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Interview with Shu-Mei Lee About Her Ethnic Background (FA 601)

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Adler: This is Betsy Adler. It's February 12, 1995 and I'm interviewing Shu Mei Lee for the EthniCity Project. [pause] Okay, if you could state for the tape your name and address and age.

Lee: Okay. My name is Shu Mei Lee and I live in Berea. My address is 150 Dogwood Heights, Berea, Kentucky and I am forty-four years old.

Adler: Okay. And where were you born and when?

Lee: I was born in Taiwan, 1949.

Adler: Okay and can you tell me something about what it was like growing up and how you ended up in Lexington?

Lee: Oh, okay. I was growing in Taiwan and after I got married, you know, my husband, came to United States as a student in 1972. And he went to Sydney [?] at Buffalo to finish his graduate school in math. And he got Ph.D. there and in 1974 I came here, I came here. After he graduated he stayed in Buffalo, he stayed in Buffalo about five years and we moved to Carbondale, Illinois, and after graduating for Buffalo he find job at University of Illinois in Carbondale. And he is the assistant professor in math department and we lived there for three years and then we moved to Pikeville, Kentucky. And we stayed there for five years and then after that we moved to Berea, Kentucky in, we moved here in Berea almost nine years.

Adler: What were you doing in Pikeville?

Lee: My husband, he teaches at Pikeville college.

Adler: What was it like living in Pikeville?

Lee: Uh, it's, ah, Pikeville is a, see, to me, I think, you know, it's very similar, the area is similar to where I growing up because I live north of Taiwan, the Kelom. It's a small town near Kelom.

Adler: How do you spell that?

Lee: _____ [?, she says what sounds like "Nuom, Nuom", counter 36] and it's a mining town. And Pikeville is a mining town, too. And Taiwan has the many mountains and Taiwan has many mountains. So, I feel just like at home to me Pikeville and I liked the people there.

Adler: Okay, and then you went to Berea, he's in the math department at Berea.

Lee: Yeah, he teach at, yeah, he find job at Berea, so, we move here in Berea.

Adler: And what do you do in Berea?

Lee: Oh, what did I do? See, at the beginning, see, I have three children and when I moved to Berea I had Paul, he was only five months and two years later I have Emily, so, I stay home, you

know, for awhile until Emily almost two years and then I start to find the job to start my career. Then I worked one year, then I, I work as a bookkeeper. After one year later then I feel that I still needed to stay home, you know, so I just worked part-time, you know, and near Berea. And then recently, last year, I start to find full-time again because Emily started to go to the first grade.

Adler: So, your an acc... you are a bookkeeper?

Lee: Yeah, I'm a bookkeeper. I'm working at P and R Roofing in Lexington.

Adler: So, you commute every day.

Lee: Yeah, I commute every day.

Adler: And, okay, what was it like growing up in Taiwan? Can you describe that to me?

Lee: See, as, in Taiwan the education is very competitive from the elementary school, I have to do a lot of homework, and we just study all the time. Writing and studying and sometimes we have some special after class review and everybody has to do that, you know, stay school late to prepare for the entrance examination of junior high school. In my time, you know, we had, go to junior high we had to take the entrance examination, but now they don't. But at that time it is very competitive. We had to study very hard. So, from elementary, junior high, high school, to the college, I have, every step, you know, I have to prepare the entrance examination to the junior high, high school, college, so, I just study all the time. I have no time to think anything else. [chuckles] And besides, my father, he's a doctor and he practiced medicine at home, the office at home, too. So, I sometimes, I have to help him. And I growing in a big family. I have five sisters and one brother. I'm the eldest one, so, sometimes I have to help the housework, you know, a lot and take care of my brother, sister and sometimes I have to help to cook. So, that's how I growing up.

Adler: And then what was it like, where did you go to college?

Lee: I go to Ming Shun [?, counter 79] in Taipei, that's a girl college, all girl. It's a business school. And then when I came to United States, I, the Men Shun College, I just got an associate degree in international trade and I work about three years in international trade and then I get married. I came to United States, I finish my accounting degree at Pikeville college.

Adler: That's great. And part of the reason I wanted to talk to you was because I really admire the paper cuttings and did you do those or did your students do them?

Lee: Uhhh, I did, I did, I did them and then my students [someone in background says, "I'm sorry" and then the sound of door closing]. Yeah, I did most of them and I have some of my students did some of the projects, too.

Adler: How did you learn how to do them?

Lee: See, I just, I have, uh, uh, I have instructions, you know, and they tell me how to do it and I just follow the instructions.

Adler: Ah, was it something you learned when you were growing up, too? Did people do that?

Lee: Yeah, I think it is probably, like daily life, like New Years they have the paper cutting everywhere, you know, on the door or on the living room. You just look, by looking in that environment and you so, you just naturally know how to do it.

Adler: Do you use any special kinds of tools?

Lee: The one I'm cutting, I just use the scissors. But usually the, you have to use carving knife and very sharp scissors and some cutting board to do it.

Adler: Do you do that kind, too?

Lee: Yeah, if you need to do by carving knife, I did that.

Adler: But did anybody else in your family do that?

Lee: No.

Adler: You just picked it up?

Lee: Yeah, I just picked it up.

Adler: And did you pick it up in this country?

Lee: Yeah, actually, because when I came here I was very impressed by those paper cutting, so, when I back home I bought one in Choc Shem [?] book, you know, they teach you how to do it and then I learned from that.

Adler: So, did you, what do you mean when you were here you were impressed with them? Did you see them here?

Lee: No, I see some of the, no, I did not see, when I go back home, you know, some people they bring some of those pictures, my Chinese friends, they bring it and I say, "Oh, that's beautiful." So, when I go home I try to look for those, the skill of paper cutting instructions. So, I find it and I bring it to United States, so, I say, "One day if I have time I am going to do that."
[laughing]

Adler: And so, now you are. Have you ever, do you have enough that aside, would you do a show of them or anything like that? Do you ever do them that way? Or what do you do with them, with your paper cutting?

Lee: Oh, see, actually, you know, I really tell you the truth because my kids are younger, you know, so I don't have time to do some spare things, you know. And the reason I did that this time because the student project and so, I just saw, oh, this is a good idea to do it, so, I start to do it.

Adler: For the students to do it.

Lee: Students to do, yes.

Adler: And do, so you don't, you haven't had time really to do very many on your own at this point?

Lee: No.

Adler: But did you use to?

Lee: I used to it, yeah, because it is not very hard, just use common material but if you want go in deep, there are several, many skills to learn and you have to use all kinds of different material. And it's very, it's now easy to get in here.

Adler: To get the materials.

Lee: Uh-hmm, certain materials but the most common I use is the paper, you know. You can use all kinds of paper. But if you want it look more delicate or more beautiful, something, they have all kinds of different, very delicate thin paper.

Adler: Do you have some of that?

Lee: Yeah, I have those, some of that with me but I did not bring it today.

Adler: Oh, that's okay, if you don't have it. I didn't mean now necessarily just in general. So, do you get that from Taiwan all of your supplies.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Where do you get your ideas from for your cuttings?

Lee: Where did I get ideas? See, they have the patterns, so, I just, you know, which pattern I like and I pick it up.

Adler: Ah-ha, do you do your own patterns at all?

Lee: Ah, not this moment. I don't have time to create it.

Adler: Did you used to?

Lee: Yeah, uh-hmm.

Adler: Well, what's your favorite pattern?

Lee: I like, ah, on that project I showed just the animal and Chinese character, the, yeah, I like the scenery, you know, scenery or the tree flower or the animals.

Adler: When you, when you came to, say when you were in Pikeville and now in Berea, did you have to adjust any of the ways you were living?

Lee: Yeah, I have to...

Adler: What did you have to do?

Lee: See, I have been here in the United States almost twenty years and I just have to adjust gradually, you know, yeah. See, when I lived in Buffalo there are a lot of Chinese, so, I probably, uhmm, didn't have, it's easy for me but when I moved to Pikeville not many Chinese maybe I am the only Chinese family there, so, it's difficult for me to adjust.

Adler: What did you do?

Lee: What did I do? I went to church. [laughs]

Adler: So, that you could meet people.

Lee: Meet people, yeah.

Adler: Uh-hmm. What did you do... do you cook Chinese food?

Lee: Yes, I, we speak Chinese at home and cook Chinese food at home most of the time. But sometimes we went out eat American food.

Adler: What do you do for ingredients?

Lee: Ah, the ingredients, we just went to the store, you know, buy all kinds of vegetables and buy, in some season we can buy from the grocery store we went to a particular Chinese grocery store and to buy some special seasonings. And to cook the Chinese way.

Adler: Where's that store?

Lee: In Lexington, you know, there is a Korean store at New Circle Road.

Adler: Okay. And is that where you get your ingredients now?

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Do you get most of the things from the grocery store?

Lee: Ah, not really, we try not to because it is expensive. So, we try to buy most of our food at, like, Kroger, and then, yeah, to get, you know, to make it between Chinese and American.

[laughs]

Adler: So, it's sort of a mixture.

Lee: Mixture, yeah.

Adler: Would it be more Chinese or more American?

Lee: I think...

Adler: Chinese with American ingredients or...?

Lee: I think it's, you know, more Chinese, yeah. But sometimes I cook American food, too, like my kids, they like pizza and spaghetti. So, I cook those in American way.

Adler: What's their favorite Chinese food that you cook?

Lee: Ah, my kids?

Adler: Yeah.

Lee: They love sweet sour pork. They like stir-fried rice and noodles and mixed Chinese vegetables.

Adler: What are some of the Chinese vegetables that you get at Krogers and what you use?

Lee: I used to get the nappa, bokchoy, spinach and green onion and ginger, garlic and, see, beans.

Adler: And how do you, do you steam them or stir-fry them?

Lee: I stir-fry them. I just wash them and cut in two pieces and mix them and stir fry.

Adler: And then do you usually have that with rice or noodles or...?

Lee: Yeah, with rice or noodle, yeah.

Adler: Do you make your own noodles?

Lee: Ahh, no. We just bought, you know, the dry noodle from oriental store and then we have to boil them first and then cook them.

Adler: Did you ever make them from scratch?

Lee: I can but I just don't have time.

Adler: Did you learn to do that growing up?

Lee: Yeah, uh-hum, see, but the homemade is not the same as thin as like you buy in store.

We used to make the _____ [?, counter 203], it's like a pan fried dumpling, very often. Use flour and you have to mix them like you make the bread and then you have to roll it very thin and put the ingredient in there.

Adler: What are the, what do you put inside them?

Lee: We put, you can put any kind of vegetable or meat, you know, it depends and then you, either you can boil them or stir fry them. It's called, some people call, it's very popular in Chinese restaurant, it's called pan-fried dumpling.

Adler: What the name? What do you call them?

Lee: Pan-fried dumpling.

Adler: And what is the Chinese name?

Lee: _____ [?, counter 213]

Adler: [pronounces word, two times] I don't know if I can even ask you to spell that. Does it spell in English?

Lee: I don't know, it's hard.

Adler: That's what I've had, people, you know, when I ask them to spell things because the Chinese characters are so different.

Lee: Yeah, in Chinese restaurant they, some, some people they pick up from Japanese, you know, words. They say _____ [counter 220] so, I don't know. Some restaurants when you go to order it you have to say _____ [counter 221, says Japanese word again]. The most common word is _____ [counter 223, Chinese word]

Adler: When you were growing up what kind of language did you speak?

Lee: See, my ancestors they are Taiwan, they are originally from _____ [?, Fu Chen] mainland China and they moved there earlier. So, we speak.

Adler: When?

Lee: When they move about? I don't know how to spell in English but maybe not that early, see, my grand, grandfather, probably about a hundred years ago or something. And then we have five generations in Taiwan and we speak Taiwanese. And at school we have to learn Mandarin. So, I speak Taiwanese, Mandarin and then my mom, he, she speaks Cantonese, some kind of Cantonese. So, the Cantonese, some of the words I can understand but I can not speak. But mainly I speak Taiwanese and Mandarin.

Adler: And did you speak English in school? Did you learn that in school, too?

Lee: Yeah, we learned English in school since junior high. Learn the ABC's and how to read and not too much write but just read and we don't have chance to speak. So, I learned how to speak it after I came to United States.

Folklife Archives Project 601 - EthniCity: Contemporary Ethnicity in the Inner Bluegrass

Interview with Shu-Mei Lee (B2,F4 & F6; B1,F9)

Adler: Okay. Uhhh, is there, what is important to you to maintain and teach your children about your heritage?

Lee: Oh, I think, we just try to teach them to speak Chinese and eat Chinese food, of course, and uhhh, some of the, you know, moral...

Adler: Like what?

Lee: Let's see... we have to respect the older people, respect parents. That's very traditional to, you know, to obey them, to obey.

Adler: Does that work in this country?

Lee: Not quite. I have, we have difficult time. [laughter] Always have conflict. Now, my son, he is teenager, so, sometimes he doesn't want to listen. He says, "I'm, it's different where you were growing..." He says that.

Adler: Does he feel that he's more of an American?

Lee: Yeah, he feels he's more American, yeah.

Adler: Do you feel that it's important that they maintain their Chinese heritage?

Lee: Yeah, I think so, you know, I think so, because you know we just pick up what is good from our culture, and what's good from American culture, try to do that, you know.

Adler: Do you get to go back home at all?

Lee: Yeah, I got back home about three times. I was just back home this, the past Christmas.

Adler: Do your children, have they been?

Lee: No, but they are probably planning to go this summer. Yeah.

Adler: Do you have a lot of family there?

Lee: Yes.

Adler: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Lee: Okay, thank you.

[end of interview 1 - February 12, 1995]

[Interview 2 - February 14, 1995]

Adler: This is Betsy Adler. It's February 14, 1995 and I'm interviewing Shu Mei Lee about paper cutting for the EthniCity Project. Okay, what's the name of the book?

Lee: This book?

Adler: Yeah. Does it have a name?

Folklife Archives Project 601 - EthniCity: Contemporary Ethnicity in the Inner Bluegrass

Interview with Shu-Mei Lee (B2,F4 & F6; B1,F9)

Lee: Let's see, this is the Chinese Paper Cutting Art and then these, like this picture, the flower and the bird, and I have this copy and some people, they already designed it and you just make a copy. And then after you make a copy you just roughly cut these edges out.

Adler: Uh-hmm, around the outside.

Lee: Yeah, on the outside, yeah and stick colored paper or any color that you want to cut and put, put that together and then you carve it.

Adler: Which one of those have you done?

Lee: I haven't done any of those.

Adler: You haven't done any of those.

Lee: The one I just, you know, last time the one I showed you, the _____... [the last part of sentence is inaudible]

Adler: Can I get you to hold that up and I'll take a picture of it? Does that, that's number 539, does that have a name?

Lee: No. This is, they're, they are numbered, so, when people they want cut this flower they can buy it from this company...

Adler: Oh, I see, and they can just order...

Lee: They can just order it.

Adler: Number 539.

Lee: Yeah, that's right. [pause, sound of pages turning] And like this, this is a little bit more, it has more space, this cut is easy.

Adler: Because it is bigger.

Lee: Yeah, bigger and this is very cute.

Adler: Now, do these different cuttings, do they have names?

Lee: Yeah, they have names. These called, I don't know how to say, like trouble maker kids.

Adler: And it's called what?

Lee: _____ [?, counter 33, says the Chinese name] in Chinese. The kids, they are very active.

Adler: That's a nice way to put it. [laughter]

Lee: Yeah. They have a different designs, all these different designs. If I want to make this, I just make a copy of this, put the paper. I think this a little bit similar is the _____ [?, counter 39, can not understand words here]

Adler: Like what?

Lee: You know, S I L... something like a shadow.

Adler: Stencil?

Lee: No, not stencil. It's called silhou...

Adler: Silhouette.

Lee: No, not a silhouette.

Adler: Where you would have like a shadow here and they would draw it and cut it.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Yeah, silhouette.

Lee: Okay, something like that, the same technique but the designs more are delicate.

Adler: It sure is. Now, what is that one?

Lee: This is called _____ [?, counter 46]. _____ [same word] means, this is called, how do you call it, _____ [fluid ?] girl.

Adler: Ah, okay. Now, when did you get his book?

Lee: Oh, that is a long time ago, I think probably about almost ten years.

Adler: Now, let me take some pictures of these cuttings. What can you tell me about the ones that you brought? Are these in your collection?

Lee: No, these are in my friend's collection.

Adler: These are from your...

Lee: I don't have any collection, all I have is just these...

Adler: What's in the book. What is your friend's name?

Lee: _____ [?, counter 55, says name] Do you remember the girl that take picture with me at the Chinese school?

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Lee: Yeah, that one. [long pause]

Adler: My battery is getting weak in the flash.

Lee: Usually the paper cutting the paper is as thin as this and you have to put this with the copy.

Adler: As thin as the tissue.

Lee: Like tissue paper and stuff.

Adler: I've never seen ones like these, the black and white ones. They're beautiful.

Lee: Yeah, it is. It looks like a Chinese painting.

Adler: Now, do people sign these. I noticed these. Is that somebody's signature on the black and white ones?

Lee: Yeah, in China, we used to have, you know, some, we make a carving of everybody's name. And we did not sign it, everybody carved a different, carve your name...see, each person when they carve their signature is different. So, when we, let's see, how do I tell you. You know that is a signature, you know.

Adler: Who would have done those then?

Lee: Who?

Adler: Yeah, I mean it's interesting that those are signed and none of the other ones are.

Lee: Yeah, these one. I think, well, let's see, this is in the first one. It's hard to say, okay, it's _____ [?, counter 79, can not understand a few words here]. But they didn't sign

their name. I don't think this is their name. This just say, you know, this picture is

_____ [?, Chinese word, sounds like the same one used above at counter 79].

_____ [same word] means, you know, the mountain in the water. It goes with the scenery.

Adler: Oh, okay, so, that's that, which one is that?

Lee: Each one...

Adler: They're all the same.

Lee: Yeah, they're all the same. They just write on this one _____, maybe that person called _____ [same word]. You know, some people they do not use their real name. They use some name just for his work. Just some artist, you know, they have two names. One is their real name and one they have a special name only for them to sign their artwork.

Adler: Oh, I see.

Lee: So, you see that name you will know who he is immediately. And usually when the men they carve very beautiful they have a special name.

Adler: Now, on these, these colored landscapes, it looks like all the frames are the same. Would they have, would somebody have stamped out the frames and then they would cut the pictures separately out of that or what?

Lee: No, I think...

Adler: How did they get all the frames so similar?

Lee: Yeah, I think they probably have some mold.

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Lee: I think, like this, they probably have mold, so, they just...

Adler: Like in the book of patterns, uh-huh.

Lee: And then they carve them.

Adler: Do you know where these different places are?

Lee: No.

Adler: Are they recognizable at all?

Lee: I don't know, it's some scenery in mainland China. Yeah, you asked a very good question, I don't know why they did not say where it is or something. I think that is... [can not hear the rest of the sentence]

Adler: Now, all these, would these have all been done by the same person? Like all these a set of four scenery ones and then the animals.

Lee: I think these probably commercialized pictures. They have master produced but probably, you know, have the different people they did that, not particular people.

Adler: Do you think, I mean they are all, they are not painted as neatly as these are. But are they the same paper? They almost look like they might be a different kind of paper.

Lee: Yeah, almost the same paper.

Adler: This is a much thinner paper, isn't it? For the animals.

Lee: Let's see, I think this and this are probably about the same and this is different. It's a little bit thicker.

Adler: It looks like maybe they just took the paint differently even though they are the same kind. What do these animals all stand for? Do they mean anything?

Lee: See in China... no, I think this is just for beautiful, you know. Some, I think, I know, twelve, see, in Chinese we have twelve animals. See, each year, you know, were you born in which... we have.

Adler: Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, yeah.

Lee: The first one is the mouse, the second is the cow.

Adler: There's the mouse and the cow.

Lee: And tiger and a rabbit.

Adler: Is that the rabbit?

Lee: And a dragon.

Adler: Now, that's the rabbit, is that the rabbit?

Lee: Yeah. And snake, snake.

Adler: Snake.

Lee: And the horse and the sheep.

Adler: It's that one.

Lee: And a monkey.

Adler: Is there.

Lee: Yeah. Chicken and dog.

Adler: Chicken. There's the dog in front of you.

Lee: And the pig.

Adler: And the pig. And this is now the year of the pig, is that what?

Lee: Yeah, this is now the year of the pig.

Adler: So, is this for the different years, too?

Lee: Yeah, different year, yeah.

Adler: So, how would people use these? What would they do with them besides sell them to tourists?

Lee: Oh, okay.

Adler: Do they decorate with them or...?

Lee: Yeah, they decorate with them, you know, put, they usually just put the frame, you know, frame them on the wall or sometimes they... Yeah, I think that's what they do because this is so delicate. They just put it as an art. The one I did last time [sound of papers moving around, hard to hear conversation] the work, you know the work like this. This is a head piece, a _____ [?, sounds like Gotabo, counter 142] and this is the long life. Like this words, usually when people get married and the they put in front of their living room, usually they have some item of our ancestor and they worship that and they put on the wood all the red paper when they get married they put this on the wall. And it means, you know, happiness and good luck, something like that.

Adler: Okay, this one is the heart. Sort of hearts and crosses are happiness and good luck.

Lee: Uh-hmm, good luck and this one means long life.

Adler: Long life. Okay, in this picture, I am putting good luck on the left, and long life on the right, squares. Let's see. [long pause]

Lee: I think maybe, your picture is colored? They like to use the red.

Adler: They use the red.

Lee: After I cut it, it becomes like this.

Adler: I see, so, these are the patterns?

Lee: Patterns. You have to fold the paper first and then cut it.

Adler: So, this is half of one.

Lee: And this is the spring, you know, the New Year's, people like to put a spring. And this is the finished product on this one.

Adler: Oh, wow, I see, let me do these.

Lee: Well, this is the same work. Usually people, I put the red in.

Adler: The red in for good luck.

Lee: Yeah, good luck. [pause] And this fish, you already saw it last time.

Adler: Yeah, that's really beautiful. Now, where did you get the pattern for the fish?

Lee: It's the same from here. I just magnify them, copy them and magnify them. Then cut it. It's all in the pattern book. It's called two fish, the paper cut not only the character and the words. You also can cut in all kinds of designs. Like a triangle or all kinds of designs.

Adler: By folding.

Lee: By folding.

Adler: Have you tried any of those with the folding?

Lee: Yeah, this is easy, it's real easy. See, I can show you how to cut this one.

Adler: Okay.

Lee: I'll cut this one. This one is just a shape.

Adler: Now, do those shapes mean anything or are they just shapes?

Lee: No, they're just shapes for a little different design. It tells you how to cut it. And this is the symbol of the flag.

Adler: The sun.

Lee: It's a flat symbol, usually they have one in here and the rest of it _____ [?, can not understand words here, counter 193]... this is blue, white and red, you know, the flag. This one. I copied it.

Adler: There's the fish, uh-huh. Let me take, let me see here... I need more space. I don't want to, let's see, move these for a minute and take a picture of the fish with the fist pattern. But I want to do the... I'd like to get a picture of all the animals, maybe. Is there an order that they go in?

Lee: This one?

Adler: Yeah.

Lee: You want to put in order?

Adler: Do they go in an order?

Lee: Yeah, we need to, the mouse...

Adler: First the mouse and then...

Lee: And then cow. Okay, here is cow.

Adler: Oh, there's four of them.

Lee: Uh-hmm.

Adler: Those are beautiful. And the mouse, the cow.

Lee: Tiger.

Adler: Tiger.

Lee: And then rabbit, here. And dragon.

Adler: I'll start them in a square because they'll photograph better.

Lee: And then snake, horse, sheep, monkey, [pause between each word], chicken, dog and then pig.

Adler: Okay. And they, would they, they would frame these all together and hang them up somewhere.

Lee: Yeah, these are just for decoration.

Adler: Decoration. Would these be more for kids, like for a kid's room? Where would they, what would they decorate?

Lee: I think they would frame them or maybe... this is very delicate work. I don't think they would let kids play with it.

Adler: Well, I meant framed. Would they frame it and hang it in a child's room or something like that?

Lee: Yeah, they probably would frame... I'm leaving you.

Adler: Stand on the counter, I'll get the shadow in it. [laughter] I want to come straight down. I don't want to get my toes on it.

Lee: Be careful. [long pause]

Adler: What we'll have to do is change the light bulbs, too. [pause] Okay. Now, the fish. Put these guys away. And then, are you teaching your students at school to do cuttings?

Lee: Here at the Chinese school many right now, we only do, teach them to speak Chinese because that is the main purpose. And then the art, you know, we just don't have enough time to do those. Maybe in the future. The problem is, we don't have too many people to enroll in the school...

Adler: To have enough classes, except for just language classes.

Lee: That's right.

Adler: So, all the classes, there are different levels but they are all language classes.

Lee: Different levels but all language, that's right. And we only meet two hours, so, it's very hard each week. Even, they meet two hours but they still have a lot of problems to speak because it is not environment. That's the big problem, if they do not practice.

Adler: Now, what is this? Did they all come in this? Which ones came in this?

Lee: This, everything is just put in here. Yeah, you can take this picture.

Adler: What does this say?

Lee: _____ [?, counter 262] that means the art of Chinese paper cutting.

Adler: Okay.

Lee: In that Chinese book the art of paper cutting.

Adler: Okay, the same thing. And then, is that what they are called?

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: They're called paper cuts?

Lee: Paper cutting.

Adler: Paper cutting. What is the Chinese word for it?

Lee: This is _____ [?, counter 266, sounds like Ginjuel]

Adler: [pronounces it]

Lee: Ginjuel, Gin means to cut and juel means paper. Ginjuel. [pause]

Adler: There's our dog out there barking. I hope these will work out. Not having a copy stand, it's a little bit different. I'm going to let the dog in while you... Do you mind dogs?

Lee: Oh, no.

Adler: She's a puppy. I'd like to do one of the fish and the _____ [?, counter 281, sound of her talking to dog] Somebody's here, huh? Somebody's here. [dog barks] Oh, hush. [pause]

Lee: See, originally I just make it _____ [?] like this.

Adler: And did you do this with a raiser? What did you cut this with?

Lee: I used a raiser. No, not...

Adler: An exacto?

Lee: No, only scissors. This is not very good. See.

Adler: But you did it on construction paper and that's a little harder.

Lee: If you used a carving knife, maybe it would look more...

Adler: Come out cleaner.

Lee: I have carving knife and I lost it.

Adler: Oh. What do they look like, the carving knife?

Lee: Carving knife, what is this knife? I think you can bought it at the store.

Adler: Let me get a piece of paper. Let me get a clean piece of paper, not typing paper. [sound of paper shuffling, pause]

Lee: We have Mickey...

Adler: Oh, Mickey Mouse. [laughs] Did you ever use an exacto knife?

Lee: Oh, yes, something like that, yeah, something like that.

Adler: Only it's, does it have a wood handle or...?

Lee: Uh-hmm, wood handle. Or like this, it's perfect. Something like that.

Adler: But you lost it.

Lee: Yeah, I lost it. Maybe it's somewhere in the house. I need to look for it.

Adler: And what kind of scissors do you use?

Lee: Just use, the one I use is very, I think some people they cut their fingernail...

Adler: Cuticle scissors? Are they bent?

Lee: Very... no, no, these are, as long as it's very sharp at the end, you know.

Adler: Uh-hmm, let me show you some I have. [pause] Like so?

Lee: Yeah, yeah, this one, the one I use is this one. They had the pattern on this one. So, you use color paper, you know, you carve it. This is not hard to carve.

Adler: And those would be with the knife?

Lee: Yeah, it would do very good. Here you could probably use the scissors. Here you would probably use the knife and here probably use the knife.

Adler: To get all the little hairs and things.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Let's see, do you want to hold that up for me? I think it almost works better.

Lee: You want me to hold like this?

Adler: Yeah. [pause] Okay. Now, where's the one with the fish?

Lee: Fish, it's here. You want it. This one, this one is interesting, too. I like it. See, the bamboo, and the lady. [?, counter 342]

Adler: Now, what is this in the middle of the bamboo?

Lee: Oh, okay, the Chinese they like to say something like the peace, this bamboo is, you know, like to bring the peace or something like that. And this is...

Adler: Oh, that's beautiful.

Lee: And this is the same word as this.

Adler: Is it? Only it's decorated.

Lee: Yeah, decorated, but the word write like this, it's a little bit different but in the beginning they use this one and they gradually change. It's changes and becomes this word.

Adler: Very pretty.

Lee: Uh-huh, and then this word is decorated.

Adler: So, they embellished it and made it the same word but fancy.

Lee: Yeah, fancy, yeah, this is called "long life".

Adler: And it's the same as this one. [sound of chair moving] Get on the chair. [laughing]

Lee: Same meaning, it means long life. [pause]

Adler: Okay, while I'm up here let's do the fish and then come back to the other ones, so, I can get that picture. Look at the goldfish, I like that.

Lee: Yeah. [pause]

Adler: Okay.

Lee: Actually, here the part is different but the reason I put this is because I want them, you know, hold together. I don't ...

Adler: Well, it looks like they do a little bit there.

Lee: Yeah, one of those in the...

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Lee: I have one construction paper here. I can show you.

Adler: Okay, show me one. Just pick one.

Lee: Pick one. Let's see, do you want the words? Do you have a machine here where you can copy something?

Adler: No, unless I can borrow it. If I could borrow it, I could get it back to you.

Lee: Let's see. Oh, okay, I have one. This work is easy to cut. That means, you know, this work, I'll cut this one.

Adler: Oh, okay, the spring fun. [?, counter 389] Now, you need scissors? These are too small. Do you need heavier ones?

Lee: I think this is okay.

Adler: Okay, so you cut it out.

Lee: Yeah, you just cut it out. [sound of paper being cut, long pause] And then here I just stick the knife in there and cut the edge off, cut the, you know, follow the line. [pause]

Adler: I'm probably blinding you with the flash. [laughter] So, you cut out all the pieces or you use a knife.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Now, when you do these, do you trace, cut all of these out like this first?

Lee: Yeah, yeah, I cut these first.

Adler: I mean, you copy them and then, like this one you would copy it and enlarge it.

Lee: Yeah, then I trace this in the paper. Like this I can trace it in the paper, too. I fold it and I just fold it in half. And then I just use the pencil, you know, to trace it. And then I cut it.

Adler: So, if you were doing, that's how you would do any one of these in here, the fancy ones even?

Lee: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. Actually...

Adler: You would cut the whole thing out...

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: You'd Xerox it ...

Lee: Each one, I'd probably, uhmm, Xerox it and then just cut the side.

Adler: Cut the side out.

Lee: The whole. I need to cut it.

Adler: You'd have to cut the whole thing to get the center.

Lee: To get center. I need to because that takes a long time. I think you need to use the knife.

Adler: Of course, once you have it cut then you can use it over and over again.

Lee: Yeah, that's right.

Adler: Once you have your pattern.

Lee: Yeah, so, you have to make your own patterns. Also, you can design them by yourself.

Adler: Have you done any of your own?

Lee: No. [laughs]

Adler: Not yet.

Lee: Not yet. But usually the people who do this they, you know, cut the patterns first. Like here, you know, they feel, they feel it and they will start to create it on their own.

Adler: Once they feel that they have it good enough, the way they want it.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: Are there any people who are famous for doing paper cutting, that you know, that you've ever heard of?

Lee: Yeah, I think there are, there are some people but I don't know who they are. I need to do some research. See, I think most of the art teachers, they know how to do it in Taiwan.

Adler: Is it something, do they teach this in the schools?

Lee: Yeah, they have some art, you know, the art class in school, they do some of the paper cutting.

Adler: They do paper cutting?

Lee: Yeah. And the work, the instruction book I bought, this is something like, how do I say? Like in United States they have a book on tape, teach you how.

Adler: How to do it, kind of thing? Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

Lee: Yeah, something like this whole thing. You used the paper to trace it.

Adler: I'm going to stop taking pictures to watch you. [laughs] Okay, so, you have it cut. So, you lay it down on the paper.

Lee: Paper, yeah, and then trace it and then cut it.

Adler: Okay, trace it.

Lee: Do you want me to do this?

Adler: Yeah.

Lee: Okay. Do you have pencil so, I can...?

Adler: Do you want to use the pen there, or would a pencil be better?

Lee: Pencil is better. The pen will leave the mark.

Adler: Oh, going all the way through. Let me see if we have one. [pause, sound of pictures being taken, dog barking] No. [talks to dog] And then you cut it out. [sound of scissors]

Lee: Then you cut it, yeah.

Adler: Okay, wait a minute, slow down. [sound of scissors]

Lee: I cut the hole out. [?, unsure of this sentence] See, this is because, the reason I can use the scissors very easily on this construction paper because this paper is hard, you know, it is easy to hold it. But your very thin paper, then you need to use the knife.

Adler: Because it's soft.

Lee: Yeah, it's soft more.

Adler: But isn't it then easier to rip with the knife, too?

Lee: Ah, this one?

Adler: No, the thin paper.

Lee: The thin paper, use the knife. It's easier.

Adler: Okay.

Lee: But use the, you can use the scissors; it is probably much, much easier to do with knife. Usually the very thin paper, they probably have to tape on the, the pattern on it.

Adler: Uh-hmm, tape it down. Uh-hmm, tape it down.

Lee: Tape down on the paper, the colored paper, you know?

Adler: Uh-hmm. [pause]

Lee: And sometimes on an angle it is hard, so, it has to be... [does not finish sentence] And this one, stick in there first.

Adler: And what is the name of this in Chinese, this pattern?

Lee: This pattern, Chun [?], Chun means spring. This means spring, you know, in a New Year, people like to put spring work on the door, in front of their door. [pause] There is a Chinese professor at the, ah, he's teaching art at Berea College.

Adler: Uh-huh.

Lee: He is very good, he is a very good art teacher.

Adler: Uh-huh, does he do these?

Lee: Uhhh, he did not do this but he did a lot of Chinese painting and something else in Chinese art. He has a lot of knowledge in this.

Adler: What is his name?

Lee: Wong, let's see, Dave E. [?] Wong.

Adler: Now, when you were in school did you learn, did you do these in school?

Lee: Do I do these? I don't.

Adler: Not in Chinese school here but when you were growing up in school.

Lee: Growing, actually, to tell you the truth in my time, no. Maybe now the students do. See, well, we did not do this at school but on the market. When a new year, you can see everywhere. Because people they like, you know, to hang it on a door or make a decoration.

Adler: So, people, so people don't necessarily... do they make their own then? Or does everybody...?

Lee: No, they just buy it.

Adler: They just buy them.

Lee: Uh-hmm.

Adler: Oh, this is way out of focus.

Lee: Usually this work they like to put upside down.

Adler: Upside down. Why is that?

Lee: There is a story but I've forgotten. Next time I'll ask my friend and tell you. I will tell you. I don't know, they have story.

Adler: Uh-hmm, about why it is upside down.

Lee: Yeah, why it's upside down. Yeah, everybody put this on the door.

Adler: Is it like a horse shoe, does it loose luck or something if it's right side up? It falls out or... huh?

Lee: I don't, I don't know. I'll find out. It's a very interesting story. I need to ask why.

Adler: Great.

Lee: Do you want this pattern?

Adler: Oh, thank you.

Lee: You can have it. It's hard to cut when you have more beautiful paper. [laughter]

Adler: I will try it. Here are these.

Lee: Yeah, you can have it if you want to.

Adler: Oh, okay. Thank you. Do you want this pattern?

Lee: Yeah, I can do anytime from that book. This is the...

Adler: Great, that's to that one. Can you do these folded ones with the construction paper, too or is it too heavy?

Lee: Yeah, this...

Adler: This one is folded in...

Lee: Yeah, I think you still can use the construction paper. This not so delicate paper. Even like this, you can use construction paper.

Adler: Well, this is hats [?].

Lee: Use construction paper, you can do it.

Adler: Now, what does this say?

Lee: This just tells you how to do the paper cutting.

Adler: Does it talk about what kind of paper to use and things like that, too? Does it give any ...

Lee: Yeah, yeah, they tell you what kind of tool you use it and what's the, and when the paper cutting, the story about, you know, the history of paper cutting and this is the, ah, yeah, this tells you how, even in the, it means to dye the paper.

Adler: To dye? To paint it. To color it.

Lee: I'm sure it means like to color it.

Adler: Okay. So, do they use water colors? Is that what it said?

Lee: Uhhh, I think, yeah, some kind of... have you ever saw those Chinese paintings?

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Lee: The color, what they have certain kinds of like water, not like water color but these are the color. Like water color but it's not quite like. [laughter]

Adler: Do they have a special name for that kind of painting, paint?

Lee: You mean the Chinese painting, the color?

Adler: Yeah.

Lee: I, I've done that Chinese painting at Berea College at one time and I just bought that from the store at Berea College.

Adler: Oh, okay. You learned Chinese painting at Berea College? [laughter]

Lee: Because Dave.

Adler: Because he's there. Uh-huh.

Lee: So, I got chance. But he's leaving maybe next semester. And this is telling you, you know, how to cut it and how to keep it...

Adler: Flatten it.

Lee: Yeah.

Adler: What does it say how to flatten it?

Lee: It says this is very delicate and you have to put it in a very safe place so you won't change the shape and the color will, how do you?... the color will gradually fade. Uh-hmm. In order to prevent those happening you have to keep in very good... it didn't tell you where to put. But most people after they cut it they put under books, like this book.

Adler: Under a book to flatten it.

Lee: Yes. To flatten, yeah. But in this way it usually will, it sometimes the color will fade and the insect will eat the paper, if you keep for a long period of time. [pause] Oh, okay, so the best, it says here, there is one technique. It's from West Germany, they have certain kind of bag and inside is _____ [?, Chinese word, counter 698] means no air. And you can keep there, you know, in those kinds of bags.

Adler: So, you can order those.

Lee: Yeah, in West Germany. From import from West Germany. A certain kind of bag.

Adler: Like a vacuum bag.

Lee: A vacuum bag, yeah, that will keep it longer.

[end of side A- 2-14-95 interview]

[side B - 2-14-95 interview]

Adler: The other way is to use the white paper.

Lee: Use the, ah, yeah, white paper.

Adler: Like tissue paper.

Lee: Tissue paper or white paper, any white paper and then to put the picture and fold it.

Adler: Fold it.

Lee: And then spread it like this [sound of paper being moved around] and then put in the plastic thing to protect it.

Adler: To protect it.

Folklife Archives Project 601 - EthniCity: Contemporary Ethnicity in the Inner Bluegrass
Interview with Shu-Mei Lee (B2,F4 & F6; B1,F9)

Lee: And here it tells, you know, how to frame it, the technique how to frame it and all kinds of things. I did not read it but it is all in here. And there are many ways how to frame it. Do you see the Chinese picture? Sometimes they use, ah, a certain kind of silk.

Adler: Uh-hmm.

Lee: Silk or cloth and to put a picture on top of it in that way.

Adler: Okay.

Lee: And then this is the pattern. This is a traditional, like in Chinese... when people get married and they have this. It means topo [?, counter 224] happiness, the one I showed you with the pond in it and the forest. This is big, beautiful. Now, one day I am going to do this.

Adler: That is pretty. Now, what kind of birds are those?

Lee: This is... what kind of birds? It didn't say what kind of bird, it's just in traditional Chinese painting always have a bird, flower and a bamboo.

Adler: Let me get this. [talks to dog, telling it to be quiet]

Lee: [sound of pages being turned] The bird, the sea, probably seagulls.

Adler: Seagulls, uh-huh.

Lee: And this is the, you know the Corinth thing, the love.

Adler: Like a valentine.

Lee: Yeah, valentine, yeah.

Adler: That one must be hard to do with all these characters.

Lee: This is from Bible, like Corinthians 12, right.

Adler: Uhhh. It's a heart.

Lee: Yeah, this means love. This word means love. All these words are from Bible verse, Corinthian.

Adler: Corinthian 12.

Lee: Yeah, that's talking about love and patience and all those words mean. And this is like the bride and a groom. [sound of pages turning] And this word is, this is very, this is beautiful words. This means to be patient.

Adler: Oh, something we could all learn.

Lee: Yeah, patient. It's heart, this is Chinese, they always like to encourage people, you know, to be patient. So, they know this word. This is very beautiful brush work, a very beautiful Chinese bird. And they say you also can make some cards.

Adler: Make cards.

Lee: And something like that. And they here even tell you about Chinese paper cutting and about western paper cutting.

Adler: Oh, so, it's got a whole history of other kinds of paper cutting.

Lee: Yeah, that's right and they tell you what's the subject and how to design it and color and the line and how do you do it and how to frame it. Something like that.

Adler: So, it's sort of like a summary there.

Lee: Summary.

Adler: And then, here's scenes.

Lee: Scenes, yeah, there are several scenes.

Adler: Silhouettes.

Lee: Yeah, this is silhouettes.

Adler: Now, those don't look very Chinese.

Lee: This is westernized some. This is westernized. It's beautiful. And this is very typical Chinese picture.

Adler: With the chariot. Now, what is that called?

Lee: Yeah. And this is the principle cutting, what's the... something you have, ah, have to know, the heart, the technique of how to use the knife. And the way you use the knife, what do you do? You know, you have to be very, concentrate and keep very happy, you know, happy heart. And you have to sit straight and don't, you know, bend your shoulder or back, something like, otherwise you will tire very easily. And every fifteen minutes, you know, after you have cut every fifteen minutes, you have to, you know, lift up your head and do some exercise, you know.

Adler: Swivel your head or neck to relax it.

Lee: Relax it, so, your eyes and your body won't get too tight, something like that. Because you will hurt your neck or your eyes. So, that's what they say you have to watch.

Adler: What's on the back there? Is that a map of where it is located?

Lee: Yeah, it says where it is located in Taipei.

Adler: Where is it?

Folklife Archives Project 601 - EthniCity: Contemporary Ethnicity in the Inner Bluegrass

Interview with Shu-Mei Lee (B2,F4 & F6; B1,F9)

Lee: That is called, let's see, the Taipei village is _____ [?, counter 84, gives name]. And the road [?] is called _____ [?]. That was about ten years ago but I don't know now.

Adler: Uh-hmm, it may not be there anymore. Was that a bookstore or was that a place like an art supply store?

Lee: Maybe like a an art supply store. I got this from mail order.

Adler: Uh-huh.

Lee: Yeah, I've never been there before but I think they have store open, they have store open and you can go over there. You know, I don't have time to go over there, so, I just mail ordered it.

Adler: Well, great.

Lee: Okay.

[end of interview]