

COMMEMORATING DR HENRY C LEE

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Dr Henry Chung-Yu Lee (李昌钰), a towering figure in the field of forensic science, passed away peacefully at his home in Henderson, Nevada, US on 27 March 2026, at age 87. Dr Lee was interviewed by A/Prof Cuthbert Teo for a Feature in *SMA News*,¹ where he talked about his life and career. His book *Cracking More Cases* (with Thomas W O'Neil) was reviewed in the same issue.²

The forensic expert's beginnings

Dr Lee was born on 22 November 1938 in Rugao (如皋), Jiangsu (江苏) province, China. His parents were wealthy business owners. His family moved to Shanghai in 1942, where they lived at 1384 Xinchang Road (新长路). They then moved to Taiwan in 1945 when he was six. The transition was fraught with turmoil and tragedy. The Second Sino-Japanese War had just begun in 1937, and the Chinese Civil War in 1945. His father died while travelling separately to Taiwan, when the ship he was aboard, *SS Taiping*, collided with a cargo ship and sank. In Taiwan, the Lee family was in financial ruin, and his mother was left raising him and his 12 siblings. His mother taught her children discipline and

resilience and insisted that they achieve the highest academic standards possible.

After secondary school, Dr Lee joined the Central Police College (now Central Police University, 中央警察大学), where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Police Administration in 1960. Dr Lee said he chose this path because it was the only academic path he could afford, the tuition being free. He then joined the Taipei police department. When he became a captain at age 22, he was the youngest person then to have risen to that rank. In 1964, Dr Lee moved to Sarawak briefly with his wife Margaret Soong Meow Lee (married 1962), who was originally from Sarawak and whom he met while she was studying at National Taiwan Normal University. In Sarawak, Dr Lee worked as a newspaper reporter/editor. To continue his interest in forensic work, he and his wife relocated to New York, US in 1965. Margaret Lee passed away on 1 August 2017. Dr Lee later married Angel Xiaping Jiang, an entrepreneur, in December 2018, in Connecticut.

Dr Lee studied at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, where he worked multiple jobs

(medical technician, waiter, and teaching martial arts which he had learned at the police academy) to pay his tuition fees and to support his family. He eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science in 1972, a Master of Science in 1974, and a PhD in Biochemistry from New York University in 1975.

An expert and public servant

Dr Lee joined the University of New Haven in 1975 and thus began his illustrious career which spanned five decades. Dr Lee transformed the university's forensic science programme, then in its infancy, into a renowned centre for forensic education. He founded the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science in 1998, a facility that serves as a bridge between academia and law enforcement.

Dr Lee worked on many high-profile cases throughout his career. His career was highly respected, but not without controversy. Dr Lee was also a dedicated public servant. From 1998 to 2000, he served as the commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Safety, overseeing the state police and emergency services.

A mentor to all

Dr Lee frequently shared his knowledge around the world. He worked with and coached the Singapore Police Force on shooting reconstruction and pattern analysis. One notable case involving his expertise was the Kovan double murder trial, where he gave a scene reconstruction report that was submitted to the Court.

The forensic science programme at the National University of Singapore (NUS) was refined and vetted by Dr Lee. He provided advice about the methods and content of the courses.

Dr Lee was a good friend of the late Prof Chao Tzee Cheng. He gave



Dr Henry Lee with A/Prof Stella Tan's son, Ethan, at different ages.

public lectures at NUS as part of the Chao Tzee Cheng Professorship Programme. In 2007, he first gave the lecture as part of the NUS forensic science programme. During his lectures, he shared his experiences and takeaways from his cases, and about developments in the forensic sciences. His public lectures were always packed, bringing together experts and enthusiasts alike.

In 2024, during his last lecture at NUS on the topic of crime scene investigation, Dr Lee said, "Life is a crime scene; there is only one chance, and once you miss it, it's gone." Dr Lee was supposed to return to Singapore in September 2026 for another lecture.

Just like a family member

To his students, Dr Lee was not just a teacher; he was family. He loved interacting with his students, learning more about them, going for meals together and meeting their families. Over the years, he proudly watched his students

blossom into leaders in their fields and watched their children grow up. This closeness went both ways, where students of his were also introduced to his family.

Dr Lee also created a platform for learning and collaboration among his students. For example, NUS students had the opportunity to learn and do research with Prof Chen Chun-Chieh from the Central Police University in Taipei.

His lasting legacy

Dr Lee's significant contributions in forensic science have been documented in crime investigation videos, such as in the series *Trace Evidence: The Case Files of Dr. Henry Lee*. These videos (which include the Helle Crafts case, the Ian Tracy case and the Ken Mathison cases) have been used for case discussions in the NUS forensic science classes.

In his talks, Dr Lee emphasised that forensic science is an ever-developing field. He taught that forensic science

practitioners should not work in silos, and that the different fields should work together to speak one uniform truth. He also emphasised that it was very important that forensic scientists are impartial; to let the evidence speak for itself.

During lectures, Dr Lee often shared his favourite adage "Make the impossible possible", encouraging his audience to work hard in pursuit of their goals.

Dr Lee's life was a journey from a war-torn childhood to the pinnacle of international forensic science. His influence will be felt for generations to come, through the work of the thousands of students he mentored, and the rigorous standards he set for a profession that sits at the intersection of law, life and death. ♦

References

1. Teo C. *Uncovering the Truth – Interview with Dr Henry Lee*. *SMA News* 2008; 40(3):1-8.
2. Jen OO. *Cracking More Cases by Dr Henry C. Lee, with Thomas W. O'Neil*. *SMA News* 2008; 40(3):14,22.



Dr Henry Lee with former students, A/Prof Stella Tan (right) and A/Prof Eugene Lee (left), 2025.



Dr Henry Lee at a dinner hosted by the Singapore Police Force (SPF), 2010. A/Prof Cuthbert Teo (standing first from right); A/Prof Stella Tan (sitting first from left); A/Prof Eugene Lee (standing first from left); Dr Wee Keng Poh, forensic pathologist (standing second from left). Other attendees are senior police officers