

Jooksings in China: Dan Lee (Part 1)

Dan Lee: Out of curiosity, how many jooksings are here in the room?

[Many hands raised in the audience.]

Lee: Now, how many of you have actually been to Taishan?

[Fewer hands raised.]

Lee: That's pretty good. Now what about Zhaoqing? Any of those?

Audience member: One here.

Lee: A jooksing is a hollow piece of bamboo.

[Audience laughter]

Lee: I like to think it's a term of respect and admiration.

[Audience laughter]

Lee: But the—

Audience member 2: I could only wish!

Lee: Yeah. Could only wish. But Zhaoqing doesn't sound too good to me either.

[Audience laughter]

Lee: That's that knotty little thing right there. [Points with laser pointer at the node between segments of bamboo.] And I'll have to let somebody else explain the significance of what that means.

Anyway, that was my starter here. Usually these types of talks are referred to as finding your roots. For the Chinese community, you know, you can go into Google and find examples and videos of people who've gone to China finding, you know, where they were from, their ancestors' villages and so on. I'm in the 27th generation of Lees. Although both of my parents were born in Toishan, my ancestors have been in this country for over 100 years. Father arrived here at the age of 10 back in 1921, accompanied by his aunt and uncle. My mom arrived in 1941, and I'm a native Washingtonian, having been born nearby here on North Capitol Street and growing up in the 900 block of Massachusetts Avenue. There are a couple people in this room that we've—you know—known since we were kids. So our roots go back quite a ways. On the, uh, my mom's side, according to the immigration files, my mother's father was born in Seattle, Washington in 1887. Uh, I take that with a little grain of salt. I've chased every jurisdiction in Washington state trying to find a birth certificate, and they said, Washington state was a hick state at the time.

[Audience laughter]

Lee: They didn't have any records—very poor recordkeeping, most people were born at home, and very few people got registered. So, that birth is a little bit debatable. When he came back into the—"back"—into the country in 1912, what got him in was a schoolteacher went down, had a picture of the class, and said, "this little boy here is this man." And then there was a guy in the local government that said, "I didn't know the kid, but I've known the father forever, and he's been talking about him for 20-plus years." So that's how he got back in. My mom married my—let's see, grandfather...grandfather...according to government records I've got my hands on, he did live in various places in Pennsylvania and ended up in the Pittsburgh area. Mom married my father in the mid-1930s and came in '41. On the Lee side of the family, the archive says that I've got a great-great-great-grandfather that was alive here in 1862, again, that's kind of debatable because it doesn't match what I know of the family genealogy. You know, later on, there's a lot of Lees in the Washington area. So, you know, I've got some stuff with me. I didn't bring it. We do have a tree that goes back about a thousand years.

So, moving on here, as I—let's see. Where am I...it's ok.

Up through the '70s I think and partially into the '80s, you could say that Taishan was the ancestral home for about 70-80 percent of the overseas Chinese. That's an old term that used to refer to people like us. You could go to Europe, you could go to Australia, you could go to Vietnam, almost anyplace, and they came from Taishan.

[Shows map of Chinese provinces with Guangdong province circled.] Taishan is a county in Guangdong province. That's that province that's closest to Hong Kong and Macau. Every 3 years, the Lee Association, of which we have a branch here in the Washington area, goes back to Taishan for a meeting. That's where I met—because of that, that's how I met Helen and Rita. Some of the relatives have been saying for a number of years if I went on this trip, they'd make sure I got taken around, shown—got into the house and so forth. Otherwise, I wouldn't have understood a word of it. And I kid you not.

[Shows map of Taishan and neighboring provinces.] There's a little ambiguity when you say Taishan. Taishan is actually that red area there, where the dot is in the red area is in the local dialect is Hoishan. I'll explain that in a minute. I flew by myself into what used to be called Canton, now Guangzhou. Some of the people that travel on these things use it as an opportunity to do some sightseeing around the rest of China, or go down to Hong Kong, you know, before or after. I didn't do that. I just flew directly into Canton and I was there by

myself for about a day but I'd been there a couple times already so I was very comfortable making arrangements with the Landmark Hotel Canton. And then I spent a day wandering around. I went and saw a memorial to Sun Yat-sen, I saw the Chin family compound, and I saw this huge Canton tower that, you know, towers over everything.

You can see Hong Kong in the lower right, Macau in the bottom center, Taishan to the left, and Guangzhou up to the top there. Also, this particular Lee Association meeting, for some reason, they split it up this time. Zhongshan, which is the Mandarin term for Sun Yat-sen, we started there and then the second half of the convention went down to Taishan.

I'm going to be drifting back and forth on these names because you know, there's the names that I grew up with, there's the names that were more common, and then there's what's currently used. Guangdong province also used to be called Canton. Guangzhou [pronounces like gong-jao] is the name of the capital of the province. In Hoisan-wa it's called Guangzhou [pronounces like gong-joo]. Spelled—pronounced with an H. The counties in the province—whoops—they're grouped into prefectures and Jiangmen, however that's pronounced, is the prefecture. Whoops, I keep getting ahead of myself. The county—Taishan is actually a county, but you can also say it's a city and the terms are kind of ambiguous. If you Google it, it'll say it's a city-county. So, I don't know. Taishan is the—from what I've seen—it's the Mandarin way of saying it. Toishan is the Cantonese way of saying it, and Hoisan with an H is the way the locals say it. You know, take it with a grain of salt. If you're looking in the immigration records, the ship arrival documents, you'll see that Xinning or Sunning, spelled with an S, in many of the documents. And then the city is Hoisan [slide reads Taicheng]. And I'll get into that a little bit more.

Again, the red area—red-orange area—is the county, and what we speak is sometimes referred to as Sze Yap or four county. It's also referred to as Taishanese or Hoisan or Hoisan-wa.

If you google Taishan on Google Maps you'll get this image here, but this is only a part of the county. This is the original—this is where the city is, on the north side or the right side of the river. And over the—when I came in, my previous trip, I came in on a bus from Canton and came in along this upper portion—and I'll show you a little more of that—and then, but here looks like it's—you know—last 10, 20, 30 years is this here. And then, below the river is some villages that I'll get into in a little more detail as we go through this thing.

Down here, if any of you have relatives that came from something called Fei Yue 49, that's that area that's developed over on the right.

My brother-in-law left there when he was 13. He has no idea where to find his village. I'm not knocking him, I'm just saying, you know, he grew up as a kid, he left it, you know, left at an early age.

Later on—here's another one of the county. Later on, let me see, Hoisan is up in here. Rita is going to talk about the village right down in here. And then Macau is—I think Macau is over on the far right bottom.

This is another scene from downtown. This is the original city area and everything else used to be rural. Back in 2007 most of this stuff down below here was just very rural.

There's a couple shots—going to come through these real quick. That's the main bus station. There's a local bus station that I arrived in by bus from Canton. On the right, we couldn't find a cab so we caught a city bus and found our way to our hotel. These couple shots here—just going to show you a little bit of the city going in. See if it comes up. These are just kind of 3 short videos, if they come up, please. As you look down the side street you'll see there's actually some pretty big buildings in there. That's all that shot shows. And it's typical of a lot of the [unintelligible] countries, you'll see stores on the bottom level.

We're not going to have too many videos.

[Chinese audio on the video clip of the view from the bus as it enters Taicheng.]

Lee: The videos here I'm showing were taken back either in 2007 or 2008. What you'll see is a mixture of 2007 pictures, some pictures I borrowed from a relative, and some more recent [unintelligible].

[Video in Taicheng.]

Lee: In the 2007 trip I stayed in this hotel you see on the left. And then on the right, we had a meal. You don't go for dim sum in China. You go to yum cha, which means 'drink tea' and you eat cha no which is tea and food. In recent years here all I hear is 'dim sum' but when I went back to Hong Kong they did use the 'yum cha' as the term.

You're gonna have [unintelligible]. I'm gonna be showing you some pictures. I have—I'm going to be using this with some relatives, so that's why some of these slides are going to be repeats. But this slide here, my aunt's oldest sister lives on the second floor of this building and there's a paint store down on the bottom, but you can kind of see a little architecture. And as we go through this thing, you'll see that there's modern buildings and new buildings. Back in 1934, part of the family went back there, and the—I believe they were in this end building. In 2007 three of the buildings were linked together as a video

arcade and now it's just a convenience store on the bottom. You know, there was a three-story—you can see the three-story—buildings with three stories. I have a debate every couple of months about whether it was a two-story building she lived in or a two...

This is a lake behind there. When my aunt who's a phi beta kappa Ph. D. professor emeritus went there, she talked to the local folks. They couldn't find her house, partially because they changed the name of the street. Her memory as a 13-year-old, versus now, they tried telling her, 'maybe it was in the rice paddy behind there.' It's now a lake.

[Audience laughter.]

Lee: This is along that same street, coming back toward my hotel. It's just to give you some views. And coming back in this direction, about two blocks from the first shop is an arcade right there, and I went in there and at the jewelry counter I couldn't talk to the girls in there because they spoke Mandarin. You're getting a lot of people there that have immigrated from other parts of China. Of course, you recognize the building in the middle. [Photo of a KFC.]

[Audience laughter.]

Lee: You recognize the building here. [Photo of a McDonalds.] There's three, four, however many McDonalds there.

You may have heard the Chinese saying, it's a famous proverb that illustrates the fame of Guangdong food: "Live in Hangzhou, marry in Suzhou, dine in Guangzhou, and die in Luzhou." It has to do with— Hangzhou is a very pretty place. The women in Suzhou are very nice, and their language, and it's a very pleasant experience. The best food is in Guangdong province in Hong Kong. But if you're, uh...and then the best wood is in that last place.

[Audience laughter.]

Lee: That's one of my cousins sitting there. [Photo of Ronald McDonald, with a man in the background.]

[Audience laughter.]

Lee: Seriously, and the food here, and in Hong Kong are very similar, I find, to what you find in the Cantonese restaurants here in the local area. On one of my trips in Shanghai, I just had to get away from the folks, and experiment and check out and, you know, make a scientific comparison of Chinese McDonalds and US McDonalds.

Here's a couple more street scenes. On the bottom right, there's a building with a big bell on it. One of my cousins was born right above the B, so that's another reason I had to include some of these slides. Here's a pedestrian street. If you look up any pictures of Taishan you'll see this picture or something very similar. There's one of the relatives buying some nuts from this lady. A small vehicle here. This was—at the end of that street there's a very, very, very upscale shopping mall. This looked like a jewelry store being dedicated. We just happened to be strolling by this spot and it looks like an M up at the top.