hancock Park.<br>FYL was born in Hong Kong in 1914.<br>Came to the United States in 1928 when he was 15.<br>FYL speaks both English and Chinese at home.<br>Toishan, Canton is his parent's village. FYL visited Toishan about once a year when he was in Hong Kong.<br>Father owned property, a rice field, a big home and was affluent. Grandfather was a popular Chinese doctor in the village.  |                              |
| 2            | 035-051<br>052-055<br>056-057<br>059-060<br>063-066<br>067-073            | Grandfather came to the United States in the 1860's because there was need of a Chinese doctor to take care of the Chinese railroad workers. Chinese laborers went back to China and complained to FYL's grandfather about the lack of Chinese doctors in the U.S. Grandfather decided to come to the U.S. and settled in Sacramento.<br>Grandfather was a Chinese herb doctor.<br>Father was born in the U.S.<br>FYL went to Queen's College in Hong Kong. Queen's College was "the" college at that time.<br>Queen's college was a secondary school. Due to the students' boycott against the British government, FYL went to Sun Yat-Sen University in Canton in 1925.<br>FYL came to the U.S. in 1928 and attended U.C. Berkeley, and graduated in medicine in 1937 from U.C. Irvine. |                              |
| 3            | 074-076<br>077-079  | FYL became an intern in Los Angeles General Hospital for one year.<br>In 1938 he started practice at 817 S. Vermont, where he stayed for 20 years.  |                              |

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|              | 080-082        | FYL then moved to 4282 Wilshire Blvd., until the present time.  |
|              | 083-087        | FYL's patients are 80 percent American and 20 percent Chinese.  |
|              | 088-093        | FYL thought of choosing diplomatic service or engineering before choosing medicine. But medicine can satisfy him in the other two fields so he chose medicine as his profession.                            |
|              | 094-095        | FYL gave six months serious thinking and chose his own profession by himself.   |
|              | 096-100        | Parents did not have much influence on him in choosing his profession.  |
|              | 101-105        | Toishan is FYL's hometown. FYL does not miss it as much.  |
| 4            | 106-109        | FYL traveled quite extensively and liked all the places he visited.   |
|              | 110-112        | FYL associated with both Chinese and Americans (50/50).   |
|              | 113-116        | FYL feels more international and never was sorry for being a Chinese.   |
|              | 117-119        | FYL is about 65 years old and has lived in the United States for over 50 years.   |
|              | 120-121        | Father was in the U.S. while FYL was growing up in China.   |
|              | 122-127        | FYL never disagreed with his parents. Being educated in a good school in China and indoctrinated with Chinese culture and history, FYL is very proud of his heritage.                                       |
|              | 128-136        | Father, Do Yim Lee, was a western doctor when FYL came to the U.S. His office was in Long Beach. His cousin included the chief of police, fire chief, merchants as well as ordinary citizens of Long Beach. |
|              | 137-139        | Father used western medicine in China and used Chinese medicine in the United States.   |
|              | 140-151        | Mother never came to the America. FYL brought her bones back to America just a month ago and put them at the Catholic Cemetery in Los Angeles.  |
| 5            | 152-156        | By burying his father and mother together, FYL felt he did his duty as a son and fulfilled his obligations of filial piety.   |
|              | 157-158        | FYL had not seen his mother since he was 15.  |
|              | 159-165        | Father was born in Sacramento and studied western medicine in the U.S.  |
|              | 166-171        | FYL ate Chinese herbs with Chinese food.  |
|              | 172-178        | FYL played volleyball at Berkeley. He has been a member of the Los Angeles Athletic Club for the past ten to fifteen years and is a doctor of the Olympic team.   |
|              | 179-191        | FYL has been the doctor for the Republic of China since 1960.   |

- 6            192-199        FYL was elected as a Board of Director for the International Association of Olympic Officers.
- 200-205        FYL likes swimming and swims two or three times a week.
- 206-207        FYL knows how to play mahjong but does not have time to play.
- 208-223        FYL attended most of the UC-Stanford games for the last 20 years and was the yell leader of the alumni. He was the president of the Southern Section of California Alumni Association for the Chinese.
- 224-230        FYL likes good movies, particularly the historical kind.
- 7            231-237        FYL wrote to relatives and schoolmates in China.
- 238-249        He was a member of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) and the President of National Sun Yat Sen University Alumni Association, for the past 20 years. There are about 100 alumni here.
- 250-252        He was the president of the Los Angeles Lee Federal Credit Union in 1965 when it was founded.
- 253-276        Respects all families in Los Angeles and considers Peter SooHoo as a prominent person, because he was a selfless individual and did many works for the Chinese without any material consideration. He was the prime mover to move Chinatown to the present location. He was the most prominent member of the CACA. He worked for the benefit of the Chinese in Los Angeles.
- 8            277-281        Most Chinese engaged in restaurants, laundry, and gambling.
- 282-294        Before World War II, Chinese made about \$80 a month. The bank clerks got \$80 a month. Eighty dollars was sufficient enough at that time. The rent for an apartment was \$25 a month.
- 295-303        About one third of the Chinese lived in Chinatown and two thirds lived outside of Chinatown on 32nd Street and 9th Street.
- 304-310        Those Chinese who were thinking of China saved money and sent the money back home. Because of the immigration laws, there was no Chinese quota before World War II.
- 311-313        Unfortunately many Chinese gambled their money away.
- 314-329        FYL met Chiang Kai-shek at Wong Pu Military Academy. Father brought FYL there for different meetings.
- 9            320-339        There were only two schools (in Canton). If you wanted to go to military school, you would go to Wong Pu Military Academy. If you wanted to run the government, you would go to Dr. Sun Yat Sen Academy.
- 340-351        During the depression Chinese were affected. Primarily no jobs. The family and family associations helped. Some Chinese wore out two pairs of shoes before they found a job.

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| 9                    | 352-376        | Before World War II, there were certain prejudices, such as, Chinese could not buy homes in a certain area. FYL lost \$500 on a deal that he bought a house yet was not allowed to live in it. His attorney advised him to forget about it because it would cost more to file a law suit.   |
|                      | 377-387        | FYL bought the house because it was close to a good school where he wanted to send his daughter to.   |
| 10                   | 388-392        | FYL tried to fight the injustice but too many obstacles.  |
|                      | 393-404        | After World War II, Chinese were given a very slight chance. FYL sent his children to a military academy where businessmen and movie stars sent their children. After they graduated from there, FYL sent his three sons to a Catholic High School, later to Notre Dame University.         |
|                      | 405-452        | One of the Berkeley classmates who graduated in 1933, cum laude, majored in petroleum engineering. He was told by an American petroleum company that the company did not hire Chinese. He later went to South America, worked there, and later became a multi-millionaire.                  |
|                      | 453-468        | Even at the University of California, Chinese in ROTC could not take Navy, Pershing Rifles. Chinese could only take Infantry, Coast Artillery. It was definite discrimination.  |
|                      | 469-481        | FYL belonged to Pi Alpha Phi.   |
| END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A |                |   |
| 1                    | 002-008        | FYL hoped to send his children to a Chinese school but the opportunity was rare.  |
|                      | 009-014        | It's a personal preference of having sons or daughters.   |
|                      | 015-021        | Before World War II, Chinese were not allowed to bring their wives over. The shortage of Chinese girls in the U.S. was the reason why Chinese went back to China to get married.  |
|                      | 022-028        | It is the individual that counts in an interracial marriage. Some are very successful but some are bad.   |
|                      | 029-040        | Before World War II, Chinese would prefer to return to China to die, but not today. Because Chinese adopted America as their own country. Before World War II, Chinese were secondary citizens. Today, Chinese have opportunities in the professional arena of the educational institution. |

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| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary  |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 2            | 041-045        | If an American educated Chinese were needed in mainland China or Taiwan, they could go there for a specific period.  |
|              | 046-075        | FYL was a doctor for the Republic of China for twenty years. The last two years FYL went to China with Mayor Tom Bradley. Last time FYL visited mainland China, he visited the Olympic officials there.  |
| 3            | 076-098        | Before World War II, Chinese were portrayed very badly in American movies. But in 1936, better movies were made about China, for instance, Good Earth. Keye Luke was the first Chinese actor to play an intern.  |
|              | 099-104        | FYL knew Keye Luke very well. FYL was a classmate of Victor San Young.   |
| 4            | 105-112        | When FYL watched the Chinese portraying a bad character, he did not feel especially offended, but it wasn't too funny either.  |
|              | 113-118        | The second generation may feel embarrassed for being Chinese, but FYL never heard of it.   |
|              | 119-126        | Chinese, no matter how poor they are, would send their children to college. They wanted their children to be in professions and in business. To the Chinese, scholars are the highest in the ladder of professions.  |
|              | 127-144        | FYL married Susie in 1939. His wife's family had been in Honolulu for about 90 years. Wife's family were from Hueng Shan district (Chung Shan) Canton, China. Father was one of the founders of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Honolulu.                                       |
|              | 145-155        | Oldest son is an obstetrician and a gynecologist in Pomona. He delivers about 70 babies a month. He also is an associate professor. He has a record of delivering four sets of twins in three days.  |
| 5            | 156-165        | The second son is a doctor of juris prudence, a CPA, has a master of arts degree from UCLA and a bachelor degree from the University of Notre Dame. He is the President of California Association of Attorneys. He is also the treasurer of the National Association of Attorneys. |
|              | 166-170        | The third son is an anesthesiologist and a formal major in the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps and Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at the Strategic Air Command Hospital in Nebraska. Now he is in private practice in Arizona.  |
|              | 171-176        | All the sons have a Chinese middle name. That was signifying the origin of Chinese culture.  |

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| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary   |
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| 5            | 177-190        | FYL was knighted by Pope Paul VI in 1966.   |
| 6            | 191-203        | FYL is one of the members of the original committee to bring the Olympic Games to Los Angeles.  |
|              | 204-211        | FYL showed some of his personal documents.  |
|              | 212-224        | Bringing his mother's remains from China after 50 years and burying her with his father was the happiest thing in FYL's life.   |
|              | 225-228        | Going through medical school was the most difficult time in FYL's life.   |
| 7            | 229-243        | July 19, 1980, when FYL buried his parents together was the most memorable day.   |
|              | 244-255        | The happiest day in his life was when he was selected as Doctor of the Year in 1961.  |
|              | 256-270        | Getting married was a happy thing for him, but does not have an impact on the community and society.  |
|              | 271-282        | FYL showed some memorabilia.  |
| 8            | 283-315        | In his profession he got some outstanding cases.  |
|              | 316-346        | In the 1960 Olympics, C.K. Yang won a silver medal. FYL was the doctor for C.K. Yang and the gold medal winner Rafer Johnson. C.K. Yang was from the Republic of China, a good decathlon athlete. With Chinese Americans' help, he studied at UCLA with Rafer Johnson. It was most thrilling to see them win the gold medal and the silver medal.   |
|              | 347-371        | FYL volunteered twice to be in the armed services in the medical corps during World War II. But they insisted that FYL could be more valuable by being a general practitioner in Los Angeles because they needed general practitioners very badly in Los Angeles. FYL sees at least 70 or more patients every day. One time he worked 24 hours a day for three consecutive days. His office was on 817 S. Vermont Avenue. |

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