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Fact Sheet
Korea
State of
Town of
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I started school at the age of four. My father was a good businessman and we were very wealthy. My father drank and gambled heavily and the farm began to lose money. At five years, I dropped school to work on the farm. I helped to grow vegetables. In the summer time I slept outside.

At 7 or 8 years of age I carried the vegetables to the market and sold them. I got about 100 pennies for 40 or 50 pounds of vegetables. Selling them was the easiest part of the farm labor. We raised lettuce, green onions, spinach, corn, babcha, eggplant, chile, and squash. I had to bargain with all of the customers to get a good price. My father continued to drink and argue with my mother. He would hit her and scold the children all of the time. All the money from the vegetables seemed to go for drink and gambling. The farm was getting run down. There was a long drought. I screamed at my father for striking my mother. He turned and hit me too. I was eight years old. I ran away from home.

I walked 700 miles in 9 days. When I got tired and hungry I would stop at a house and knock. The door would open to a very small slit. I was always asked, "Where are you from?" I would reply from my home town. Then they asked, "Where are you going?" I said, "I don't know." I stayed at the house and got meals and bed for doing housework or farm work. Several places wanted me to stay two or three days and they would pay me. Sometimes I got ten pennies, sometimes twenty. When I couldn't find a place to stay, I paid 25 cents for a meal and room for the night.

Finally I reached a place that I liked very much. I stayed seven days. I cleaned the yard, brought fire wood, cleaned the kitchen. The landlord liked me very much and encouraged me to stay. On the seventh day a man came to the landlord and said he had to give up his lease on ten acres of land. The landlord was very angry but the man couldn't farm the ten acres although he had already plowed the ten acres. The man left without getting a refund of his rent money. Of the rent money, \$20 went to the king.

I overheard the conversation and asked the landlord what he said. He told me the story and I volunteered to farm the ten acres. The landlord laughed and said I was too small. I told him I knew how to farm. He asked how I knew and I told him about my father's farm. He knew how hard I worked around the house and that I never went to bed until all of the yards and kitchen were clean. He didn't think I could do it, but he said okay anyway. He hired a man with a cow or ox to smooth the land for ½ day.

I planted rice. I planted an acre a day. I had help from other young boys who were sent by a candy seller. The boys worked for the candy selling by going door to door. If the people didn't have money the boys took pieces of scrap metal and gave the customer a few pennies worth of candy. They gave the metal to the candy-seller who took it to a foundry and sold it for 100 pennies. The candy-seller had seen me and sent the boys to help me to try to gain my friendship and get me to work selling candy. The candy-seller sang and danced as did many people in the town. That was the first time I had ever seen dancing or heard singing.

The rice grew rapidly after one month of farming and was doing very well. The landlord called me into his office one day. I was cleaning the kitchen and I came right away. He said, "Do you know this man?" I turned and saw my father. I was very scared and bowed on my hands and knees. My father laughed and held out his arms. I cried. The boss told my father about the farm and about my work at the house. He said the kitchen was always clean,

everything, always clean.

My father sold the crop for \$350 even before it was harvested and we started for home. He was a good businessman. We walked five days, a hundred miles a day.

My father was jealous that I raised ten acres by myself. He spent the \$350 in paying hired help to farm more acres than was possible. The farm continued to lose money. I had six brothers, 3 died. I worried about my younger sister. My father continued to drink and gamble. I was eleven when I thought about running away again. For a month I cried myself to sleep. Then I decided to leave. I decided to leave as soon as I had made ten pairs of shoes. I worked hard and hid each pair. There were no more tears. One night, after the January New Year, I took my ten pairs of shoes, 90 pennies, and left after saying goodbye to my little sister.

I stayed with an elderly lady for about a year, about 80 miles from my home. In the summer I picked green persimmons and soaked them in warm water and salt for 4 or 5 days. I cleaned the yard and the house. In the winter I caught a cold and got tonsilitis. I couldn't eat or sleep for three days. All I had was warm water. All I wanted was to go home to my mother and father. I wrapped towels around my face and started to leave. The lady begged me to stay until I was well, but I thought I was going to die and wanted to see my family. I walked and slept, walked and slept, until the tonsils broke out themselves. I felt very good although I looked terrible. I saw my mother and father. He didn't scold me. He loved me and I did whatever he told me about the house. I ate good and I felt good.

It was winter and there was no work for farmers. I could get an everyday job at a quicksilver mine or selling notions. I sold notions.

I walked twelve to twenty miles a day. Every five days a market would open in a nearby town. I traveled in a large circle visiting a new town every day and spending every fifth day in my home town. I worked one day on my father's farm.

Every merchant had his own place in every town. It was usually in front of someone's home. I paid the home owner for a dinner and received a room for the night free. I carried all of my wares, which I bought wholesale, in a bamboo frame covered with paper. I worked like this for nine years, supporting my father, sister-in-law, nephew, sisters, and brothers. I gave my money to my father who paid the workers on the farm and drank away the rest.

In the nine years, I saved \$1000. I kept it in small bundles with friends in each town. Nobody knew how much I had all together. In those days, \$1000 could buy a very nice house. The house would have two bedrooms, a porch, an outside kitchen, a room for polishing rice, and a separate unit for the pantry, stable, and parlor.

I visited the Buddhist temple two or three times a year. I thought I would like to become a monk but I couldn't stand the restrictions. People look down upon someone who joins a monastery and then drops out. The monks cut off all of their hair. Hair is very valuable in Korea. Nobody touches someone else's hair. I liked to watch the Buddhist dances.

I was twenty when a woman who dyed clothes for my father mentioned that her niece would make a fine wife for me. I went to the house but didn't go in right away. I stayed outside and watched for her. She came out to get water from the fountain and I saw her. I knocked on the door and went inside, but she wouldn't see me. We were married a month later.

The wedding ceremony is very long. I had to borrow a horse to attend the ceremony. I knock on the door and identify myself. The guard looks on the piece of paper to see if my name is not the list of guests. It is. He lets me in. Inside, I go to the head of the table. I may not sit down until her brother comes in. When her brother comes in, I am told to turn around so I don't see him. Then the bride and her maids enter in costume. Then I am told to turn around and face my bride. We are twenty feet apart. She bows three times, all the way on her

knees. I bow once, also to my knees.

A servant pours half a cup of rice wine and gives it to the girl. She lifts it up in front of her face and puts it back on the serving tray without drinking it. The servant brings the cup to me. I take it with both hands, take a sip and place it back on the tray. The servant brings the cup to the bride who does the same. We both rise and go to separate rooms.

The groom can only speak to the best man. He has supper with the best man in the separate room while everybody else is eating in the main room. The door is open and all of the guests poke their heads in to give their regards. Lunch lasts three or four hours. About six or seven of the best men leave. About eight or nine, all of the guests leave. The bridesmaids come to the groom's room and fix the blankets and a table with rice wine. They leave and the bride enters alone.

Depression struck Korea and after one year the \$1,000 I had saved was gone. We lived in my father's house. I decided to go to Hawaii.

It was 1905, and I was twenty-one. A sugar factory paid my passage to Hawaii. I would be paid \$14 per month. I only worked for seven days. I became seasick on the way over and couldn't eat. When we reached land I ate too much and got indigestion. I worked hard after the meal and became very hot. I drank cold water which had strange bacteria in it. It rained and I continued to work. The rain stopped and a cold evening wind chilled me. I never got used to the weather. I was always ill. I couldn't work for the sugar factory, so I worked as a cook for my brother who had established a grocery business. I worked for one year.

My wife had a boy. I worried about him and about my family.

My brother sold groceries to sugar factory cook houses. The workers were divided up into sections of 150. One married couple cooked for each section. I made delicacies for the

workers. I bought bean sprouts for ten cents, raised them and after a week I sold them for \$.50. I saved \$150 in three months. My brother borrowed \$100.

With the fifty dollars I had left I took the train to Honolulu to study in a grammar school. I paid thirty-five dollars for room and board for nine months. My stomach was still bad, my eyes watered when I tried to study, and I always had headaches. I could only study for three months. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to work for my brother. The Japanese invaded Korea so he didn't want to go home. I came to San Francisco, followed by my father who had come to Hawaii ten months before with my little brother.

We stayed at the Korean Mission. It cost 25 cents a day for two meals and board. My father left unexpectedly to work in Arlington. I followed him there. I didn't know where Arlington was or how to get there. It was about 100 miles out of San Francisco.

When I arrived on the farm the cook was ringing the bell for supper. I saw my father and we ate together.

That night, I woke to the sound of the dinner bell ringing. It was too early for breakfast. Then I realized that my bed was rocking violently back and forth. It was 5:12 a.m., April 18, 1906. Two stories of the Korean mission were destroyed by fire started by the earthquake. There was no damage in Arlington.

I remember the sight of hundreds of nurses, all in white, lined up, ready to go into San Francisco.

I worked for three months and returned to San Francisco in October after the harvest. I wanted to learn water systems and return to Korea. San Francisco's water supply had been destroyed in the earthquake.

I had earned \$90. My father had earned \$70 and I borrowed \$70 from a good friend. I spent \$30 for clothes for my father and got back the \$100 my brother had borrowed from me. I sent my father back to Korea. My older brother didn't help me. I went back to the ranch to pay off the \$70 I had borrowed. In the winter time I did housework.

I worked for five years at Mrs. Horner and Dina Boarding House. In 1915, the World's Fair came to San Francisco. I went into partnership with a man who was starting a restaurant in an apartment development constructed or leased for tourists visiting the fair. It took a year to prepare the restaurant and cost about \$2,000. In two weeks, he made \$5,000. The apartment development lost money.

I had my tonsils removed in 1916. I worked for one month at Hotel Brookdale which was opened only in the summer. While I was working, the head nurse and her housekeeper from the Red Cross Hospital offered me a job in the hospital when the hotel closed. I worked in the diet kitchen for one year. I delivered the correct meal to each room and fixed up the tray. I still remember a lot of details and procedures.

My first wife had re-married because I hadn't seen her in eleven years. On July 4, 1916, I also remarried. It was a simple ceremony with a preacher. Yim Choong-san was her name and she was thirty-five.

Together, we rented forty acres in Manteca to farm sugar beets. She worked in a tomato cannery while I worked the farm by myself. All of the stores gave credit until harvest time when everyone was paid off.

Next year, I rented 64 acres and raised tomatoes. Esther, my first daughter, was born then in 1917. Tomatoes weren't so good, so I rented 160 acres with a partner and raised sugar beets.

In 1918 insects invaded the fields and buried themselves in the ground. They attacked the sugar cane and drew all of the sap from the plant. In one week, every sugar field was dried up. We didn't have one penny. Everyone owed money to the stores. The sugar factory lost money also. We sold our furniture. We sold two teams of horses. We sold the farm tools. First, we paid the banker, then the blacksmith, and then everyone else. We owed nothing, except the landlord, Mr. Palm. He and I were good friends. I always did odd jobs for him or found someone to do them. He had built our home, leased us the land, and provided the two teams of horses. He got nothing in return but still was generous enough to give us \$50 train fare to Dinuba where my brother lived with his wife and three children.

My son Ernie was born a few months before. We four moved to Dinuba.

I worked in the orchards picking grapes and oranges. My third child, Sookja (Lucille) was born. We stayed with my brother for six months. I gave my brother \$100 for room and board. After paying other expenses we moved to Mendota and rented a farm 20 acres, and had \$15 left.

One morning Esther and Ernie were watching the sun come up. They were in a rocking chair in front of the window. They were standing on the seat rocking back and forth, hanging onto the back rest. They crashed through the window and Ernie cut his hand, badly. We put iodine and Mercurochrome on the cut, but the next morning his hand was swollen and was a funny color. I walked ten miles to the doctor. He wasn't there. I telephoned and found him. He came right away. It was just in time. If Ernie's hand had swollen any more he would have lost his arm. The doctor washed his hand in warm water and left instructions to wash it twice a day. In three days, the hand was all right. The doctor bill was \$10. We only had \$5 left.

