

Jooksings in China: Dan Lee (Part 2)

Dan Lee: What I'm going to show you in this is three—I'm going to concentrate primarily on three villages: the one where my mother was born in 1915, the one she lived in starting in the 1920s, and there's gonna be the hotel, and then I'm gonna move on to our village where she and my sister lived in the 1930s, and then I'll end with the Lee Association ceremonies.

[Shows a Chinese map of Taishan county.] This map here, there's a copy in the back if you want to look at it. If you want a copy of it, get hold of me. It's the only map in existence I know of that has their villages actually on it. You can't read it here. There's a very close hold on maps in China that have any meaning. If you look at a Google Map, you'll see that all the place names and the roads are all shifted off to one side. By law, they can't provide—they won't allow satellite images that are accurate.

[Audience laughter]

Lee: [Shows a map of Taishan.] This is primarily, what you're seeing here, is the downtown is right here, and this is just that small area of the county. I saw a figure of a million people, but I don't—I think it may be the county. If you Google Taishan, you'll actually get the image of this. And again, I came in eleven years ago on this route [points to north end of Taishan], and this was all rural [points to development on the south end of Taishan]. This blue area, some sort of industrial complex, is new [points to large buildings near the middle of Taishan], and this was all dirt [points to area south of Taishan] when I went back in through here. And this is what I referred to as 49 [points to developed area to the southeast of Taishan].

[Shows a map of the south half of Taishan.] We're going to show you here, I'm going to show you down here at the bottom is where my mother was born. In the 1920s, her grandfather moved and created a village of six buildings up in here, and then we'll move over to here, which is where the Lee villages are. There's Lee villages all over the place but the ones we're interested in are here, then the area down in here where there's some gravesites now.

[Shows another map.] These buildings are all less than 10 years old. Driving—driving to this village here, back in '07, it was like trying to drive through a trash dump where there'd been truck loads of dirt and everything was kind of raw.

[Shows a map of Cheng Sa Han.] That's the village. I'll show you a couple pictures.

[Shows three photos of buildings labeled "Mother's Birthplace."]
Usually you get to these places, most of the people have moved into the cities where they actually have an apartment with a living room, a kitchen, bedrooms, and so on. If you go out into the villages, basically you've got a house, you've got two rooms in it, and a center room. To the left—top left picture—is my aunt and uncle, cousin, who were standing in front of a building that's got the village name on it. You get in there [points to alley between buildings in another picture], the space in between buildings is very narrow. It's like an—you know, barely an arm's length between them. [Points to another picture of a building.] This house hasn't been lived in, that I know of, since the—well, the family moved out of it in the 1920s and the front of the building is collapsed. But the walls are a couple feet thick, and each family—you could have two families in a house. You could have two brothers' families, one on each side, with two cousins. If you go in about where I'm standing, there's a doorway, there's a cooking area, and then right here is a doorway going into one side of the building. And then there's a doorway that goes into the center room. You'll see more of that later on as I go.

PowerPoint is taking a break. Let's see, here we go.

[Shows a video of the interior of a house.] This here will give you a better view. I've included some video because I think that gives you a better understanding, rather than give you a bunch of single shots. We're going to a nearby—relative's nearby house. You can see the space between is very narrow. If you understand Hoisan-wa then you'll catch a few words.

Video speaker 1: Uh, alright.

Video speaker 2: We're going into a house?

Video speaker 1: Yeah.

Lee: One bedroom, one wife. That guy's a lawyer.

Video speaker 3: [Speaking Hoisan-wa.] Great-grandfather.

Video speaker 4: Great-grandfather. Yeah.

Video speaker 3: [Speaking Hoisan-wa.] The grandfather and the younger brother.

Video speaker 2: You understand English?

Lee: 10 years.

Video speaker 5: [Speaking Hoisan-wa.]

Video speaker 3: Ten. Ten. [Unintelligible] great-grandfather and then the highest one, the grandfather the younger brother.

Video speaker 4: Ok.

Video speaker 2: You know what I mean now?

Video speaker 1: Yeah.

Video speaker 2: Ok.

Lee (on video): Now, great-grandmother Ji Ping--

Video speaker 3: Huh?

Lee (on video): Grandma. Great-grandmother

Video speaker 3: [speaking Hoisan-wa]

Lee: There's something on the ground. I think they used to drag rice, grains, or something.

Video speaker 3: [speaking Hoisan-wa] [Mimes stomping on floor.]

Video speaker 4: Oh! Oh, oh, oh. Ok.

Video speaker 3: [speaking Hoisan-wa]

Video speaker 4: [speaking Hoisan-wa]

Lee: [Shows a map of Taishan.] Ok. Let's see. This is—ok. I think—basically I already discussed it earlier. We were down here to the bottom, and then we're going to move up into this area right here south of the river.

[Shows a map of Leung Gong.] That's—that is—there are 6 buildings there that were built in the 1920s. Great-great-grandfather actually tore down half of that village because the feng shui wasn't right. He rebuilt it. These buildings here were just being built when I was here in the mid-2000s, and this area here was all dirt, and down in here was all dirt. So, we had a hard time finding it.

[Shows two pictures of his mother's childhood home.] Here's—actually, these are pretty substantial-looking buildings. I'll sell it to you as a fixer-upper.

[audience laughter]

Lee: [Shows an interior picture.] This is not the area—not the units that we lived in, my ancestors lived in. I think I took these at an adjacent unit.

[Shows another interior picture.] Again, you know, you've got a small room on one side for a family.

[Shows another interior picture.] This must be the other side.

[Shows a picture of a cooking area.] I'm just guessing. Now, the cooking areas, there's usually two in each house, made of brick.

[Shows a picture of a well outside.] We've got a well, and beyond my aunt you can see it's still kind of rural back there.

[Shows a picture of a high-rise building.] This is going up as I was there.

[Shows a map of the Taishan area, with Leung Gong and the hotel marked.] The interesting thing was, when I went back this time, I did have an objective of finding my relatives' villages. I ended up in a hotel right here. I've been kidding folks that this is Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago.

[audience laughter]

Lee: You'll see the resemblance. He might have an investment there. And just a block and a half away is where my mother grew up as a kid. So, I thought that was great at the time.

[Shows two pictures of the Country Garden Hotel.] Don't you guys see the resemblance?

[Shows a picture of the hotel interior.] Here's the inside. This is just one wing of the place.

[Shows a picture of buildings across from the hotel.] This is looking across the street from the hotel. And if I went down the street to the left about half a block and turn right, [shows picture of the view north of the hotel] this is what I would see. All those buildings—well, the buildings that were across from the hotel, those buildings down there, all that high-rise has been constructed in the last 10 years. The buildings that are lower level were, you know, in progress at the time.

[Shows picture labeled "mother's village behind building."] My mother's village is behind this—these few buildings right here on the corner and this is as close as I could get to it. I could never get to it, even when you've got a car and you try coming in from another direction. I think the village is abandoned, but back in there, you can just barely see a tree—a house top there. So, I was a little disappointed there.

[Shows map of Taishan labeled "south of river."] Now we're going to go from the far left and we're going to go over to this area here. Back in '07 you basically came out of this [Chinese]—this bridge here, and just follow this road down about 5 minutes, less than 10, and you got

to several villages here. All of these were those streets that were not there back then. So, there have been a lot of changes.

[Shows a picture of high-rise buildings.] This—and these are not abandoned. These are not empty buildings. I've been in China in places where, you know, you've got buildings like this and there's nobody in it.

[Shows another picture of high-rise buildings.] I mean that's—parts of China are really modern and parts of it are still pretty rural.

[Shows another city view of high-rise buildings.] I mean that could be New York City. That could be Brooklyn.

[Shows a map labeled "Lee Villages."] This is the area that Helen and I are focusing in on. Helen has a relative in this one. She calls it hoeng [Chinese] which translates as 'old village.' Cheng Fat Toon is right here in the middle. I'll show you a couple pictures. And then the one on the right is Cheng San Toon. And we can get into debates about what the proper names are, or proper spellings. It's the best I can do for you.

[Shows a picture of Cheng Fat Toon.] This is that village that was in the middle, Cheng Fat Toon. The words—you get into this space of the traditional Chinese and the current, simplified Chinese, and the things all look different.

[Shows a map of Lee Villages.] Again, old village on the left, and the Cheng Fat Toon in the middle.

[Shows a picture of a grassy area with a village in the background.] Here's one view of that village that goes back—I think this one—this picture's about 10 years old.

[Shows a picture of buildings.] This picture was a year and a half ago. And this one here, I think will give you a little better perspective. Let's see if this thing takes. I hope it does. Come on. We're just going to pan the village. I think a video will give you a little bit better view.

[Shows a video of Cheng Fat Toon.] Look at the high-rise and the radio tower. There are still some people living in these.

Video speaker: [speaking Hoisan-wa]

Lee: [laughs] Somebody I know, if you follow the Chinese.

[Shows a picture of a sign which reads "Chan Xi Chang Sheng Cun."] This is the one—my father's village. Chan Xi is the first couple of words. That's the geographic area we're in, and for many of the Chinese in this area, their roots are from Chan Xi. Chang Sheng Cun is the actual village name in this case.

[Shows a map of the Lee Villages.] Again, that's—we're down here right now. They've actually cut the road that we came on before. You've got to use these more modern highways.

[Shows a picture of a grassy area with a village in the background.] There's another view, a shot from the ground.

[Shows a couple of pictures of a village.] Let's see, what am I doing here?

[Shows a video of Cheng Sen Toon.] The two villages—the one in the middle and the one from the right are actually very close. If any of you go up the silver fountain the owner has a house that's up that, the long way. My mom's house is the one that's in the dead center right now and new stuff has been put in there, infiltrated. Let's see here. Whoops. I'm just going to skip this here.

[Shows a picture of 3 men standing in front of a house.] I'm standing in front of that house. Notice how narrow the walkway is in between buildings.

[Shows a picture of a house and narrow alley.] Occasionally you'll run into a relative and somebody will say, "such-and-such lived across from your mother or your grandmother." Well, that's how close you are and if your house is further back you can't even get a decent picture of the house. You might get a picture of the doorway.

Let's see. Oops, we're going to pause for a second here. Come on.

What we're going to show in the next couple of slides is a—give you an inside view and then we're toward the end here.

Please. We'll now lose it.

My Chinese is the Hoisan dialect. I've forgotten—If I ever even knew it. I've forgotten most of it, my vocabulary is horrible and I don't understand the Chinese culture, to be honest with you, so I'm definitely a jooksing.

[audience laughter]

Lee: If you go to China—now I have managed to use the language a little bit, in Canton. I've used it in Hoisan. I've used it in Hong Kong. A lot of the older generations of people born in Hong Kong trace back to here, but you can't go to China unless you've got a good escort or relative that will, you know, make all the arrangements, handle the transportation, you know, do all the discussion. You're just totally out of it.

[Shows a picture of the center common room in a house.] This one shows—let's see, back up here, no.

[Shows a picture of a house and narrow alley.] If you go into that house, through the doorway, this is my mom's side.

[Shows a picture of the center room in a house.] From her side, you can see the center room is in there. There's some calendars on the wall. That's that pink and green stuff, and beyond it is the doorway to the other side. From where I'm standing, there's actually a cooking area and there's an entrance to our side of the house.

[Shows a picture of a cooking area.] That was what she cooked on.

Audience member: That's the kitchen.

Lee: [Shows a picture of the common room.] This is, I think in the main room. There's a picture—one looking one direction, one looking the other.

[Shows a picture of pictures on the wall.] Many of the pictures you'll see on the walls are pictures that are sent back from States, and so I recognize some of those pictures in our own photo album.

[Shows a picture of a family room.] That's the other side of the house where my dad's cousin's family lived. Ours is this side. Somebody dug a hole in the floor for some reason and nobody filled it back in.

[audience laughter]

Lee: [Shows an exterior photo of a well.] There's a well.

[Shows pictures of a procession walking up a mountain to tombs in the side of a hill.] Hong-san, you walk into the mountain, or wherever, go visit your ancestor's gravesite. You go back to Hong-san. This is—my brother took this picture back in '92. This is just one of many shots. I won't belabor it.

[Shows a picture of a gravesite.] I believe this is one of our ancestors, our great-grandfather, perhaps.

[Shows a picture of another gravesite.] Since then, the highways were coming through, and so some of us had to kick in some money to relocate the bones and do it up, halfway decent. On the day I got to this thing, it was pouring rain and nobody had cleared the path up. It's a bit of a hill. It was a miserable day. We got stuck in the mud.

[Shows a picture of a Lee Association meeting.] Lee Association—this picture was taken in Cheng-San.

[Shows a map of Taishan county.] One of the places we stopped while we were there—one of the towns had a museum to overseas Chinese and they had many of the pictures that you would see at, you know, anyplace. You know, the railroad workers and so on. Taishan, this thing's on the floor. It has a prominent spot there.

[Shows a city view.] This is in the city. We were getting ready to pay our respects there.

[Shows another city view and a crowd of dragon dancers out of costume.] My uncle actually taught school in that building back in the late '40s. We had all the folks with the dragon dancers.

[Shows a picture of a table with roast pig.] The dead pigs. The roast pig here tastes very good. You can actually get the roast pig here at New Kam Fong on University Boulevard. Their pig is pretty darn close to this. Cantonese food here and over there, I find fairly similar.

[Shows a picture of Lee Ancestral Hall with dragon dancers.] Here they're going to pay respects. They're bowing, and then they went to that other village, Cheng Fat Toon. I think Helen tells me it's a Lee Ancestral Hall.

[Shows a picture inside Lee Ancestral Hall.] Inside, Basically, it's a room. There's a little—I don't know what you call it, an altar or something in front. In the far right there's some pictures. I believe 8th generation.

[Shows another picture of a table with roast pig.] We went through the same thing with the pigs and the candles and the bowing and all that stuff.

[Shows a photo of 4 portraits hanging on a wall.] I think is someplace about 8th generation. I don't know. A couple more, and we're almost done.

[Shows a video of walking to a Lee ancestor gravesite.] I think everybody got on a bus and we went to a third location and here we kind of walked up a little hill. I think the fact that there's actually a hill in that picture is more coincidental. As you drive around China you're going to find—you're going to see little spots on the side of the roadway where there's, you know, gravesites.

[Shows another video of walking to a Lee ancestor gravesite.] So the first picture we're coming up halfway, going up to the top corner there. Let's see. Oops. Not responding. I want to just get through three more of these. Come on. It says the PowerPoint is not responding. Doesn't do you a lot of good if you keep clicking it. Ah, here we go.

[Shows video of a crowd and roast pig at a gravesite.] We're up at that summit.

[Speaking in Hoisan-wa]

Lee: [Shows a picture of Dan Lee cutting a roast pig.] Let's see, this picture, somebody grabbed me and stuck a Chinese meat cleaver in my hand and [unintelligible] my pig. After this was over, we actually cut up these pigs and everybody had a chance to eat it. Sometimes what you do is you take it back to, you know, it's just a—well, for my ancestors' thing we just poured a little box of stuff but it was pouring rain so we took it back to the—normally you take it back to your house.

Let's see, this one here, I thought I changed this heading on this thing, but I guess it didn't take, apparently. Come on, do something please. We're just about done.

[Shows a video of exploding firecrackers.] Here was the conclusion of that episode up on that hillside. Those were real firecrackers there.

[Speaking in Hoisan-wa]

Lee: Ok, we're at the hotel in Cheng-San. We had a banquet, we had a banquet as part of the convention in Taishan, and then we had one for the local folks.

[Shows a group photo.] Anyway, there's a picture there and that concludes my portion.

[applause]