

Interview with the Lee Association

Place: Office of the Lee Association (614 Fisgard Street)

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Interviewer: Zhongping Chen, Charles Yang

Interviewees: Kent Lee (李国权), chairman of the Lee Association

Bob Lee (李以博), secretary

Sabrina Lee (李蕾蔓妮), member

Lit Fung Lee (李烈风), member

Yuk Wah Lee (李玉华), member

Lai Kuen Lee (李丽娟), member

Table of Contents

:

Emigration of families; origins of families; occupations of early immigrants; payment of head tax; education of immigrants; paper sons.....	Pages 1-6, 7-8, 10-11
Social contacts; personal hobbies; recreational activities.....	Pages 6-10, 12
Relations with the University of Victoria; wishes to the university.....	Pages 6, 29-30
Education of local-born Chinese; occupation of local-born Chinese.....	Pages 8-9
Formation of the Lee Association; association activities; members of associations; youngsters in association activities; income of association; schedule of festivals; origins of members; building of the Lee Association.....	Pages 12-16, 25
Lee Associations in Canada; Lee Associations in the world; Conferences of worldwide Lee Associations.....	Pages 16-17
Leaders of the Lee Association; Jack Lee; Lieutenant Governor Philip Lee; election of leaders	Pages 17-18, 20
Relations with the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association; overlapping membership in Taishan Association; members in Zengcheng and Panyu associations	Pages 18-20
Contacts with Chinatown; residents of old Chinatown; changes in Chinatown; non-Chinese businesses in Chinatown; problems in Chinatown; wishes for Chinatown.....	Pages 20-22, 23, 25-29
Anti-Chinese discrimination; decline of anti-Chinese racism.....	Pages 22-23
Relations with China; visits to home places; changes in emigrant places; Taishan people in the world.	Pages 30-32

Zhongping Chen: First, I'm interested in your family history. Can you tell me where in China your family came from at first and when was that? Did your grandpa or your father pay head tax or not? and why did they move here from China to Canada?

Kent Lee: OK, so start with individual?

Zhongping Chen: Ya, probably just one by one.

Kent Lee: [to Lit Fung Lee] You are the oldest, so how about you start? For the questions he asks... Ok what's your first question?

Zhongping Chen: The first question is where in China did your family come from? Which county?

Lit Fung Lee: From China, Guangdong.

Zhongping Chen: What county?

Lit Fung Lee: Zengcheng.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, Zengcheng. Thank you. So when was that? About what time?

Kent Lee: When did you come?

Lit Fung Lee: 1930... uh 1956.

Kent Lee: How old were you when you came here?

Lit Fung Lee: 19 years old. My dad came here so he brought me here too.

Zhongping Chen: So what kind of job did he do here when he first came. Your father.

Charles Yang: What did your dad do?

Lit Fung Lee: He was a cook, like me, working a day job—

Bob Lee: Ok, I'll speak first. Ask me first.

Zhongping Chen: Ok, ya the same question. From which part of China did your family come from?

Bob Lee: I am from Guangdong, Taishan.

Zhongping Chen: Taishan? What village? Township?

Bob Lee: Tangmei village.

Zhongping Chen: Tangmei is?

Bob Lee: It is here. Tangmei. Tang as in "pond."

Zhongping Chen: Ok, around when?

Bob Lee: I came here in 1976.

Zhongping Chen: So... You weren't the first, before you, who was the earliest?

Bob Lee: My grandfather was here. His dad was here as well. I would say they, my grandfather came here around 1918 or 1917, around that time.

Zhongping Chen: When did your great grandfather come?

Bob Lee: Around 1880's.

Zhongping Chen: Your grandfather was called?

Bob Lee: Chongjuan Lee. My father was called Li Ziru, and he worked in China.

Zhongping Chen: Oh so he hasn't come here?

Bob Lee: He did come here after.

Zhongping Chen: When your great grandfather came here, he paid head tax?

Bob Lee: Ah, no. My grandfather paid head tax.

Zhongping Chen: So, why did they move here? Not to other countries and other cities?

Bob Lee: My great grandfather was actually in the States.

Zhongping Chen: Oh! Which city?

Bob Lee: He was by the west side. It could have been at that time. There was the gold rush. There was the issue of gold panning. After that, it became too chaotic and he ran to Canada. The states were in turmoil at the time. Could have been in war. I'm not too sure. Anyway, they came here, my great grandfather arrived in Canada.

Zhongping Chen: What did he do after first arriving here?

Bob Lee: Farming.

Zhongping Chen: His own farm?

Bob Lee: No, he worked for someone else.

Zhongping Chen: So your great grandfather returned to China?

Bob Lee: He returned and married, and my grandfather was born. My grandfather had many siblings as well. He and his younger brother came to Canada. They came in 1905.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, so your grandfather came in 1905. So he had to pay 500 dollars in head tax.

Bob Lee: I've forgotten the amount, but I know they had to pay it anyway.

Zhongping Chen: What was he doing here?

Bob Lee: He had been doing lots of work. Basically, a cook.

Zhongping Chen: A cook. Ya, and when did your father come?

Bob Lee: My father came afterwards. He came after retirement from China.

Zhongping Chen: When was that?

Bob Lee: It was 1986.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, so he worked in China? Never worked here?

Bob Lee: Ah, no. He retired.

Zhongping Chen: Ok ya, so we can move to next one. So we want to first talk about family history in general then go to association. Your name is?

Lai Kuen Lee: Yes, Lai Kuen.

Zhongping Chen: From which county of Guangdong province did your family move here.

Lai Kuen Lee: Nanhai. I was born in Hong Kong.

Zhongping Chen: Oh you came here directly from Hong Kong.

Lai Kuen Lee: I married somebody and came here.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, When was that?

Lai Kuen Lee: Erm, 1977.

Zhongping Chen: So what kind of job did you do here before... when you just came here?

Lai Kuen Lee: What kind of work I did? Uh, I did dish wash.

Zhongping Chen: Oh dishwasher? In the restaurant?

Lai Kuen Lee: For the St. Michael School.

Zhongping Chen: Ah, I see. So later did you change the profession?

Bob Lee: She owns a store.

Lai Kuen Lee: I own the store.

Zhongping Chen: Next question is mainly about yourself. Let's start from Bob again. So I just want to know about your education background. You know, what kind of school did you go?

Bob Lee: I graduated from Guangzhou Shipbuilding School.

Zhongping Chen: Which year was that?

Bob Lee: 1968.

Zhongping Chen: So, how did you manage to come here? At that time, nobody could be allowed to go out of China.

Bob Lee: I fight the systems. I was pretty much the first batch of Chinese people to come to Canada.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, which year was that?

Bob Lee: 1976. I should have been able to get out in 1973, I already had my Canadian visa done, but it was really complicated at the time. They wouldn't let a batch of people leave, didn't want people to leave that year.

Zhongping Chen: So when you first came, what kind of job did you do here?

Bob Lee: Dishwashing, doing the odd jobs here and there, restaurant work, etc.

Zhongping Chen: Ah, in the restaurant, not family restaurant, it's your own family...

Bob Lee: No, no, I worked for other people.

Zhongping Chen: Ah, ya dishwashing, and later..

Bob Lee: Then later, I worked at a sawmill for a while.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, sawmill. Ok and then...

Bob Lee: Did all kinds of jobs. As long as there was work, I would do it.

Zhongping Chen: So did you later, did you get a permanent job?

Bob Lee: I worked as a cook.

Zhongping Chen: Cook. Is it in one restaurant? Chinese restaurant?

Bob Lee: Ah no, Canadian restaurant?

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? You cook Canadian food.

Bob Lee: Ya.

Zhongping Chen: So usually what kind of activities do you do with your friends, and what kind of people you associate with?

Bob Lee: Oh, I don't want too many friends. Just that all the people here now are friends.

Zhongping Chen: Mainly in the Lee Association. How about your former colleagues in the restaurant?

Bob Lee: I used to go to the university to play badminton.

Zhongping Chen: Oh in the university. You worked there?

Bob Lee: No, I just went there to play badminton. They used to welcome the community to go. Right now they might not allow it anymore.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, badminton. Right now they will not allow people to go?

Bob Lee: I don't think so, because I didn't go there for at least three, four years now.

Zhongping Chen: Now what are your major activities?

Bob Lee: Ya, so we play ping pong here instead.

Zhongping Chen: Thank you. Let's move to the next person. Did you receive education in Hong Kong or here?

Lai Kuen Lee: In Hong Kong.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, mainly in Hong Kong. Which level?

Lai Kuen Lee: To grade 6.

Zhongping Chen: So did you continue education here?

Lai Kuen Lee: No, we came here [to] marry first and got a baby.

Zhongping Chen: I see, so you worked as dishwasher and so usually what kind of people you associate with? Do you go to churches?

Lai Kuen Lee: No.

Charles Yang: He's asking what kind of people are you mostly associating with?

Lai Kuen Lee: Usually? Sometimes playing mahjong.

Charles Yang: So mainly at the Lee Association building?

Lai Kuen Lee: Ya at the Lee Association.

Zhongping Chen: You play mahjong here only or also go to other associations?

Lai Kuen Lee: No, only here.

Bob Lee: Play at home.

Lai Kuen Lee: Sometimes at home, with friends.

Zhongping Chen: Any Caucasian friends?

Lai Kuen Lee: Ya, sometimes.

Kent Lee: No, no Caucasians.

Zhongping Chen: They cannot play mahjong properly.

Zhongping Chen: So probably we'll move to next one. Mr Lee, what kind of education did you receive in China or here?

Lit Fung Lee: I didn't go to school.

Charles Yang: Didn't go to school in Hong Kong or China?

Lai Kuen Lee: There wasn't really any schooling back in the day at his age.

Zhongping Chen: But here in 1950, you could not enter school at that time?

Lai Kuen Lee: No money.

Kent Lee: When he came he was too old anyways.

Yuk Wah Lee: 19 years old.

Bob Lee: Even when I came... Even if you went to school and graduated, you still couldn't start your own business. If you want to be an accountant, lawyer, or even a university professor, it's impossible. You cannot forget this point.

Zhongping Chen: I just remembered. So usually what kind of activities do you do, I mean, how do you play with your friends?

Yuk Wah Lee: Play chess or mahjong.

Bob Lee: Fishing.

Zhongping Chen: Oh you like fishing, playing mahjong.

Yuk Wah Lee: Gardening.

Zhongping Chen: Gardening. So fishing with friends or just by yourself?

Bob Lee: Friends.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of friends? Mostly just Chinese friends or non-Chinese ones?

Lai Kuen Lee: Chinese friends.

Lit Fung Lee: Ya, Chinese people.

Zhongping Chen: Are they from the Lee Association or from different lineages?

Lit Fung Lee: Always play with people here (The Lee Association).

Bob Lee: A lot of his friends were not the Lees but of other lineages. But not Caucasians.

Zhongping Chen: Mr. Lee, what kind of education did you receive here?

Kent Lee: Technical school.

Zhongping Chen: Which school?

Bob Lee: BCIT, Vancouver. It's very famous.

Zhongping Chen: So after you graduate, what kind of work did you do?

Kent Lee: First worked for the electrical consultant company then I moved to the provincial government.

Zhongping Chen: And usually what kind of social activities do you have? You are the president of this association. Apart from that...

Bob Lee: Well he's an electronic guy.

Charles Yang: No friends? Just kidding.

Bob Lee: Lots of friends, Hi-fi, you know that type of thing.

Kent Lee: Well that's just a hobby, right.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of hobbies?

Bob Lee: He's got over 20,000 of those cds.

Kent Lee: Hobbies? I like, you know, music and listen to it, you know...

Bob Lee: He's got over 10 machines. A set of speakers for \$6000, would you be willing to buy that?

Kent Lee: Ya and also play table tennis.

Zhongping Chen: Where do you play table tennis? Here or other places?

Kent Lee: Yes, mostly, mainly over here.

Zhongping Chen: Ok, so usually play with Chinese friends?

Kent Lee: No, both.

Zhongping Chen: Both Chinese and Caucasian friends. I see. So you still like have communication with Caucasian friends, like colleagues? What kind of communications do you have with like... reunions of school, or other activities?

Kent Lee: We go for drinks and, you know, do different things. Most Caucasians like drinking, so you know, start drinking.

Zhongping Chen: You're good at drinking?

Bob Lee: Go to the bar eh? Strip.

Zhongping Chen: Ms. Lee, can we talk a little about you? What kind of education did you receive? You received education in China or here?

Sabrina Lee: Ya, I was born in China and then I went to Hong Kong, about 10 years old, and then I lived in Hong Kong for 10 years and then moved here when I'm 19.

Kent Lee: You went to high school here, right?

Sabrina Lee: My grandfather was here long, long time ago. I don't know when. Before I was born, my grandfather went back to China. That's why, umm, then my brother came here first.

Zhongping Chen: But did your father come after your grandfather?

Sabrina Lee: No, my brother came here first.

Kent Lee: See in the olden day, uh, it was not easy to come to Canada at that time. So her brother came by himself, because lot of people sold their [immigration] documents at that time.

Zhongping Chen: Oh I see, like paper sons.

Kent Lee: Ya, that's right, and he came that way.

Sabrina Lee: And then my brother brought the whole family here.

Zhongping Chen: Together with you.

Sabrina Lee: Ya, with mom and dad.

Zhongping Chen: You actually did not use your grandfather's connection to come here.

Kent Lee: Her father came here. Then he returned to China.

Bob Lee: You're not afraid to talk about selling papers.

Kent Lee: It's ok now, even about selling papers.

Bob Lee: You know that back then there was an Exclusion Act.

Zhongping Chen: Chinese Exclusion Act, right, from 1923 to 1947.

Bob Lee: After 1947, in 1950 they officially let Chinese people come here.

Zhongping Chen: Right, no Chinese was allowed to come before that time...

Bob Lee: Back then, a lot of people were like him and relied on selling papers. That is, from here you return to China and then report back to the Canadian government that you had, say, three babies in China. They would then send you a certificate of proof. Then people would take that certificate and sell it. So a lot of people who came here were with those certificates. So they changed their names and came here.

Zhongping Chen: So after your brother came here, he had to change name.

Kent Lee: Ya, he had to change his name too. But he finally straightened it out with immigration afterwards.

Bob Lee: It's a pardon.

Zhongping Chen: Which year did they actually give him the pardon ...

Kent Lee: In the seventies I think.

Bob Lee: Sixties... seventies? 72, 73.

Zhongping Chen: Thank you. So what kind of activities do you have? I mean hobbies or what do you play? and play with what kind of people?

Sabrina Lee: Now? Now we just play here.

Zhongping Chen: So this association is really important.

Sabrina Lee: Really important and on weekend we play mahjong here and on Tuesday, Wednesday we have karaoke and then on Friday we have ping pong, table tennis here. Really active here. Also, mostly hang out around here.

Zhongping Chen: Ya, we can probably talk about the association. So why was the association originally established here?

Kent Lee: Well as you know, at that time it's the only family you have when you come as an immigrant at that time. The white society won't accept you at that time so you have to be united right? So basically every... different surnames or different counties' people form associations like this, to be as a family, as support, right?

Zhongping Chen: That's right, but right now this is not a problem but why do people still join these associations?

Kent Lee: Well it's getting pretty hard to maintain the association because younger people don't come down anymore. So ya, as you said, we probably don't need this association anymore, right? Because, people you know... they are not like in the old days, right?

Bob Lee: Because of cultures changes, they don't need that kind of support anymore. They speak English and they get good job now.

Sabrina Lee: Everybody has family now and now we just have fun here, gather here.

Kent Lee: Ya, just social network I guess.

Zhongping Chen: I see. Do you have a formal register or membership?

Kent Lee: Yes we do.

Zhongping Chen: How many people in the association?

Bob Lee: Around three hundred.

Zhongping Chen: Three hundred? Ah, so this is like automatic membership, or they have to apply?

Bob Lee: They have to apply.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really, among three hundred members, usually how old are these people?

Bob Lee: From 90 to 15-16... I mean 18 at least.

Zhongping Chen: But most people...

Bob Lee: Most people are over 50.

Kent Lee: On average over 50, I would say.

Zhongping Chen: So the young people usually would not come here.

Bob Lee: They come here, you know like... spring festivals...

Kent Lee: Only during special occasions.

Bob Lee: Spring banquets and—

Kent Lee: Parties--

Lai Kuen Lee: Special... New years.

Bob Lee: Picnics, you know. They will show up but don't come to meetings anymore.

Zhongping Chen: Do they need to pay like a membership fees?

Bob Lee: One time membership. 10 dollars.

Zhongping Chen: 10 dollars. Lifetime.

Sabrina and Bob Lee: Lifetime.

Zhongping Chen: So how does this association fund by itself? 10 dollars is not enough.

Kent Lee: No, but we have rent downstairs, two storey's... That's the only revenue we have.

Bob Lee: And then we have some donations.

Zhongping Chen: From Lee families?

Kent Lee: Not necessarily.

Bob Lee: From people you know, in the associations,... sometimes from...

Kent Lee: And friends that come here for the activities.

Zhongping Chen: You mentioned a lot of activities here. Can you tell me more about the association activities? And usually you actually have schedule every week?

Kent Lee: Usually table tennis on Mondays and Fridays.

Zhongping Chen: Thank you. And then Tuesday?

Kent Lee: Tuesday karaoke, right?

Zhongping Chen: Tuesday, karaoke.

Kent Lee: And then sometimes Wednesday right?

Sabrina Lee: Sometimes Wednesday too.

Zhongping Chen: Tuesday and Wednesday, and then...?

Kent Lee: Thursday, the only day's free here.

Zhongping Chen: Thursday's free. How about the weekend?

Sabrina Lee: Saturday and Sunday mahjong.

Zhongping Chen: You have a lot of activities. So, apart from these regular activities, do you also have annual, big annual celebrations or something?

Kent Lee: For a new year, we start with—

Sabrina Lee: Christmas party.

Lai Kuen Lee: Chinese New Year la...

Bob Lee: And then August 15th.

Zhongping Chen: Ah, August 15th, Mid-Autumn festival.

Bob Lee: Dragon boat festival.

Zhongping Chen: So usually what kind of activities that you prepare?

Kent Lee: We have parties. They have food and...

Bob Lee: Worshipping ancestors.

Zhongping Chen: Which days are for worshipping ancestors?

Bob Lee: Offering incense here and to show our respects.

Zhongping Chen: Which day was for that...?

Bob Lee: Basically any day except for.... Except for Christmas, ya.

Zhongping Chen: So there is no specific day for worship?

Bob Lee: No, no.

Zhongping Chen: Ah, I see. For members in this association, from which counties they mostly came from?

Bob and Kent Lee: Taishan, Guangdong province, mostly.

Zhongping Chen: Then ...what...?

Bob Lee: Zhongshan.

Zhongping Chen: Zhongshan, and ...?

Bob Lee: Xinhui.

Zhongping Chen: Xinhui. And... Enping...

Bob Lee: It's Siyi.

Zhongping Chen: Siyi...

Bob Lee: Kaiping.

Zhongping Chen: So not a lot of people from Sanyi?

Bob Lee: There are some from Sanyi too... Panyu...

Zhongping Chen: Panyu, Shun De?

Bob Lee: There are some too, but not a lot.

Zhongping Chen: Mr. Lee, what is the relation between this Lee Association and other Lee Associations in Canada? Like I think there is a national association in Vancouver.

Kent Lee: Yes, it's a long story.

Zhongping Chen: Does national association hold any meetings? National meetings?

Kent Lee: They do.

Bob Lee: They did, but right now we're establishing a new organization.

Zhongping Chen: So how about the relationship between this association and its global one... I think the Lees have global meetings?

Kent Lee: We get invitations occasionally from, you know, all over the world.

Zhongping Chen: Does that association have schedule for meetings? Like every five years, they have a global meeting?

Kent Lee: They probably do, but we didn't attend many of them. But we do hear from them.

Zhongping Chen: They send invitation here regularly?

Bob Lee: For celebrations. Whenever there's a big celebration event, they will invite us.

Zhongping Chen: Usually in San Francisco?

Bob Lee: Taiwan, also China has them as well. In China a few times. Boston, New York...

Kent Lee: Hong Kong.

Zhongping Chen: Among the Lees in Victoria, can you recall anybody who actually made outstanding achievements? Like Jack Lee is the obvious one. Can you think about others, important ones, like in politics? Or in business?

Kent Lee: In Victoria?

Bob Lee: Right now, it's Jack Lee.

Kent Lee: Pretty much just him.

Bob Lee: Others aren't here anymore. Back in the day, being well known in Victoria was useless.

Zhongping Chen: Like Jack Lee—

Bob Lee: Jack Lee, ya he has been very successful. A successful businessman. He has also attended social events.

Zhongping Chen: Actually like your father, I think he is important. He published an important book. So that's why I'm interested in your family history.

Bob Lee: That's all in the past now. There's Philip Lee, he's now the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. He is also a member of our association.

Zhongping Chen: Did he ever live here?

Bob Lee: No, he is a member in name. He has a good relationship with us. An honorary consultant.

Zhongping Chen: So, I know this association is associated with CCBA, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Do you join other associations?

Kent Lee: Ya, we are members of the Taishan association.

Bob Lee: You are free to join any other associations.

Zhongping Chen: So both of you joined the Taishan association?

Kent and Bob Lee: Yes.

Zhongping Chen: Why did you join that association?

Bob Lee: You are [interested in] where you're from, what origin.

Zhongping Chen: So it's just for fun?

Bob Lee: Basically ya.

Kent Lee: No real reason.

Bob Lee: There's no special reason, just...

Zhongping Chen: Ah, you are from Zengcheng. Do people from Zengcheng have the local association?

Bob Lee: There was one before but probably not anymore now. Zengcheng doesn't have an association now, right? There was one before.

Lit Fung Lee: There was one before, not anymore though.

Kent Lee: You're not part of like the Panyu association or those similar to it?

Lit Fung Lee: If we did, it would be disbanded.

Zhongping Chen: Ms. Lee, you are from Zhongshan. Do you join any Zhongshan association?

Lai Kuen Lee: I'm from Nanhai.

Zhongping Chen: Nanhai... Does Nanhai people have any association here?

Bob Lee: Does Victoria have any?

Lai Kuen Lee: Victoria, no. Vancouver does though.

Zhongping Chen: So, Mr. Lee, this association is associated with the CCBA, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. What kind of relation between them... do you need to contribute membership fees to them?

Kent Lee: There's no membership involved. We just represent our association there because CCBA considered the central, well, you cannot say government, but you know they represent the whole Chinese community, right? We are just part of that.

Zhongping Chen: The president of this association would be on the board of directors of CCBA...?

Kent Lee: No, no. Each association allows three representatives to the meeting. So we have our say. Every association has say... rights.

Bob Lee: They might not listen to you.

Kent Lee: Whether they listen to you or not is another story.

Zhongping Chen: Usually three delegates in the meeting. But anybody on the permanent board of directors?

Kent Lee: No, it's elected over there with their own people. You could actually nominate to be one of the board of directors over there but you got to be selected by them.

Zhongping Chen: By them? There is election there?

Kent Lee: Ya, there's election.

Zhongping Chen: Annual election?

Bob Lee: Every two years.

Zhongping Chen: So by the way, how does this association choose a leader? Do you have annual election?

Kent Lee: We have elections.

Bob Lee: Every two years.

Zhongping Chen: Every two years. By all the 300 members?

Kent Lee: Whoever shows up.

Bob Lee: Whoever wants to vote. We usually do it on the banquet. The spring banquet. Most people gather together at that time.

Zhongping Chen: [to Kent Lee] Ya, it's interesting. Your father actually served as president and then your brother, older brothers, right now you are the president. That's great, your family...

Bob Lee: It's good tradition.

Zhongping Chen: About Chinatown, usually, how often do you come to Chinatown? Are you living near Chinatown or outside?

Bob Lee: Outside.

Zhongping Chen: In your case, how often do you come to Chinatown?

Bob Lee: Twice a week?

Zhongping Chen: Twice a week. For what?

Kent Lee: Probably more...

Bob Lee: Sometimes shopping, maybe more, three, four times maybe. Used to play ping pong and I'm now coming in the evening to sing, like go shopping sometimes and get haircut but still... pretty much keep in touch with the Chinese here.

Zhongping Chen: So, Mr. Lee you are in the same frequency?

Kent Lee: Probably not as much. But you know, it's pretty close. About twice a week, I would say.

Zhongping Chen: So you are the same? You came together.

Kent Lee: That's much more than my used to. When I was in younger day, I hardly came down.

Sabrina Lee: When his father was here. We don't, never come down Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? Never?

Kent Lee: But after I retire, I had more time so I'm more involved with the Chinese community. Come down more often now.

Zhongping Chen: I see. Ya so, that's the problem, we try to get more young people into the project. Even this association...

Bob Lee: Hard to find people right now. Young people...

Sabrina Lee: No time... they have to have lot of time or you retire and you get enough time...

Zhongping Chen: So where is your family living in the city? Which part?

Kent Lee: In Saanich.

Zhongping Chen: Saanich, East Saanich?

Kent Lee: Ya, east.

Zhongping Chen: So you take like 20 minutes to drive here?

Kent Lee: Mhm.

Sabrina Lee: Only about 15.

Kent Lee: See when I first came to Canada, all the people live locally near Chinatown. That's in 1959 when I first came to Canada and there were lots of old people, single male at that time. They didn't have family, so the old men would be sitting around in Chinatown, a lot of old men sitting around there.

Bob Lee: So different.

Kent Lee: But now, I mean after they were gone, nobody live down Chinatown anymore.

Bob Lee: Even when I came over and—

Kent Lee: Ya you were living here for a while.

Bob Lee: Ya I lived in Chinatown for three years. In those days, the white kids can call us Chink.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Bob Lee: Chink is like... you know... Only Chinese people they know about is Mao Zedong and then it's Bruce Lee. It's two people.

Zhongping Chen: Like this kind of racist discrimination, when did you think it disappeared?

Bob Lee: 90's I would say.

Kent Lee: It's not too bad, you know. When I—

Bob Lee: It's getting better and better and then in 1990's I felt a lot better. Even in the 80's, I worked in the restaurant, I still felt it.

Kent Lee: But I more or less grew up here, I don't feel that much discrimination. This was hard times but I don't feel too... you know.

Bob Lee: I had some people tell me go back to China, like you know, many times.

Zhongping Chen: In the restaurant?

Bob Lee: Not really. Simple, just say like I go for garage sale and then try to bargain with people. Ah [They would say:] “come on, go back to China.” You know, that kind of stuff, you know... it’s in their brain.

Kent Lee: Well there are just odd people like that you can’t avoid. No matter what, even today.

Zhongping Chen: But you mean from 1990’s it became much better.

Bob Lee: Oh, a lot better. You can feel it, you know like the people’s perception changing, you know, towards Chinese and then in the late 90’s they changed again. They started to be jealous of Chinese people.

Kent Lee: Because they have money.

Bob Lee: They do well, you know ...

Sabrina Lee: We get Chinese mayor and all that. They look up to you.

Bob Lee: [For] people from Hong Kong, they drive fancy cars and like right now people from Mainland China to Vancouver, you know, they buy the expensive houses.

Zhongping Chen: Apart from this kind of discrimination, in other aspects did you see what was the major change from the 1950’s?

Bob Lee: Like in the 1950’s there were a lot of older people in Chinatown. They were sitting around on the benches, and people walking by, and pointing their finger, this is who and he is whom...

Zhongping Chen: They knew everybody.

Kent Lee: Knew everybody then.

Bob Lee: This is whose husband and that is whose...

Zhongping Chen: When did these older folks gradually become less?

Bob Lee: 80's.

Kent Lee: Actually, earlier I would say in the 70's they all disappeared.

Bob Lee: Late 70's.

Zhongping Chen: And so what other kind of changes did you find? Actually, I found one change is there are a lot of non-Chinese stores in Chinatown. When did that happen?

Bob Lee: The white people started to get into Chinatown to do business.

Zhongping Chen: When did that happen?

Bob Lee: Late 90's I would say.

Kent Lee: See, When I first came here, three streets were in Chinatown. Lower part of Pandora considered Chinatown and this portion is considered Chinatown. Now reduced to just one street.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, originally it was much bigger.

Kent Lee: Much bigger then.

Zhongping Chen: I see. So, on these streets there were mostly Chinese residents.

Kent Lee: All Chinese stores.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, stores. So they gradually disappeared?

Kent Lee: People don't live there anymore, I mean move out of Chinatown...

Bob Lee: Business needs people to support and if the population move out then business is going to have a hard time.

Zhongping Chen: Did local Chinese population decrease? Or just move out?

Kent Lee: They just move out of Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: Just moved out, not necessarily decreased. Like the membership of this association, can you see the increase or decrease in the past 20 years?

Kent Lee: Probably increase because there're more activities right now than before. Before, just a building, hardly anybody comes down here because nothing to attract them to come.

Bob Lee: His father used to walking on the street and see everybody and ask for donations once. Because we don't have money for the associations, we need money. It was really hard.

Zhongping Chen: When was this building built?

Bob Lee: 1911.

Kent Lee: One hundred years old.

Zhongping Chen: So, how did they collect money?

Kent Lee: All by donations.

Zhongping Chen: Donations from members.

So how often do you come to Chinatown? Where are you living in the city?

Lai Kuen Lee: West Saanich.

Zhongping Chen: West Saanich? That's far away from Chinatown...

Kent Lee: That's by Wal-Mart there.

Sabrina Lee: Not very far, all about 15 minutes.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, you drive? I see. How often do you come to Chinatown?

Lai Kuen Lee: One week? Two times, three times.

Zhongping Chen: Two to three times.

Lai Kuen Lee: Just for mahjong.

Zhongping Chen: Apart from playing mahjong, what else are you doing...?

Lai Kuen Lee: Usually go into Chinatown, buy vegetables.

Bob Lee: Shopping.

Zhongping Chen: Shopping, ok. So, Mr. Lee, where are you living right now in the city? Which part?

Sabrina Lee: This part.

Bob Lee: Walking distance to here.

Zhongping Chen: So you come to Chinatown everyday?

Bob Lee: Oh, everyday.

Lai Kuen Lee: Everyday, everyday, he retired, you know.

Zhongping Chen: I see, everyday just come to this association or other places?

Sabrina Lee: He come to the store, talk to the store owners.

Kent Lee: All his friends are in Chinatown. He knew everybody in Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: Which store did you meet most people?

Bob Lee: Every store.

Kent Lee: Every store, even restaurant—

Bob Lee: He's a rat in Chinatown.

Kent Lee: He's been here long enough.

Charles Yang: Come down to chit chat.

Lai Kuen Lee: Different societies in Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: Can you think of other changes here?

Bob Lee: I mean Chinatown is getting more people to here ya, especially Caucasians—

Zhongping Chen: It's more crowded.

Bob Lee: Ya, more crowded. Especially on Saturday and Sunday. Used to be here and you can't see anybody on Sundays.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Bob Lee: Ya, at the time when I came here if you ran around Chinatown with a rifle, you couldn't snipe many people. You couldn't kill anyone.

Zhongping Chen: Probably at that time people went to churches on Sundays.

Bob Lee: Not allowed to shopping on Sunday. But in Chinatown you could open, always open.

Kent Lee: That is back in the 60's.

Bob Lee: It was still open then.

Zhongping Chen: But still very few people here.

Bob Lee: No people came down here.

Zhongping Chen: But why didn't the local Chinese come—

Kent Lee: Because at that time there's no dim sum for one thing.

Zhongping Chen: So the Chinese would do shopping only on Saturday? They would not come on Sunday?

Bob Lee: Ya, it's funny I don't know why but it was really quiet on Sundays.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, that's surprising.

Bob Lee: And Chinatown is more beautiful compared to used to be.

Zhongping Chen: You mean it got new buildings?

Bob Lee: Buildings, streets and cleaner. You can be comfortable at Chinatown, not like before.

Zhongping Chen: What other changes can you think about?

Bob Lee: And the buildings, the old buildings are being renewed and renovated. There are more people now and it's more prosperous than before.

Zhongping Chen: So these people are not only Chinese, but also Caucasians?

Bob Lee: Lots of Caucasian people come down to Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: For shopping or just fun...?

Bob Lee: For shopping—

Sabrina Lee: Even shopping and grocery shopping.

Bob Lee: For lunch.

Kent Lee: Or business, there's a lot of Caucasian business there now, not just Chinese business.

Bob Lee: You go to Fan Tan Alley. They all Caucasian shops there.

Zhongping Chen: So what kind of problems do you find in Chinatown? I mean today, like downtown usually has problems.

Bob Lee: I think it's pretty good except graffiti's.

Zhongping Chen: So, are these mostly done by Chinese or non-Chinese?

Kent and Bob Lee: Non- Chinese.

Bob Lee: Right? I think the biggest problem right now is—

Kent Lee: There used to be those... those homeless people. It's much better now.

Bob Lee: I don't see any problems.

Kent Lee: It's all good.

Zhongping Chen: For Chinatown, do you think... what kind of activities the government could actually do better for Chinatown?

Kent Lee: I think they need to put a cultural centre in Victoria because I have been to most cities you know, even in Winnipeg, Calgary, they all have a cultural centre and yet Victoria, the oldest Chinatown doesn't have it. No facilities like that.

Zhongping Chen: Ya, you are right. This actually is good idea. Probably we can jointly push for that. Apart from that, how can the University of Victoria do better for the local Chinese community?

Bob Lee: See they used to, you know, in the badminton club, they have 50 members. They allow 10% from the communities, right? So you can have 5 people to play there. But later on, you know...

Zhongping Chen: They closed the club?

Bob Lee: They closed. You have to be with the university in order to play over there. I know that because it cost money to there, right? On the other hand, it doesn't matter if those five people go there or not, you still spend so much electricity, whatever right? It doesn't cost them anything to allow the people from the community to join in.

Zhongping Chen: Did you ever go to university, like for fun or something?

Lai Kuen Lee: No, my boy went to university for school before but I did not go...

Zhongping Chen: Never been there, ok. I have tried to help local Chinese to write their family history. We could organize this kind of workshop free for local Chinese. We could even find students to help you, free. Also, we can give

you some lectures about local Chinese history here. I'm not sure whether this kind of activities will be welcome.

Bob Lee: I don't know.

Zhongping Chen: Like in this association, how many people would be interested in family history?

Kent Lee: It's hard to say.

Zhongping Chen: For your relationship with China, Mr. Lee, in your case, how often do you visit China? Do you still visit your homeland of your family?

Kent Lee: There's no set schedule. But for the past few years, like in three years we've went to China twice. In the last three years.

Zhongping Chen: Which year was that? Can you remember?

Kent Lee: 2008 and last year, we went in 2010.

Zhongping Chen: So just for travel or for visiting family members?

Kent Lee: Sightseeing basically. We don't have many family members in China now.

Zhongping Chen: How many Lees in Shuilou township now?

Kent Lee: When we visited our village there were hardly anybody there because everybody left the country. Basically empty. I'm not kidding. There's hardly anybody in the village.

Zhongping Chen: Left for Canada, United States...?

Bob Lee: All over the world.

Zhongping Chen: What people—

Kent Lee: All the houses just locked up and no one live in it. Empty houses.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, most houses are empty.

Kent Lee: Including our own.

Zhongping Chen: You have house there? But you never use it.

Bob Lee: They're from a big family.

Zhongping Chen: Do you rent it out?

Sabrina Lee: No.

Kent Lee: It's just the ancestor's home basically. That is the only reason we saved it.

Zhongping Chen: Did you entrust somebody to take care of the house—

Kent Lee: Ya, there's neighbors who take care it.

Zhongping Chen: That's interesting.

Bob Lee: Taishan is a very special place. Like, right now as a city they calling it, I think has about 600,000 people, I'm not sure. But in the world, the population from Taishan county, I think probably at least 8 million people.

Zhongping Chen: That's interesting. So in your case, how often do you visit China?

Bob Lee: I didn't go back there for 10 years.

Zhongping Chen: Do you still have relatives there?

Bob Lee: I do, I have a sister.

Zhongping Chen: So you still have close relatives there.

Bob Lee: Just my sister. She's retired now.

Zhongping Chen: By the way, did you ever visit your homeland of your family in China? You came from Hong Kong directly.

Lai Kuen Lee: Yes.

Bob Lee: How many times? When?

Lai Kuen Lee: Last year, and couple years ago, maybe five years.

Bob Lee: How many times have you gone back in total?

Lai Kuen Lee: Been back to the homeland about twice and Hong Kong about every 3 years.

Zhongping Chen: Mr. Lee, how often do you go back to China? To Zengcheng.

Lit Fung Lee: Two times.

Zhongping Chen: Two times. Which years were that? Can you remember?

Lit Fung Lee: Can't remember.

Zhongping Chen: Ms. Lee did you go there to China together with him?

Yuk Wah Lee: Ya.

Zhongping Chen: Can you remember which years did you go back?

Kent Lee: 2009.

Zhongping Chen: In this association, do you have any documents? Do you want to share these documents with us?

Bob Lee: Basically there isn't anything special. Mostly just associational certificates and badges.

Zhongping Chen: How many? How many are you able to find?

Bob Lee: Even finding them, they may not be useful.

Zhongping Chen: To us, they are very useful.

Bob Lee: Almost every association probably has similar certificates and badges. If you go to the CCBA and find theirs, it would probably have more representational value.

Zhongping Chen: But because this is a lineage, a surname association and that is a community association, so it's not the same.

Bob Lee: We could have a meeting and discuss this issue.