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LESLIE CHIN

Immigrant from China

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Interviewed by Stephen S. Knipp

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Leslie ChinStephen S. Knipp, *Interviewer*  
6012 Lakehurst Drive  
Baltimore, Md. 21210

301-377-9150

K: This is an interview with Mr. Leslie Chin, conducted on November 30, 1977 in Mr. Chin's office in Kenwood Senior High School in Baltimore County. The article and book referred to in the interview is "The History of Chinese-Americans in Baltimore", a Bicentennial project written by Mr. Chin.

PAUSE

G: I came to this country in 1941 and I came in- you notice my date of birth is 1928. Actually that was in the old days. That was discrimination. The Chinese cannot come to the United States unless the father is living in the United States. So I came to the United States as a brother of my father. So I claimed my grandfather as father.

K: So, in other words, the man you refer to in your article as your grandfather -?

G: Is my grandfather. On my paper- that's why my last name is Chin. Chin is not my real name. Hom Kim Kay is my real name and I lived in village in the old country (near) (\*) Canton. A small village, and I grew up there. And another thing too, I was adopted by the family because my foster father passed away, and in the Old Country the woman -ah- the oldest son in the family has to have a son to carry on the name. So my father- foster father - had 2 girls so they re-assigned- they adopted me as a son to carry on the name of Hom. During the Second World War they decided to send me over to the United States so I came over as what you may call refugee with a badge on my back and front to say who I am and where I am supposed to be going. (Laughs)

K: I want to get into that later.-

G: So I came into the United States, and I had all those problems of Interrogation. You had to memorize a book about inch thick.

K: What is the Interrogation Booklet that you mention?

G: Interrogation Booklet is - Every Chinese, before Second World War come to the United States had to go through the same process. They had to memorize their whole history and situation and terrain of the village. Now a lot of Chinese come to the United States do not (come) as the true family. True Sons. The problem is, they can go buy a paper name from (an)other family that was in the United States. In order for him to come in he had to memorize the book (that) consists of the whole family history- of the paper- the paper son. The whole family history. Memorize everything. From how many steps to your front door? How many doors? Which is front door? On the left side? North side? north west

\* Where clarification is necessary, due to words or syllables left out I have added words or syllables in parenthesis.

and East and so on. In other words, that test was ridiculous, right now.

K: Was this a requirement of the United States government?

C: Right. Because through the interrogation they asked you "what's your name?" and you answer your paper name. "How old are you?" and you answer them the age and then if you look like the age, but you repeat "I am this age." "And where are you from? \* Who is your mother? - What is your mother's name?, and where is your Grandmother on your mother's side?, and grandmothers name on your father's side?, and who did marry your Grandmother?" Those questions are ridiculous now in fact, but it is true.

K: Do you still have that--?

C: No, I regret it, I threw it away, but if you have any Chinese that came over before, on or before Second World War, they had to go through all this. And that was the biggest problem. Now, if you failed, let's say a question- couple of questions you failed (to) answer correctly and then they ship you back. In other words, you failed examination- the interrogation- and you failed- (you) go back to the Old Country.

K: Where did you take the exam? Did you take the exams in China?

C: No, the interrogation is (given) right in that quarantine. They have quite a few places. In Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Boston. I came through Boston. It's a little island, and I remember that time, in 41. I had to go through all of the procedure. If you passed, then they sent for the family to pick you up.

K: You say that you were born in a village outside of Canton?

C: Canton is about 80 miles. Toison is a small district.

K: How would you spell that?

C: Well, there are so many different ways of spelling it. Not sure. The simplest way is T-O-I- I think I have it in the book.

K: O.K.

C: <sup>different</sup> T-H-A-N. There are so many pronunciations.

K: You were living with your family in that village?

C: I lived with my foster mother and the two sisters. They were grown up at the time, and one of them got married, and I had another sister. And when I came over, possibly the paper age around 12 or 13- the real age I would say-- actually I don't even know how old I am, the real age, because, number one, I remember when they adopted me something

about that situation when they came to a strange village, but I don't speak to my mother, because if I do that, I will make her lose face. I would start up something that I shouldn't and I'd probably get spanking and so on, so I'm smart enough to avoid those things (laughs). To keep it quiet- let's put it that way.

K: Can you explain the difference between the paper age and your real age?

G: The ~~paper~~<sup>paper</sup> age, in other words, you see, (when) the foster father pass away on the Hom side, my father, first father, pass away. He not come in ( to US), so I had to claim my grandfather as father. Now the age. It might just be a year's difference. This I never do (know). But I'm pretty close to that age. Maybe a couple of years difference.

K: Your grandfather came over here first? Is that correct?

G: Yes. Now my grandfather. Now this is another true story, too. My grandfather came over as what we call wetback. My grandfather jumped ship, jumped ship- I don't know. I never did ask him when he was alive. He probably wouldn't tell me the true story. But I heard from my grandmother that my (grand)father came to the United States around 1900. He was to be - he worked on the Sampan. He worked - sea, in the village area where we lived a river come up and he's the one that had to go down to the riverbank when any ship come in and the winds kind of died down. The sails no workable, and the current keep going down- out. The ship has to come in, so they need men to pull the ship upstream. My grandfather had that job. So he's the one- I'm glad you mentioned that to me- that I remember. I asked when he was young what he does, and that's what he told me. So he has a hard job, and he has a chance to come to the United States and he borrows money from some relative in the village. Now he come over, and how he jumped ship and or where he come to, the same process as I have, I don't know. He got in. When he came in- he should use name of HOM, but he didn't use it because at that time the translator's name was Chin, and so if he (my grandfather) say Hom, which is not a close relative, or even a distant relative, so since he found out that man, the translator was (named) Chin, so when he asked "What's your name?" so he (my grandfather) said "my name is Chin so and so". So in other words. "I'm Chin, you're Chin too" he says "Give me a little more favoritism" that kind of thing. So I think that's why my grandmother told me how come the name Chin. So he came over, and back in the old days, when the Chinese come over, they used to have laundry. That's the only thing he can do.

K: Why was that?

G: Well, one thing is that back at the turn of the century- when the Chinese come in- not at the turn of the century, around mid 1800-1860's, when they built the railroad. When the pioneers moved West, and they used to have a lot of dirty laundry, and the Chinese, of

course they can't speak the language so the only thing they can do is whatever the other people don't want to do so the cowboys and whatever they have, and the pioneers get the laundry and give it to them and wash it and iron it and they do a good job, so they got the job as laundrymen. They don't need much money soon as they get off the boat, and they don't have money from relatives, and (they) start building that kind of business. A laundry- that's how it was.

In my research, in my book I mention that they even sent the laundry back to Hong Kong to wash (laugh). Took a half year before they got (their) laundry, and even before that they even sent the laundry to the ship and they come down to South America and come back to New York and wash. It was faster than to go (a)cross with wagon train.

K: Isn't that amazing.

C: So, that's the story. I don't know how true.

K: Why did your grandfather come to Baltimore?

C: Again, after, (he) come to Baltimore because relatives in Baltimore. Friends in Baltimore. So they usually bring their own relatives. Matter of fact, right here in Baltimore (he) had quite a few relatives. Hom family. Just like Jimmy Wu and Wu family. They are all related family. And we still do bring the family over. Distant relatives, like sister family.

K: I see. Your grandfather was not what is called in the books a sojourner, then? He didn't go back and forth?

C: The sojourner is the one who just comes in to make the money. Yes he is. He make the money. He went back (to the ) Old Country. He went back a few times, I would say.

Then another interesting thing about this. Why do Chinese always have sons come to the United States? OK. This is what happens. When they go back to the Old Country, even if they have a girl, and when they come back to the United States. They stay now until they have a child, either boy or girl, and then come back. Then through the interrogation they ask. "What do you have, a son (or) daughter?" They always say, "I have one son, twin sons, two sons" depending on the calendar you have. Or you can come back a few months later and say "I have another son" So you can go on one trip and you might have three. (laughs). But no girls. He would say, "How come Chinese always have son, but no girl?" Sometimes do claim one or two girls, but girls not valuable at that time. They have sons come over, and they can sell the paper- paper sons. Sell to somebody else for maybe a hundred dollars a year. So (if he is) 10 years old- a thousand dollars. And so on. Fifteen years old, the paper worth \$ 1500.

K: And then they get the paper sons over?

C: Get the paper sons over, and you sell the paper for that price. That's

how they make the money. And when they come over the first year, they have to work and pay off the debt. The only way to pay off the debt is to go right to work, soon as they get off the boat. That's it, go right to work, and where?, in the laundry. Now the chop suey place, and the other things, that come a little later, after the railroad. Soon as the railroad stopped, and they stopped paying them, and they staid where-ever they stopped at the city or town. They stayed there and have money, and they opened a chop suey place or opened a laundry. They formed a little community they called Chinatown. That's how they started. And also the people, back in 1860- 1870, after the railroad finished in 1870, a lot of them went into farming. They went down to Louisiana, Mississippi and so on, farming, and while doing that, they also had fishing. They became fishermen. So today, if you go down to New Orleans, Florida, along the Gulf Coast, you will find the Chinese fishermen. And if you go to the western part- New Mexico, Texas, (on the) Mississippi side you will find the Chinese have laundry and chop suey place or restaurant. Past St. Louis on the other side, (they) usually have groceries, laundries, and restaurants. I have a brother-in-law who has grocery down in Tucson, Arizona. His father- grandfather- helped build the railroad, and his father actually is born (in) Tucson, Arizona. He is actually second (or) third generation. He went back to the Old Country in the 30's and married my sister- older sister. Then after Second World War- during the second world war he (was) in the service, and after the war he went back and brought my sister over. After the Second World War, a lot of the Chinese bringing their families.

K: It became a lot easier then?

C: Easier, yes. Only after the Second World War. But before that, it was very hard- impossible.

K: Why were you selected to come over?

C: I didn't selected to come over. The family felt that as the only son in the family, and the war was getting pretty hot. The Japanese (were) invading China- pretty hot. The best (thing) to do is send the sons over. At the same time a lot of the Chinese went back to the Old Country and found that the war's getting too vigorous and too hot too handle and came back to United States. There is one family- Bock Ark family- another Chinese community member- he passed away a couple of years ago. His wife (is) still living.

K: Bock Ark?

C: Bock Ark- I think I mentioned (them) in the book. Now his family. Mrs. Bock Ark told me that she knew the Chinese War was going on in the 30's. She wanted to take the whole family- at that time she had 4 or 5 kids. They had a restaurant and they made a few dollars and they wanted to go back to (the) Old Country. But her husband said, "No, you can't because the war is too dangerous. A lot of people are coming back." So they stay(ed) and their sons is all finished and have their Phd- doctor degree in very different field- in Science. And even (their) daughter have her doctor degree. So if they take their children back to

the Old Country, they probably won't have the opportunity.

K: When you came over, you planned to stay for good?

C: Actually, I didn't plan to stay for good. When you are that young a age- around 10. When I came over, and my grandfather had a hard time, but during the Second world War, then I went to school. First I went to school, elementary school, but the war is taking all the young men from Chinese restaurants. All the young men went into the service, but nobody worked in the kitchen. So at that time, although I'm 11, 12, 13, I had to go into the kitchen. I kind of withdrew from school and went to work in kitchen for my uncle. My uncle had a restaurant at Eutaw and Fayette Streets. And I stayed there- they had no way to find me. Back in those days, they (had) people trace the children under a certain age. You had to go to school, and no way, because I was hidden in the kitchen (laughs), doing all this cooking. And I didn't go to school (again) until after Second World War, in 1946.

K: Then you went to an American type--?

C: Yes, and I went to school, and they put me in Junior High School- 9th grade. Chronological age. They put me in the 9th grade. At that time I realized that my age is starting to change too, so they put me in that 9th grade. Then I went into the 10th grade at City College. But in the 11th grade, around 1948, one of my uncles- when I say uncle, I mean relative, wanted to go back to Old Country- to visit relatives, and they needed someone to work in the kitchen, so I say, "Well., OK, I'll volunteer." So (in the ) 11th grade, I only took 2 courses. Math and English, and I took the courses in the morning at 8 o'clock, and I had to go to work at 11 o'clock. That would be open the restaurant in the kitchen 11 o'clock, and I work(ed) until next morning 3 o'clock for (a) whole year.

Most of the time, I slept through the classes (laughs) or didn't make it at all, so attendance was very poor at that time. I didn't go to bed until around 4 and had to get up maybe around 7 or 7:30- get into class around 8. So that year I went (into) 11th grade and on the 12th grade I had to make up all the courses that were required for graduation. I graduated in 49, and then I went to Hopkins, McCoy College, and Maryland Institute.

One reason I went to college is because the class I was in, everybody went to college except me and I felt terrible. So during the summer, I search and find the best I can fit into, and I went to Art School, and then to academic courses. I took it at McCoy College, and the practical course down at Maryland Institute. In the morning from 8 to 3 down at the Institute and from 4 to 10 down at Hopkins everyday. So my first year was pretty rough. (laughs)

K: I can imagine.

C: But for 4 years. I can remember my first year, for both schools I only paid around \$600. per year. By the time I graduated in '53 it went up to almost (a) thousand. So that was a lot of difference.

K: Did you go to Chinese School when you were younger?

C: Yes, I went to a Chinese school. I think at about the age they adopt me. I think at about the age- maybe around 5 years old or 6 years old.

I was sent to a school. I remember I didn't ask how old I am at that time. I know I get a feeling that there is my foster mother there and I don't want to hurt her feelings. Even at that time, I can understand that and I just go along. The kids usually teased me as a stranger because the dialect I spoke at that time was entirely different from the village. So they kind of teased me. So that's one make me remember more about. I went- around in the 40's- to a school there. I l-earned the basic writing *and reading*

K: And did you continue in Chinese School in Baltimore?

G: No, I didn't have the chance. Since I came over, Lillian Kim, she was a youngster then, she came and took the newcomer to the church. So I went to the church for I don't know how long, maybe a year or so, and there I learned the ABC's in the *Church* Sunday School.

K: This is where you learned your English?

G: Right, the ABC- Sunday School.

K: In your home, when you first arrived in Baltimore, was any English spoken?

G: No. Since I arrived, I stayed with my uncle at the restaurant. The restaurant was called China Land. On the second floor. The kitchen is on the third floor. One section of the 3rd floor is the kitchen, and the other section, in front, is the living quarters. So I live in the 3rd floor. That's the reason the Board of Education couldn't find me. (Laughs)

K: You were behind the kitchen--

G: Until I volunteer, and came out after the Second World War, and went to school.

K: Going back to your trip over, what arrangements had to be made for your trip?

G: The arrangements. When I came out of Hong Kong. At that time the Japanese occupied large portion of the coastline, so when I came out, since ~~KKK~~ I live in village the Japanese had already bombed the town of Toishan City. Maybe. I don't know the number of population. It's considered the main city in that district. Well, anyway, they bombed. They do have (a) railroad in that city, and I did see the airplane come down, drop a bomb, go up and disappear. That's at the beginning. I don't remember what year, but I saw how the Japanese airplane came down, drop a bomb and go back out. For me, I had fear, but I kind of enjoyed watching it. I didn't know the difference at that time. Then a few years later, when they drop the bomb, the airplanes just go straight past the city- didn't come down at all, and the bombs just coming down like matchsticks, and more than previous year.

At that time, I think around '39 or '40, the Japanese (had) already occupied the coastline, so in order for me to come out (from) Hong



Hong. At that time it was- still is - British colony. It's a free port. So I had to come out (to) Hong Kong to get to United States. When I come out, I had to get on a sedan chair and kind of sneak out through the mountains and come out to the waterfront- and when I get to the waterfront, the ocean. That the first time I see ocean, and it's water. At that time I have no fear. I couldn't swim at that time. And I got on a small sampan with no sail, and it just float. I forget how long, but it's a long time, maybe two days. And I got out to Macao. Macao is Portugese colony.

When I come out, I come with group. A group of people. I don't remember now (how many). There (were) some young kids and some adults in there. But I don't remember. But when I get on the sampan, those adults put those youngsters down below, underneath, almost touch the water. The sampan down in the bottom has the water, and the kids stay down in that section, and the adults stay on top. They put boards on top, but between the boards (you could) see light coming through. When they served meal, they just picked the boards up and handed you the meal. While I'm coming out, I can hear the machine guns sound, like firecracer. Now I had no fear at that time, and I'm kind of curious - "What's going on?" I wanted to go up and see, but the adults (said) "Quiet kids, keep quiet." And they did keep quiet, and finally we did get out of Macao. We take a boat and went to--- (end of tape)

After I got to Hong Kong, that was around October- sum'ertime. And I came through. A boat come up and going past (the) northern part of Japan the Japanese dropped a couple of bombs (on the ) ship where I was coming over to Vancouver, Canada. And they dropped a couple of bombs, and I heard the bomb went off. There were quite a few youngster like my age also. We have little tags on the back and front telling who you are and where you going. In case you get lost. (laughs) Identification- name and so on. And the ship had one adult specially taking care of that group of youngsters. At that time of course I dont remember who was come with me and so on. I forgot even how many. I remember that group.

When I heard they dropped the bomb (it) sounded like somebody firing a gun and of course our age kind of curious about fishing, hunting whale and so on. We wanted to see if somebody was shooting the big whale. So we runned loose then. Finally the ship started listing, and (gestures) almost like a skateboard ring- kind of tilted. You can slide down. The kid(s) kind of enjoyed it too. (laughs). (The) adults come out and started putting lifesavers (on) the kids and grab us and put it on and that's it. And I saw the airplane coming down, and at that time (there was) no fear. I kind of enjoyed it. (laughs). If that bomb had dropped a little deeper, I might have had to swim all way over. (laughs)

Then after it happened, we went up and looked, and the hole was so big- bigger than two dining room tables. It went down for quite a few decks, and I heard the adults talking about how far it go down. If it go too far, it go to boiler room. Now back in those days they used coal, and they don't use oil. They don't have no oil at that time- use coal. The man down there had (to) shovel coal to make steam to travel.

So that's how I come over to the United States, and I got to Seattle

and I had to get on train, and again another adult took a group of people to Montreal.

I stayed in Montreal (with) relatives for a little while and I come to Boston. (I) had to go through the process- interrogation. I passed it and they let me out. Around February.

K: What year was this?

G: '41

K: This was before Pearl Harbor?

G: Before Pearl Harbor. Then I went to school. I went to school first and I met American friend. About the same age. Same class (in school). And since I'm a novelty at that time, I'm kinda enjoy it. (laughs) He took me to (his) family, and the family kind of liked me, and I liked the family. I enjoy it and so (they) become my second family.

K: These were Americans?

G: American family. They German. They lived around Clifton Park. That's how I started going to elementary school. Until all the young men went to war. Then I had to go to work in the kitchen. I drop from the elementary school and (I was a) drop out until the war's over. But meanwhile I still went back to see the family - American friend. They very nice. Their nam<sup>s</sup> Hobine (spelled out) and they (were) very, very nice. They (were) like mother (and) father to me.

K: That's wonderful.

G: And after the Second World War, I went back to school, and I went back to my grandfather's laundry which is not very far from Ma Hobine's place, Clifton Park. So I visited them. Finally my grandfather sold the laundry and he wanted to go back to Old Country right after the second world war. I wanted to go to school. He wanted me to go back to the Old Country, get married and have kids, and work in laundry and so on and so on.

K: In the Old Country?

G: In the Old Country. Went back to Old Country and get married and come back and then come back and work in laundry. I can't see myself in (those) shoe(s).

So I continue to go to school. On my own. I worked in restaurant on weekend, and while I went to college I stayed (with) the Hobines, too. I stayed there. Whenever I come in there, there's always a room, and when I'm hungry, there's always a plate on the table waiting for me. A room for me anytime I come in. I had a bed to lie down (on). So they were very, very nice to me. Like mother (and) father to me. And the boy's like (a) brother to me. We still like brothers, and I still visit the family. And Mom and Pop pass(ed) away a couple years ago.

K: Do you remember your first impressions of Baltimore and America as a kid?

C: At that time, Number 1, I kind of enjoyed, one, you had nice bed to lie down on, and there was plenty of food to eat. You had clothes to keep you warm. I kind of like it. I had shoes to put on. Otherwise, in old country I would probably run around half naked. (laughs). It's true. I told my kids, even though I'm 89 years old, I'm half naked running around the rice paddy. I kinda enjoy it.

K: What was the Chinese family structure <sup>in Baltimore</sup> when you arrived? Was it similar to the Old Country?

C: The family structure (was) the same. Yes, again, its the relatives. Remember, at that time there was only no more than a dozen family that had mother and father in the city, in this country. Only about a dozen family. the rest of them are male, and because of discrimination at that time, Chinese had no other entertainment except go down (to) Chinatown and make their own entertainment by gambling. That's how it's involved. Chinese gambled a lot because they had no other entertainment.

K: Was this cards and --?

C: Played cards and play mah jong and so on. All kinds of gambling type things. I don't care for gambling so my IQ on gambling is zero. (laughs)

K: What was the place of women in Chinese society in America? but there weren't that many, I guess?

C: The mother is usually the boss. It's amazing. Not like in the United States. The mother is the boss. <sup>Not</sup> Like the Godfather kind of thing, it's not, but they (are) hidden behind. They is smart. Chinese women very clever. They let the men think they are the boss. Actually, they behind everything. (laughs). They the ones that hold the family together. And of course, father had to go out and make the bacon and bring (it) home, and mother do the cooking.

K: In your article, you said your grandmother had said she would find the prettiest girl in the village for you. what did you mean by that?

C: Well, when I leave the Old Country, they always want their children-grandchildren come back and get married. That's one thing that they (do to) get the grandson to want to comeback. At that time, I was too young to actually understand what she meant.

K: Were marriages arranged?

C: Yes, marriages arranged (at) that time- even up till Second World War, after second world war. Matter of fact, they still doing it. (laughs) Can be arranged - yes. I'm still a bachelor, but I had a lot of relatives (who) arranged meeting of this nice girl - "Want to meet

her?" and so on and so on.

K: Who does this, the grandmother, or--?

G: Relatives. Father, mother, distant relatives - they all do.

K: And this still goes on?

G: They still do. There's no difference. But today both party(s) have (to) be satisfied. Compatible. Share the responsibilities. Not like in the old Country. "You have to marry my relative so and so." Can't do that anymore today, but you have to both sign permission.

K: Sign Permission?

G: Both permissions. Not signed, but agreement. Back in the old days, you had no choice. You marry so and so and that's it. But today the youngsters have a choice. "I'm not like that person." "OK, so I'll find you another one." That's what's today's policy. Keep trying (laughs). Keep trying on me. (laughs)

K: Do you recall what (was) the greatest adjustment you had to make when you came over?

G: Ah, the greatest adjustment is the language. I remember that. The problem of the language. And making friends. I remember that when I was little (I was) very very lonesome. And that's how I learned how to draw, (to) keep myself occupied. So I get involved in art because here you sit down, and you can't read their language, their books. You have very little of yours, so you pass time doing other things you are familiar with.

K: And you drew?

G: And I drew pictures. And I kind of successful in that so I keep working on it.

K: Did you run into prejudice as (a child)?

G: For me, when I was young, no, because, you see I met the Hobines and they took me (into the) family, so I never had that feeling. I never had that feeling, but when I talked to other people, they had, yes. (I) think prejudice is there and as I look into it, I can see. But from my personal experience, I know I didn't, even when I finished school.

Except one time, when I sign up the course for art education, the dean of the college asked me "when you finish this course here, you going to go back to Old Country and teach?" That's the only time I felt discrimination. Only time. No other time. And (even) then, in a way, I wasn't embarrassed, but I was kind of concerned, I think- what I going to be? Going back, maybe. I don't want to go back. That's the only

time for discrimination.

K: Was there an awareness when you were younger of the superior culture of the Chinese?

C: You mean?

K: It's a much older culture than our culture.

C: Do you mean, do I feel that way?

K: Yes.

C: No, no. I don't feel the superiority or inferiority aspect. No, when I (was) in school I had a lot of friends and I go to parties. The childhood experience with Hobines. I feel no discrimination. I even remember when Hobines have parties playing post office and so on. Little kids. The kids treat me like one of them. I never feel discrimination. Then when I start come out teaching, then I never feel that way, although the students I have may pronounce my name in other sounds- different way. (laughs). That you may consider discrimination. No, I don't think so. Maybe they want to learn my language and pronounce the word, the name, so. I feel that way.

K: Did you have any trouble getting adjusted to American food?

C: No. Matter of fact, I don't remember my adjustment at all. Anything. (laughs) Except one thing - cheese. I had a little hard time. I remember cheese. Back in the old days, in my uncle's restaurant, they had cheese hanging on top of the restaurant. You know the huge cheese hanging up? And I don't like the odor or fragrance of the cheese at that time. But I learned to eat it and like it.

K: Do the Chinese have cheese?

C: Not exactly. The kind of cheese we call bean cake- kind of cheese. But it's not cheese - bean cake. It doesn't have the fragrance or odor like a cheese.

K: When you were a child, did American celebrations such as Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July mean anything to you?

C: Yes, I remember really looking forward when I was a child to Thanksgiving, because Mom Hobine always had Thanksgiving and I loved pie. The pie, the fragrance, and the flavor, and the roast turkey stuffing. I never forget that Mom Hobine made the best roast turkey. Back in those days, we looked forward to turkey at Thanksgiving. I don't remember whether it's the same turkey they have save up until Christmas or not, but we do have turkey around Christmastime, too.

K: When did you realize that America was your home, or did this ever occur to you?

G: After I went to school. I finished high school and I realized that (was) the only way I could make it. And I don't think I want to go back to Old Country- work in rice paddies. Go into other kind of occupation. That's why I went to college. And since I finished high school I went to work down at Chevrolet Assembly plant. Right on Broening highway. Then I worked there and all I do was put 4 bolts in 4 nuts and tighten together.

Now that's all day, jumping into one car and out of another. All you do is put 4 bolts in and 4 nuts and tighten up with air gun, and by the end of the day I was dead tired. I got home so tired, and a ra would say, "What's the matter, son?" "I tired." "He said "Take off your T shirt (and) I'll give you an/ alcohol rub." I said, "No, I'll go to bed and rest." And the next day I'll go back and do those same things over again. I can't see myself for the rest of my life, working on the assembly line, doing the same thing. That's hard work- I appreciate education. (Laughs).

K: Yes, that's when you decided education was the thing? (when)  
You said (in your article) that you returned to China. Did you?

G: I took a trip around the world in 1969. I saved up some money and I decided I might take a trip around the world and see what happens. So I decided- to arrange for the passport, get on the plane by myself and flew around the world. I kind of enjoyed it. A little expensive, but I kind of enjoyed it, because when I get to a certain city if I like it I stay. All the sightseeing I can sign up for, and if I don't find anything I like, I decide (to) call the airport and arrange the flight to go out to another city. I kind of enjoy it.

K: Did you go back into China?

G: I couldn't (go) back at that time, in 1969. I stop at Hong Kong and I find my sister - the family - lived there at that time. They wanted come over (to) this country. So when I came back I started to work on the arrangement for (them to) come over. Sponsor them over.

K: How did you feel going back to a totally Chinese area?

G: I found that when I was a child pass(ing) through Hong Kong, it was entirely different than '69. Completely opposite. I couldn't believe how it developed. Such a tremendous change. A lot of people there. Over four million at that time and the building was all over the place. About 20 or 30 storey high, and the people all over the place. Even this past summer I went back Hong Kong to visit Hong Kong- my other relatives. It got worse. More people! (laughs). But this time I really enjoy it because this relative of mine took me all over the place where ordinary tourists don't go to, and if I go by myself, without relatives, I probably wouldn't see all those things. But they took me all over Hong Kong. the different islands, New Territories, and I taste their food, and I really love it. I had wonderful trip this past summer.

K: Good, good. Going back to your childhood, you did not work in your

grandfather's laundry, did you?

C: I helped out, during the Second World War, although I worked in the restaurant when the day I get off I go to visit my grandfather. At one time my grandfather did pull me out of the restaurant because the laundry was very busy. So he went back there and pulled me out of the restaurant, and I helped him in the laundry.

K: Who was working in the laundry?

C: Just my grandfather. By himself. He hired a colored lady to iron shirts, and I usually helped him to iron collar, starch the collar, and iron a few shirts, and so on.

K: Was there a difference in discipline for a young Chinese in America as against in China? was the discipline in the home different? Within the family?

C: Within the family, no different. The only difference is the discipline problem in the Old Country. Remember the male sojourners (are) out of the country. They (are) overseas. And the mother has to play mother and father part. So this is one problem that was entirely different. Now the family here, when you had mother and father in the family, the discipline had to be shared. Child behavior I'm sure would be entirely different- psychologically different.

Here then you had mother play both parts in the old country and you come over to this side and father had to play both parts. Mother had to play both both parts, mother, father, or for me, my grandfather had to play all those parts. Father, grandfather, (mother). It's hard for him. And the youngster's behavior problem different. I consider myself kind of rebelling against those philosophies.

K: Could you explain again his philosophies? (Your grandfather's)

C: Yes, his philosophy is that you come over, work, make the money, go home, marry, settle down. But my philosophy is to make something out of yourself. That's the reason I went to school. It's entirely different. His idea is still (the) Old Country idea. The young generation look different. They see, they go to school, and they see the thing different. They want to change it and I consider myself as part of it.

K: Did you say that your grandfather went back and stayed?

C: My grandfather never did went back. After he sold the laundry in the early 50's when I was in college and my grandmother passed away. So he just stay.

K: Where was your grandmother living?

C: In China. she couldn't come over. If she wanted to come over, she would have had to take out paper and go through same old routine. They can't

go home to Old Country and bring the wife over. Not until after Second World War. The only one who can bring the wife over is the one who has been in the service, as a GI. Then they can go, a lot of young, in the 20's and 30's after the Second World War, they had been in the service. They go back to ( the Old) Country and bring the wife over- no problem.

K: They came as war brides?

G: That's it. Like a citizen they got off the boat. No problem whatsoever. No interrogation. No routine.

K: Well, the interrogation stopped completely after the war (didn't it)?

G: After the Second World War. Right, and after that, in the 50's, they also checked on the paper sons. I became citizen in 60-61. Before that, in the 50's they (were) very strict. They checked on everyone to see whether you were genuine or paper son. Paper son go back to Old Country. Otherwise, you had to go through process and change. Now in the 50's, when Kennedy was in, I think that the law changed. That you can change your name from paper son back to genuine name. But nothing (else) change. So in the 60's I did. I changed back to my genuine name, Hom Kim Kay, the family (that) adopted me, from Leslie Chin. But they cannot change anything else, just the name. The age, birthday, and so on, they cannot change.

K: Well, what is your name now?

G: The reason that I still use Leslie Chin is because I have been using it in my field, my occupation, and if I change now, I kind of confuse things. So I kind of leave it alone. But in the legal field, I use the name Hom Kim Kay. For example, I took a trip out of the country I used Hom Kim Kay on the passport.

K: That's KIM KAY ( spelled out)?

G: KAY (spelled out) So I had to use that on my passport. As a matter of fact, this summer, I had some problems cashing American ( Express) checks. What I did wrong. I bought the travellers checks and used Leslie Chin's name. Then when I go over there I wanted to cash that. They wanted the passport. They say " How come the passport has different name?" Fortunately my relative knew the money exchanger. " That's OK." ( laughs) I went through. No problem. Otherwise I would ( have had) problems.

K: I'm sure that your driver's license says Leslie Chin, doesn't it?

G: Right. My license has that name, and of course social security number is the same.

K: Are there many of your friends over here that were paper sons?



C: Yes, I'm sure a lot of them, but they have changed to genuine. Since 1960 they have changed now.

K: Was it the kind of thing that you talked about beforehand, or you just kept very quiet?

C: At that time, you have to kept very quiet. But now I can talk more freely. I have nothing to fear. I have become a citizen and I am telling the truth. I have nothing to fear. At that time yes, they probably would say, "You paper son. You have no right to be here. You go back to Old Country. You don't mind to go back, but the problem is, how can I make a living over there? And all your friends are over here. When you do want to come back, the process, the procedure that evolve and you go through and all those. Very unsettled.

K: Just a quick thing on celebrations. When you were younger- the Chinese New Year. How did that differ in Baltimore from the Old Country?

C: In Old Country, the kids usually receive gifts from the adults, and the youngsters always looking forward to something. we all enjoy it. And they celebrate maybe 10 days or a couple weeks and the (have) all kinds of goodies to eat and gifts to receive. As a youngster you get a lot of those things. Now in this country I kinda missed out those things. But every year they do have a couple of days- especially on Sunday, to celebrate New Year, but not like in Old Country. Like whole week, Couple of weeks.

K: And also Ching Ming? ( A period of veneration of ancestors. Generally gifts and food are taken to the tombs or shrines of the ancestors)

C: Ching Ming. At the Easter Time. To visit. Similar to our Easter time.

K: How is that celebrated over here if the ancestors are not here?

C: We have- the Chinese have cemetery- couple of them. And we do, at Ching Ming---- (end of tape, not noticed)

Items discussed after tape ran out. The customs of Ching Ming are changing. People are not bringing food and gifts any more to the tombs, but are bringing plastic flowers and some real flowers. The custom used to be to take food out to the tomb, and then take it home to be eaten.

If there are no ancestors in this country, there is usually a shrine for the ancestors who are buried abroad.

There are 2 Chinese cemeteries in Baltimore. One at the end of North Avenue, and one out at Loudon Park cemetery

There was discussion of Jimmy Wu. He also was born in the Old Country and knows more about the local Chinese community than anyone else.

Jimmy Wu, as a youngster, took Leslie Chin to a department store to buy American clothes shortly after he arrived in Baltimore.

TIME INDEX

TIME

SUBJECT

Side 1

1	Introduction
2	Youth in China
3	Paper Sons
4	Interrogation Process
5	Ditto
6	Youth in China
7	Paper age, and grandfather's experience s
8	Grandfather youth and trip over of grandfather
9	Early Chinese in America
10	Chinese laundries- early
11	Chinese settlement patterns
12	Paper sons and interrogation
13	paper sons
14	Early chinese settlement patterns
15	Later Chinese settlement patterns
16	Why Leslie Chin came over
17	Sojourners
18	L.C., early life in Baltimore
19	L.C., schooling
20	L.C., early work, restaurant and school
21	L.C., schooling
22	ditto
23	L.C., school in China
24	L.C., learnung English in Baltimore
25	L.C., youth in Baltimore
26	L.C., trip over
27	ditto
28	ditto
29	ditto
30	ditto

TIME INDEX

TIME

SUBJECT

Side 2

1.	L.C., trip over
2	ditto
3	ditto
4.	L.C., American friends
5	difference in generations attitudes towards education
6	Impressions of America & Chinese/American family structure
7	Place of women
8	Arranged marriages and marriage patterns
9	adjustments in youth
10	Prejudice and discrimination
11	ditto
12	American food
13	American celebrations
14	Realization of being an American
15	Return to Hong Kong
16	ditto
17	ditto
18	L.C., work in laundry as child
19	ditto
20	Chinese/American discipline
21	philosophical differences between Chinese generations
22	Migration after W. II
23	ditto
24	Easing of restrictions of migration
25	L.C. changes name and becomes citizen
26	ditto
27	Paper sons after war
28	ditto
29	celebrations- Chinese New Years
30	New Years and Ching Ming

INDEX

designation of (1/5) means side 1, minute 5

Adoption, Leslie Chin 1/5  
Bok Ark family 1/14  
Chevrolet body plant, Baltimore 2/14  
Ching Ming 2/29, 2/30  
China, return to 2/15, 2/16, 2/27  
" Chop suey place " 1/14  
Discipline- Chinese/American 2/19  
Family structure- Chinese/American 2/5, 2/19  
Food, American 2/12  
Grandfather, Leslie Chin - early years in America 1/7, 1/8  
Gambling, Chinese 2/6  
Hong Kong 1/27, 1/30, 2/15, 2/16  
Hobine family ( American friends) 2/3, 2/4, 2/12, 2/14  
Hom Kim Kay - Leslie Chin 2/24, 2/25  
Interrogation 1/2, 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/12  
Laundries, Chinese 2/18  
Macao 1/28  
Marriage arrangements 2/7, 2/8, 2/9, 2/22  
Migration Patterns 1/14  
New Years - Chinese 2/28, 2/29  
Paper Age 1/6  
Paper sons 1/3, 2/22, 2/26  
Prejudice 2/10, 2/11  
Restaurants - L.C. work during youth 1/17, 1/18, 1/20, 1/24  
Sojourners 1/11, 2/19  
School- L.C. 1/18, 1/19, 1/20/ 1/21  
School, Chinese, L.C. 1/22, 1/23  
School, "english language, L.C. 1/24  
Toishan, China 1/5  
Thanksgiving 2/13  
World War 2 - L.C. 1/25, 1/26 thru 2/2  
War Brides, Chinese 2/22  
Youth in China, L.C. 1/2