In Memory of Baptist Minister Rev Shau Yan Lee*

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Dr. Shau Yan Lee [李守仁] was a Baptist minister, teacher, and scholar. He worked in China and America for more than 40 years. His text books and audio materials on Chinese language studies were widely used in America and Canada during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. He was the first few persons to use phonograph recording to record Chinese dialects and English-Chinese vocabulary. His two academic books *How to win the Chinese* (1944) and *China has a ten thousand mile spiritual wall* (1945) attracted a lot of attention in the 1940s. According to the WorldCat, his first book had three reprints between 1944 and 1946 and was held by twenty six libraries worldwide. His second book had four reprints in 1945 and was held by twenty four libraries worldwide. The latter was also gifted and received by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (See Proulx, 2006). In this memoir we will give a brief account of Lee’s education background, work experience, academic publishing, and contributions to Chinese linguistics. We will also give a brief account of his families. This account is based on sourced materials and completed to remember his contribution to society. Any information without citation is provided by his two youngest daughters Ding Jung Lee (李定中) and To Jung Lee (李道中).

*Keywords:* Shau Yan Lee, missionary, Chinese language teaching, family history

1. Lee’s Education Background and Working Experience

Dr Shau Yan Lee was born at Shangjiao [上角], Heyuan [河源] county town, Canton [广东] province on 27 April 1888 and died in New York on the 6 December 1969.

Lee graduated from Canton Graves Theological Seminary, which was established by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1890. He was J R Saunders’ student. Lee became a co-worker of J R Saunders after his graduation (Lee, 1944, p. 9). He learnt English in China (possibly at Canton Graves Theological Seminary) for four years and four years at Sacramento College, America (Lee, 1944, p. 9).

The earliest photo found from Lee’s youth was taken in 1905. Written alongside the picture are a few Chinese characters: “17岁的守仁 ‘东山’, (17 years old Shau Yan, Dongshan)”. Dongshan was his first name used as a kid.

*Acknowledgements:* I would like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to my mother To Jung Lee, my aunt Ding Jung Lee and her daughter Kimmie Lee Leung for their information and support.

WU Yunji [伍云姬], Ph.D., a retired academic staff from Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne, is Dr. Lee’s granddaughter.
Lee started his Christian work in 1914. His career can be divided into two time periods: The years 1914-29 (in China) (Lee, 1944, p. 10) and the years 1929-68 (in America). As far as we know he had worked in the following places in China:

1. Graves Theological Seminary as J R Saunders’ co-worker and a teacher (see Lee, 1944, page 9);
2. Huizhou, Canton, as a Baptist minister (See Canton Gazetteer Editing Committee, 2002, p. 381);
3. Tung Shek Church (established in 1906) as a Baptist minister.

Lee went to America twice. On his first attempt in 1923 he was unable to get in. On 10 April 1929, “Sacramento Baptist Church sent Brother M. Lee to China to call me to pastor their church, especially to urge me to erect a church building so that the Chinese might have a certain place to worship God and spread the Gospel” (Lee, 1944, p. 135). Lee arrived in San Francisco, California on 15 June 1929 and started his work in Sacramento on 1 July. He also took charge of Chinese missions in Courtland City, Locke, Walnut Grove, Isleton, and Fresno City. A property at 431 M Street, Sacramento, California was purchased for the church five years after Lee arrived in America (Lee, 1944, pp. 135, 138). According to Proulx (2006), Lee worked “in Northern California, and later in Mississippi and Texas”. He “established a mission at Phoenix, Arizona, then was transferred to Norfolk, Virginia after working in Texas”.

Figure 1. Lee, 17 years old (Year 1905).

Figure 2. Lee in America (Date unknown).
In Lee’s book (1944, pp. 136-145) twelve photos recorded his activities during this period. There were six images with Lee in the pictures. One of them is presented below (p. 143):

![Figure 3. Chinese Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia (October, 1941). The photo includes Lee (second from right), Lee’s daughter (wearing graduation cap, the first on left) and Lee’s son (standing behind his sister).](image)

Some traces of Lee’s activities have been found from American Newspapers in the 1930s and 40s. For example, in the *El Paso Herald-Post* (20 April 1939), there was an announcement entitled “Baptist women meet tomorrow at First Church” indicating that “Dr Shau Yan Lee, Baptist Chinese missionary from the state headquarters at Atlanta, will … [words cannot be read] for more than 150 women”. In the *El Paso Herald-Post* (16 November 1939), there was an announcement “Chinese Missionary takes charge of El Paso Center. Rev. Shau Yan Lee will direct activity at Baptist Mission”. This article included his photograph. In the *San Antonio* (20 March 1946) there was the following announcement “Dr. Shau Yan Lee, Chinese minister and missionary to the Chinese in this country who spoken last week at the Chinese Baptist Church, will return for morning and evening services Sunday, the Rev. G. Lawrence Stanley, pastor, announced Monday. The Chinese missionary has been stationed in the US for 17 years.”

For one and a half years Lee worked at churches and Sunday schools with American and “travelled through forty of the forty-eight states, visiting the Chinese Churches and Sunday schools” (Lee, 1944, p. 12).

In his first book *How to win the Chinese* we found where he lived at that time, 308 E. Freemason St, Norfolk, and a photo of the church where he worked in Sacramento. We also found from the cover of *A Biography of Dr. Sparks W. Melton* (See Lumpkin, 1963) a photo of the church in Virginia where Lee worked.

### 2. Lee’s Academic Publications

In the 1940s, as mentioned before, Lee published two books *How to win the Chinese* (1944) and *China has a ten thousand mile spiritual wall* (1945). The first book was introduced by Sparks W Melton and J R Saunders. The second was introduced by J R Saunders.

The aim of *How to win the Chinese* “emphasises how to win Chinese to Jesus Christ” (Lee, 1944, p. 11). There are seven chapters in this book, the first four chapters describe Chinese religion and doctrine … through the doctrine you may understand why China, a peaceable nation, though not prepared for war, has been fighting for eight years and will overcome her enemies. Chapter five “The plan of soul winning” discussed “how to spread the
Gospel among the Chinese, how to organize Sunday schools and how to win them to Jesus”. Chapter six “Another Pentecost movement” discusses why and how the renewed study of the experience of Pentecost is needed. Chapter seven “How to create the new century” discussed how to inherit material and spiritual properties of predecessors to create a new century.

Melton states “The message of the Gospel to the Chinese Nation should be ‘We want you to meet One who, through the centuries, you have been seeking… In this age of low morals we could read the story of Chinese loyalty to tradition and the highest conception of ethics and learn something which would be of profit to us’. It is a good book and I commend it” (Lee, 1944, p. 8).

Saunders states “I have had the pleasure of reading How to win the Chinese. I am glad to commend it to the careful reading of God’s people in the United States and elsewhere. The book is not only most interesting, but most profitable” (Lee, 1944, p. 9).

The reason for writing the book China has a ten thousand mile spiritual wall in both Chinese and English was “to accord with the request of Chinese and English friends… the book will give Chinese in America a better understanding of Chinese precious things, and also help American friends to know more the spirit of resistance and reconstructions of my country. We hope the book will result in a present time and post-war cooperation between China and America” (Lee, 1945, pp. 9-10).

Everyone knows China has a ten thousand wall but not everyone knows about the spiritual wall which “was built from four kinds of beautiful morals. It is not of earth, sand, stone and brick, but propriety, righteousness, purity, shame” (Lee, 1945, page 10). In this book the concept of these four Chinese morals are discussed in detail.

These two books were well received, “after only six months since its publication, orders have come in from seventeen states, Honolulu and Canada… The Chinese consulate at Houston, Texas, has sent announcements to all Chinese newspapers in the USA” (Lee, 1946 (44), p. 10).

3. Lee’s Contributions to Chinese Linguistics

Lee was not only involved in activities as a Baptist minister but also in language education. In 1950, Lee came back to America from Canada to search for teaching materials. He selected appropriate materials for Chinese children and families, edited them into books, and made phonograph recordings as well. He established his own company name YAN (taken from his first name) SHENG (means “sound”) Publishing company located at 425 Sterling place Brooklyn 38 NY, America. Over a period of ten years he published a number of text books and phonograph recordings (see Lee, 1962 (1952), back cover).
The following advisement printed on the back cover of *Records for English-Chinese conversation* (Lee, 1962, 1952) provides some information about the books Lee published between 1951 and 1962. We have no information about works completed after 1962.
(1) *An English-Chinese vocabulary in sound* [有声的英汉字汇留声片课本] (1955) containing twenty-three phonograph recordings. ‘This is the first this kind of work in the world … It will help people know the correct pronunciation of 7000 words. (See preface)

The aims of this book and its recordings is to help Chinese learn English, make a living, undertake education, and with daily communication. It also aims to help western people and overseas born Chinese learn Chinese. “We now enter a new epoch of having an outstanding feature in world history, that is, a newly invented record of an English-Chinese vocabulary in sound” (See preface).

This book had 136 pages containing 7000 words. The English in the recordings was read by Miss Marcie Morton, a well-known English teacher. Both Mandarin and Cantonese were read by Lee. One edition was read in English and had twenty-three phonograph recordings and another edition was read in both English and Mandarin (or Cantonese) and had fifty-three phonograph recordings.

(2) *Records for English-Chinese conversation* [英汉对照留声片日用会话] (1952, 1962) containing five volumes. Each lesson has two phonograph recordings in Mandarin-English and Cantonese-English respectively.

(3) *A Chinese English text in sound on the topic of citizenship* [入籍问题留声片汉英对照课本] (publication date unknown) aiming at assisting people to apply for American citizenship. It contains four phonograph recordings.

(4) *Records for Chinese* [中国语文留声片课本] (1951) containing eight volumes. The phonograph recordings include recorded sound in Mandarin (pronounced by Qitan Liu Zhang), Cantonese (by Shao Yan Lee), Haka (by Mujie Liang Xu), See-yip dialects (by Jintao Xu Lee) and English (by A Smith). Each dialect has thirty-four phonograph recordings.

(5) *China has a ten thousand mile spiritual wall* [无形之万里长城] (Chinese-English) containing six phonograph recordings, publication date unknown.

Lee’s text books and recordings were widely used by Sunday schools where people were learning Chinese. The most important contribution he made, from a linguistics perspective, was he recorded the pronunciations of Chinese, not only the standard Chinese at that time but also a number of dialects spoken in the 50th and 60th. I believe these materials were the earliest oral recordings in Chinese linguistic literature.

4. Lee’s Families

In this section, we will give a brief accounts to Lee’s ancestors, as well as his own family members.

Li’s family was Hakka and once lived in a Hakka style square compound with more than one hundred residents from the Lee clan. Lee’s family went to Fujian [福建] province before they came to Heyuan, Canton. There is no information about when and why the Lee family moved from Gansu to Canton via Fujian.

Lee’s father Ruzhou Lee [李儒舟] was a *Suijinshi* [岁进士] (a high ranking scholar in the Qing Dynasty). He took part in the burning of opium stocks in Humen [虎门] Canton when he was an officer there.

Ruzhou Lee built a house next to his family’s residence after he received the title of *Suijinshi*, named ‘The New House of Six Lees [李六合新屋]’ because he had six sons. Lee was the youngest child with five brothers and three sisters.
Lee’s wife, Wa Yin Yet Lee [李叶华英] was a traditional Hakka girl from Lee’s hometown in Heyuan, Canton. She was born on 27 August 1897, and died in San Francisco on 30 March 1982. She received no education at all in her youth but managed to read the Bible in her later life. The couple might have been married in 1917, if not earlier, since their first daughter was born in 1918. They had a western wedding in a church which was very unusual at that time in China.

*Figure 7. Mrs. Lee (time and place unknown).*

Lee and Mr.s Lee had seven children, two sons and five daughters. Two family photos are presented below. One was taken in 1928, a few months before Lee left China for America. At that time his wife was pregnant.

*Figure 8. Lee and Mrs. Lee with their six children in Guangzhou (1928).*
After Lee left for America, Mrs. Lee took all the responsibilities of looking after seven children. The children received their primary school education at Pui Ching [培正] primary school. After primary school the boys were sent to Pui Ying [培英] Boys High and the girls were sent to Pui To [陪道] Girls High. These three schools were established by the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the war time (1937-1945), Mrs. Lee and her children suffered greatly. They were forced to flee for safety.

In 1937 when the war had just started, the family took a boat from Guangzhou to Heyuan, their hometown. At that time the youngest daughter was only eight years old. They were attacked by Japanese aircraft when they were getting into a boat. The old son Jop Jung Lee [李执中] was so shocked by the noises and flares of bombs he became ill. When the boat reached Huizhou, half way to Heyuan, he was sent to church and then hospital, but died soon after. He was only fifteen.

Mrs. Lee then took the six children to her mother who was a widow. They stayed at Heyuan for one year and after this the family went to Hong Kong when Mrs. Lee learnt the children’s schools, Pui Ying and Pui To had moved to Hong Kong from Guangzhou. Later, the oldest daughter Wai Jung Lee [李惠中] went to study at Hong Kong Lingnan University. She was the only female student in the department of Biology.

The death of Jop Jung Lee made Lee decide to bring some of his children to the USA. In the early summer of 1940 See Jung (Philip) Lee [李时中], who was seventeen years old and Jee Jung (Margaret) Lee [李致中], who was about sixteen years old, left Hong Kong for America to join their father. The following photo was taken in Hong Kong before their departure.
It was not easy for Philip Lee and Margaret Lee to enter the USA, according to Larisa Proulx’s interview with Margaret in 2006. Their father had to first produce two white witnesses to verify his status as a minister and that he had “performed no labour in the past twelve months”. Next, Margaret and her brother had to independently prove to immigration officials that they were really the minor children of Rev Shau Yan Lee in order to land. During the medical exam doctors noted Margaret had curly hair which led them believe she might not be Chinese. As a result she was put in the European woman’s dormitory. Her immigration file shows she was asked a total of seventy-four questions about her family background and village life, including all past residences and schools attended by her siblings. After the examination they finally met their father in San Francisco.

In early December of 1941 the Japanese attacked Hong Kong. Mrs. Lee had to take her four children to Heyuan again. At that time their oldest daughter Wai Jung Lee had graduated from Lingnan University. She found a job as a school teacher at Heyuan but contracted cancer and died soon after on 18 March 1942 at a hospital run by German missionaries.

Not long after Wai Jung Lee’s death their second daughter Wang Jung Lee began to study at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Mrs. Lee took her two youngest daughters to Pingshi, Canton to continue their study. The Lee family had had financial problems since the war started. The money Lee sent from America did not reach China. Lee was able to ask people from the Red Cross to bring some money to his family but this was not a regular occurrence. Mrs. Lee needed to support the family by doing some labour work such as building sheds and hammering stones. Because of the financial problems, their two youngest daughters had to give up the chance to study at university and went to Canton Teachers Collage instead. No school fees were required there.

When the war ended Mrs. Lee took her two daughters back to Guangzhou. The sixth daughter Ding Jung Lee went to Hong Kong after her marriage. Mrs. Lee’s youngest daughter To Jung Lee went to study at the Guangzhou Conservatory of Music as soon as she returned to Guangzhou. From the time Mrs. Lee came back from Heyuan she lived in Guangzhou with her mother and her youngest daughter To Jung Lee before she got married to Mengxiong Wu. In 1955 after her mother died Mrs. Lee left China. She went to Hong Kong and Macao to stay with her daughters before she went to the USA to join her husband.

Figure 11. Mrs. Lee with her youngest daughter’s family in Wuhan (1951). Wu Yunji, Wu Yunqing [伍云青], Lee To Jung (Li Daozhong in Pinyin), Mrs. Lee and Wu Mengxiong [伍梦熊].
Mrs. Lee arrived in America in 1958 after almost thirty years separated from her husband. She was not only greeted by family members but also some government officers at airport. The following photo was published in a local newspaper.

*Figure 12.* Mrs. Lee and her son Philip Lee’s family in America (1959).

Not long after Mrs. Lee arrived in USA, her two daughters in Macao and Hong Kong also went to America to join the family.
By the 1960’s the only child left behind in China was her youngest daughter To Jung Lee. To Jung Lee and her family suffered a lot during the Cultural Revolution due to her overseas connections and she was forced to stop contacting her family from 1964. Lee never met his youngest daughter after he left for America when she was only three days old.

In 1974 Margaret Lee and her husband travelled to China. They managed to meet their sister, brother-in-law and their two younger children briefly in Guangzhou.

In 1981 To Jung Lee finally got a visa to visit America. At that time Mrs. Lee had been diagnosed cancer. She was looked after by To Jung Lee for six months before she died in 1982. To Jung Lee was also able to see her sisters (but not her brother due to political reasons) when she visited her mother.
Today, the three daughters of Dr. Lee and Mrs. Lee in the above photo are still alive. Margaret Lee and Ding Jung Lee are in America and To Jung Lee is in China.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Dr. Lee had a full life and was successful in his career. He was also a lucky man married a strong, selfless and caring wife who raised their seven children alone under extremely difficult circumstances. Dr. Shau Yan Lee will be remembered as a passionate and dedicated Baptist minister, teacher, and scholar.

**References**

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