

# Telling an American Story: The Portland Chinatown Museum

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127 NW Third Avenue | Portland OR 97209

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# Paper Sons & Daughters

文件上的“子女”

Strict enforcement of Chinese Exclusion laws propelled many would-be immigrants to adopt illegal strategies to enter the United States. One common method was the use of falsified papers claiming membership in one of the classes exempted by exclusion laws including, merchants, native-born citizens of the United States, or their children. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, which destroyed all of the city's immigration records, made this legal loophole all the more exploitable.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the overwhelming majority of Chinese immigrants entered the United States by posing as a "Paper Son" or "Paper Daughter" of a U.S. citizen. To crack down on illegal entry, immigration authorities subjected all Chinese to interrogations so long and detailed that even a person with legitimate documentation could fail. The legacy of the paper son and daughter phenomenon has impacted Chinese American communities and families throughout the twentieth century and into the present day.



Photograph of Lee Yoke and Hom Tien Shee, c. 1920s

Courtesy of Bertha Lee Saiget

The man pictured here came to the United States as a paper son in 1925, posing as a merchant named Lee Yoke. Civil wars, droughts and famine in China compelled Lee and his wife Hom Tien Shee to acquire falsified identities to gain admission to the United States. Despite language barriers and racial prejudice, Lee found work at the Berman Hotel and, with Hom, raised a family in a small house west of Chinatown. Lee's book of poetry recipes for the Berman Hotel is displayed nearby.

Lee and Hom shared little about the family's history with their children for fear of deportation. Decades later, the subject of immigration for the same reason.

Bertha Saiget, PCM Board Member and Docent, stands before a photograph of her parents who came to the United States as "paper sons", using falsified documents, during a time when Chinese people were prohibited from immigrating to the United States.





Vignettes displaying Chinatown merchant life and dry goods store







