

Interviewee: Teh Cheong Chang
Interviewers: Mai Ton, Chelsey Wen
Date/ Time of Interview: June 8, 2018, 11:30AM
Transcribed by: Mai Ton, Chelsey Wen
Edited by: Mai Ton, Tian-Tian He (10/28/18)
Audio Track Time: 1:28:13

Background: Teh Cheong Chang grew up in mainland China in the 1930s before moving to Taiwan and then America. In America, he built a name for himself as a renowned architect, going on to win national competitions and building the O'Hare Airport. T.C. Chang moved with his wife to Hong Kong before settling, finally, in Houston in 1984.

Setting:

The interview was conducted in the multimedia room in the DMC of Fondren Library, Rice University.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

TC: Teh Cheong Chang

MT: Mai Ton

CW: Chelsey Wen

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

MT: So today is June 8th. It is 11:32. My name is Mai Ton. And this is -

CW: This is Chelsey Wen.

MT: And we're going to be interviewing T.C. Chang today. Um so to start off can you like tell us about... a little bit about your childhood growing up in Nanking, China?

TC: Uh I was born in Nanking, China and uh during the war that's um like when I was five or six, we moved from Nanking to Chunking which is uh upstream of the Yangtze River. Yeah. Uh we live in the countryside. Um my father was the uh uh president of a uh paper mill. And uh so we're in a really countryside uh with uh one teacher school uh but I uh learned uh how to play go game, play bridge, play taichi, kungfu, so so I had a great time and then—at the age 13, went to the boarding school. Uh, 南开中学 [Nankai Middle School] - and its a elite, one of the most uh progressive school. Like uh they lock the classroom at 3:30 in the afternoon so no one can - can stay in the classroom and do the homework. [**CW**: laughs] Yeah, yes you have to be outside, so I learned to play basketball, play tennis, and the uh so and also was a boy scout. And I remember they say every day you should do a one good deed. Yeah so it was a uh enjoyable experience and after 8 years in Chunking, we won the Japanese war. We went back to the Nanking and then uh uh so went to different a Cath—a Christian school. Yeah and uh so that's... Then

Communist was coming over so we moved to Shanghai for a period of time. And so I told my mother, I said you know here we are not going to school, why don't let me go back to the mountainside uh to continue my education, yeah? And she—she has 8 of us. So, one goes you know, that may be diversify (?) so so she said ok, yeah. And my brother, two years younger, and he said 二哥 [older brother] wants to go, he said, you know I'm in the same boat, why not me? Yeah, and then we had my sister in between. So three of us went to Chunking. It took months and we had a great time. And we and we changed boats three times when we got there, yeah. At that time my father was in United States and he had a dream of building a um material surface because uh he found out that there's no uh uh no machine-made brick, concrete block, any of these things. At that time, the United Nation has a program to sell equipment to help you dev... yeah so he was in this country. He went to Cornell. Uh so he's you know he is first generation. And they uh so they—everybody the three of us were celebrating. The new year was coming and we got new clothes. This and that. In the meantime my father came back to Nanking and took the whole family to Taiwan, yeah. So I thought about it and uh you know three of us—Taiwan in the midst of—we had no idea where it is, yeah, and the more I thought about it the more I was concerned. What happens when I finish school, can I go someplace else? Then and my sister in between so we'd be... could be three of—could be three different places. And where the money going to come from? So we wrote to father and father wired back. He said was bad idea [laughs] so he said come home, yeah. So we went, yeah. So we went to Taiwan and I entered another public school. And uh so I finished high school there. And then I got a scholarship from Catholic college in Belmont and uh uh my father said TC, there's no way I can send you to United States. At that time when he was in this country, they were not allowed to work. Yeah even after training after school, uh you can have one year practice training but you cannot stay here. You cannot work, yeah. He said there were 8 of us. There was my income. There's no way. So my answer to that was, I said you s—buy a one-way ticket. You send me there. Uh, If I don't make it, I crawl back. [laughs] So I went to Belmont Abbey and they uh it was very small school. It was beautiful. It only had 280 students and two years in junior college. Yeah but you learn the language. You learn the American way of—you know I learned how to hitchhike. Yeah, yeah. So that summer I went Chicago, work in a department store as a clerk. Yeah and I got paid like a dollar and a half an hour. Uh so then I needed transfer 'cause I went to Illinois study architecture.

MT: Mhm. Um so what made you want to like study architecture?

TC: Okay my father asked me since he was involved with building you know bricks. He said, this country really needs a ceramic engineer. He said none here. He said uh, think about that, and another thing he said, I don't think I want you to be a lawyer because morally, he said, I have a problem with that. [laughs] Because a lawyer, even though yo—your client is guilty, you still do your best to, to rescue him. [inaudible] ...so some moral problem. But anyway, Illinois has a has a whole building for ceramic engineering, yeah. But I look at the career. Yeah, mud is mud. From freshman to senior, you play the same mud. [laughs] And the architecture school [inaudible] is the second oldest architecture school in this country, yeah, next to MIT, yeah, and they are building beautiful models and the renderings and so I entered architecture. And not knowing anything about architecture. [**MT:** Wow] Yeah and one of the most difficult thing was they were talking about 2 by 4, 2 by 6, I look up in the dictionary, went to library. [laughs] Nothing! [laughs]

MT: Did you find it hard adjusting from like adj – adjusting into American culture?

TC: Into what?

MT: Into American culture? Like into American society?

TC: Uh... say that again.

MT: Did you find it hard adjusting into American society?

TC: Uh American society. Uh no. No. Well the Belmont... It was a good training ground. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah yeah, I learned how to hitchhike and I learned the dormitory food. Uh, so it was a uh, and then in Illinois there's such a big population of Chinese students. [**MT:** Ah.] So we—in fact, six of us rented, rented a place in a house, and uh everybody did cooking. It cost a dollar a day for food at that time. The room cost twenty dollars. And the uh so I work like sixteen hours or twenty hours a week part time to support myself. And two years later, my sister came and she told me, TC I don't want to go to the nursing school where she was accepted. So I said we can make it but you need to work. So she also joined me in Illinois. At that time in Illinois, the ratio for – there's maybe like 640 Chinese students. There were only 8 girls. So—so she married my roommate [all laugh] and they were all PhD's, practically. Uh, yeah, so so we made that adjustment.

MT: Um how did you um manage to like progress from a department clerk all the way to like um getting to the design firm?

TC: S-say that again.

MT: How did you manage to progress from a department clerk to all the way to working for a design firm?

TC: Oh uh the second year, my roommate get a job at the US Steel, Gary, Indiana. And he was giving me a ride to Chicago. Was looking for a summer job. And then at the meeting at the employment office, I see there's a line. People um you know, th—they apply for a job and they were getting them. [**MT:** Mhmm] So I stood in line. So I was looking and they uh they ask me very key questions. Said, are you a CIOFL [AFL-CIO] union member? I said, I'm not but I can join. That was the right words, so I was hired. [laughs] And the studio uh then I thought about it. It was a really that summer was only chance I can experience a heavy industry, yeah. Uh they... they working uh three shifts, yeah. They pay like \$5 an hour and they uh every 8 hours is a shift, they change the shifts every week. Yeah and the noise level was such you know and the pollution. You're going in there with clear overalls and 8 hours later, it's black, yeah. The life expectancy in the steel mill is uh pretty terrible. But you know the money was good [laughs] so that that was second year. And third year, you see the picture I showed you, the one, the architectural one. That was University of Illinois. That was my first construction job, yeah. In four months we finished the building with all the tinker toys, yeah. Uh so there was uh yeah. This uh then the fourth year uh uh went—said it's time for me to go to the architectural office to experience what's that about. And they – there were several, went to the biggest architectural office in Chicago and the... the girl said, the receptionist said, are you from Illinois? I said yes. She said, you're architecture students? I said yes. She said, will you fill the form? We don't have openings but we'll call you, yeah. So from the 16th story up I get down to the sidewalk. There, I said, why she said architectural? So I went back in. I said, you have any other openings beside architectural? She said can you do mechanical? I said, yes. And she said, while you wait here, I'll get the chief out. And the chief said, you're from Illinois? I'm from Illinois, too. So that was good. And then say, you know Professor Carol? I said, yes. In fact, I work for him to do some drafting. Oh, he said, I'm his good friend. We are in same class together. And so from there on, we talk about Professor Carol and uh after 10, 15 minutes, he said, when can you start? [laughs] Yeah, so that's how I got into uh the the architectural practi—the uh profession. Uh I already knew at that time, they said less than 10 percent of the graduates uh work in the profession office and they something like uh another

less than 10 percent would do actually some design work, yeah. Most would become you know supervision, construction, drafting, yeah. But I was lucky, I got in, yeah. And they—I was very successful. They loved me because I know where to run the ducts, where to plate register and to the architects' liking, so I had the combination of both worlds. Yeah and they... so then they offered me a full time job, pay me twice as much as an architectural, young architect. Uh so of course, I need the money. I took it [laughs] and then 8 months later, uh the firm get the O'Hare uh, Airport, brand new job, yeah. And the, the firm name was that time called Naess and Murphy. And Murphy went to high school with Mayor Daley and uh Mayor Daley is very influential in Chicago. And but he supported him as a businessman all his early campaign. Yeah so from after he become mayor, successful, and all the big jobs of uh, they're all Murphy's. And so Chicago O'Hare at that time was a 400 million dollar project, equivalent like 4 billion or 10 billion now. Yeah and so we, so I ask for transfer, yeah. So that's how I got into design and they didn't have any designers with them so uh uh Naess, he usually does the... he's very old fashioned. At that time he was already 75 so so I was able to do most of the work. Yeah

MT: Um from your work in Chicago, what did you think is your most... the, the work that you're proudest of?

TC: Uh well... O'Hare certainly was uh, was uh prominent, yeah, because it influences so many people and I get chance to work with uh the top in the profession, all the consultants. Yeah so that gave me a chance. And then uh after the O'Hare, I did a major competition uh for the new Boston City Hall and that's, the winner would get the full commission and uh uh get the design built. So so out of 350 entries uh they shortened to 8 and then we came in second. Yeah and the—so that established my uh credentials as a good designer and they said, Harry Weiss that time he was ranked maybe one, two, three in the nation as a archi—architecture firm. So they offered me to—position to join them, yeah. When I joined, there's only other 10 architects. Eventually he got the commission for the uh—he's always noted uh if you ask any architecture student where you want to get trained, they always say Harry Weiss. He's always done something new every project. Yeah yeah so I was fortunate to be invited. And then I stayed like 6, 7 years and did many you know like uh museums, concert halls uh like Stanford University engineering school and they're all prestigious.

MT: Where did you move after uh living in Chicago?

TC: Ok we were doing great. Margaret was teaching, my wife was teaching at Northwestern and Chicago Art Institute. Um so and I was... I was with her and then after several years, I decided to uh get my license. Now in my period at that time, you have to be a citizen in order to practice architecture, so I have no choice I have to work for—you know join with a firm, yeah. And then after that many years, I thought that maybe it's time for me to open my own office. And the, the big project when you do a concert hall, its 3 or 4 years and O'Hare was like 4 or 5 years. Yeah, and small project, I did a house in Vancouver. I did house in O'Hagen Island, uh in uh Massachusetts and doctor's clinics and pharmacy. All of them. Most enjoyable thing was I designed a uh, one of the biggest—now—it's a violin shop. It's called Bein & Fushi in Chicago. I just looked them up. They're still in business. [laughs] And it's amazing uh all the Stradivari (?) and all the antique violins. Every maybe 10 years or so they need to be repaired because the wood has microcracks, yeah. So they pop it open, here is 6 pieces each one worth a million. [laughs] Yeah and uh you know they patch it and put together. Uh and the test for the technician to repair is they get a block, a maple block, and they use a knife and cut it and you have to shave it smooth again with the shortest waste of material. And yeah things like that. Yeah yeah and I also did two tennis club during that time, indoor time before the tennis pool. Because at that time there was no fitness clubs or anything. So tennis, everybody thought was the uh the only way to get exercise. Tennis is not easy to learn so so eventually the fitness took over. Yeah but they uh, still—Chicago now has like 40 indoor tennis clubs.

MT: Um so after you uh worked in Chicago, did you move to Hong Kong after that?

TC: What's that again?

MT: Did you move to Hong Kong after you lived in Chicago?

TC: Oh we... we were doing fine in Chicago and then the Hong Kong University invited Margaret to teach. And uh so we've been away from home so to speak. We thought it'd be good experience for her to go back. Yeah so she—so she went there and I visited her. The first year I said uh I said Margaret I said the architectural practice is not very good in Hong Kong and the people are very clan-ish. Uh you know they only like their people in on the island themselves. And I said uh maybe you know after a year you come back, yeah, to Chicago. And then the university and the people really wanted her to stay at least another year. Yeah and then uh we met the biggest uh developer in—the Chinese people were operating in Hong Kong. Her name is Chen Zhen Xi (?). She he is uh has a company called Hen Rong (?) Development and they are the biggest developer in Hong Kong. And they uh so Margaret knows them, she met them. So we call them. They invited us to their house, they live in top of mountain there and they uh and this man very unique. He is well taught, self-taught and never went to college but he has capacity. He talk to you for hour and he can really find out what how much do you know, what you are good at. He—some people have that talent and feel very comfortable to draw you out, yeah. And uh, so he has lots of project. Like in Chicago, if you do one high rise, that's uh that's exceptional. They do like 5 or 6 at one time. Yeah so there he was and he pulled out some of the project he did. And so I look at it since I was his guest and couple days I go back to Chicago, so I just let it out. I said you got this problem, you got that problem and they uh you know and every part has a problem and those are easy problems. Yeah like you don't open up a bathroom uh into the living room with showing the toilets, things like that. Yeah um and the door clash each other and uh the so so he recognized that. He said—well, we were overnight. Next morning, he said, I want show you more of my my work in the office so we went. Yeah and th—there's more project and more problems. And then he said you stay here, I need a conference. So he came back, he said uh we want you to take all this problems with you to Chicago. See if you can help us. So I was commuting as a consultant. Yeah and solving their problems. And then he said, TC, he said, your wife is here, uh, Hong Kong and Chicago is too far away. He said, why don't you come? He said, if we work it out, your salary'd be like this. He said, if we work out, it'd be like that. [laughs] Oh yeah you could – yeah. And uh the project so interesting yeah and I really can't help. And that's how, so that's how we went to Hong Kong. So I was very enjoying developer firm, which is different than – so I hired. In three months, I knew all the architecture firm in uh, in Hong Kong. I'm hiring so so they all come to court me. [laughs] Yeah and after years, I decided I have to make a choice. Either stay with the developer or go back to the architectural practice, yeah and so I decided to, to architecture practice. I joined the uh one of the biggest firm in Hong Kong and then I also receive some uh commissions by myself. Yeah we did two big projects in Taipei so we become partners. So so for a period of time I had one of the biggest architectural firms in Chica—in Hong Kong and also in Taiwan. So I was a internationally recognized architect. [laughs]

MT: Um did you find the architectural styles of uh Chicago a lot different from that of Hong Kong?

TC: Yes the uh Chicago has its own—it's historically uh the best architectural city. Th—they develop new materials, new methods. Historically, like uh, the greatest master in history Frank Wright, Mies van der Rohe and those all came from Chicago. Uh Sullivan even dates back. So it was good for me to get all that training.

MT: What was it like um going back to Hong Kong?

TC: Going back to Hong Kong, uh... when you doing overseas, all the practice are different. I, for instance, uh I asked them, I said, now all the building projects have specifications like this. Uh, I said you

ever fired a contractor [inaudible] delay the project? They said never. I said then why this uh [laughs] this thick of specification? They said we use it as a whip. [laughs] We can threaten them. Yeah because in reality, you don't do that. He said, what happen is the practice is like you have a building. Uh, have ten different base high rise and the, the concrete work they were lent out by ten different subcontractors. They paid based on they—how fast they finish. So the sooner you finish, the earlier they get paid so they work from seven to eleven. Sometimes even overnight, and the uh practice is if they were complained because the noise, and the police will come to fine. The second time and they take the uh superintendent into the police stations and then we change the uh superintendent because he gets two more choice. Two more shot at it. Uh so so that kind of practice is different, yeah. And they also for instance in in this country, when you bill the project it's the bottom line how much the project. Over there, there's no bottom line. It's all based on each door how much. So so if you add another door later on, you just add price. While in this country, if you have 100 doors, you know you get one price. If you add one, that one door may cost you ten times. So that kind of practice is different. And also was fortunate, uh you get to pick, like for the uh marina (?), the best consultant uh in the world. We got consultant structural engineer from uh, from this country. We got lighting from Germany and uh the cost analysis from UK. Yeah so it's a, it's a learning curve for me. Yeah and then the practice in Taiwan is also different. The practice in Taiwan is again, is very different. Like the project I was involved, it has 4 mountain sites. It has 6,000 home, home lot. Um it um Taiwan's—that project problem was the geotechnology. The Hong—the Taiwan's slope, mountains, are 32 degrees, they are stable. And underneath, about 7, 8 feet, there are crushed stones. And when it's wet it's very slippery, but the 32 degree uh, because vegetation [inaudible] hold stable. But uh if you build a road and you cut into the mountain then the upperside of the—becomes steeper, like becomes 35 degrees or 38 degrees. And that, if you don't take care of the water come from the top, you landslides. So that's dangerous. And the—when they hired me to commission me to do the project was because of that problem. They couldn't solve. Hong Kong was very good with geotechnology, we have—yeah. And uh so we managed to uh solve that problem. Yeah and they, and also uh the project already has uh uh four or five very prominent architects in Taiwan, did model homes. I noticed the uh the off shore case. It cost a lot money to build, yeah. And so I suggest to the owner that we should do another set, uh more practical more marketing oriented. So I designed something like ten different model homes. Uh so it was a uh, it was interesting. Now, the problem the—again, it's practice problem. The, because it's such a big project they have uh 30, 40 engineers, architects involved and they they they subdivided. Like they have design group. They have uh work and join (?) group. They have supervisions and estimators. And at that time when we started the the project... like in this country, when we have a project, at the beginning you need ten designers and we put – you know, everybody join in. Over there, you can't because they're – they're division heads. You know, 我是 *chu zang* [I was *chu zang*] and the—这个 *chu zang* [this], if you put them in a design group and two of them cannot work for another *xiao bing*. So so I told the, the chairman, I said, it doesn't work way. I said, we need all 30 people all into the design, yeah, so we can all work together and try different things. Yeah so that kind of practice is different. Also, I designed a very good uh Cook County's courthouse building. Yeah the courthouse building is very complicated because you have security problem. You have criminal court. You have civil court. And uh for instance, I designed the – and they have a competition and we won the competition and the chief of the justice uh minister ask me, TC. He said, you know, to me, my building, security is most important. We had fist fights in corridors yeah because uh uh you know they do occur. Yeah, to me, it seems to me only need one entrance so we can control people in and out. Now why in the world do you give me 10? [laughs] So I explained to him. I said, now, I said, first of all, your administrative people, they not involved with any of the court activities. They should have separate entrance, away from that. So he agreed with that. And then I said, now on one side is your civil, ceremonial courts which people have multiple weddings and they do fireworks and they are celebrating. They are happy. On the other hand, you have criminal courts. Uh, you are passing death sentences. So the whole family show up crying. I said, these two groups of people don't mix. And also for instance, I said, when the judge pass the sentence, he shouldn't be involved with the public people. Things like that. Uh so so each project has its own uniqueness.

MT: Um so other than like... your wife uh...'s career being based in Hong Kong, how has her career as an artist impacted your career... as an architectural designer?

TC: Uh speak a little louder, yeah.

MT: Other than her—um your wife's career as uh being based in Hong Kong, how has her...artistic career impacted your architectural career?

TC: Oh it—it's a uh... yeah thinking back uh... for me to study architecture for her study art, we really benefited each other, yeah. And uh... uh she—yeah I go to like we made a number of uh trips uh to visit oversea museums. Um... uh so uh because her connection I can get into uh so the group of museum people, curators and uh we can go to their uh collections and see what the best they have, yeah. And the uh... so that part helped me, to train my eyes, s—so I can uh make a better aesthetically judgement. That's very beneficial, yeah most architects they—they don't have that art... that part uh closeness, yeah. And uh in her case like uh, I designed the museum and she had that show there that was a breakthrough for her, yeah. And the uh we we—and because I'm more outgoing, and she is more conserved uh so that—that worked out very well. [**MT:** Mhm.] Mhm, yeah.

MT: Um what is your opinion on like, China's um modern buildings now? Like how it has changed over the years.

TC: Uh yes! It's a great deal. Used to—we are thinking in term of efficiency, in term of uh aesthetic beauty, and uh... um and the making—trying to improve um, you know all aspect yeah. Uh, but today's, uh you look at the—all the new buildings and somehow uh... there are pros and cons, and the building now everybo—the clients are much more wealthy, so they would have a twisted buildings, and they have revolving uh floors [laughs] and all these uh—they treat it more of the art. [**MT:** Mhm.] That part actually is—is good, but then the other people trying to follow, and then y—then you question, you know, they spent all that money and it turned out uh to be uh not very—very good yeah, yes, yeah, and so it's much truer uh during my generation. It's uh versus um today's uh—you looking all the buildings here, they put the brick they put—they put concrete, they put the mirror glass and all the different materials threw into it, become very hodge-podge. And like uh—of course th—people like Frank Gehry, you know he treated the—the buildings uh—tilted, and crooked and uh—and yeah, and the whole thing is like a sculpture. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah, yeah uh that's different approach [**MT** and **CW:** Mhm] yeah. Mhm.

MT: Um how did you come to like live in Houston?

TC: Houston? Yes, uh, in 1982 when Margaret Thatcher went to Peking give back China—give back Hong Kong to China, and so the Hong Kong is—is a doomsday [**MT** and **CW** laugh] because everybody lost their lease. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah the majority of the uh owner uh they're building based on long term lease, yeah. When you give the lease, uh you know to [inaudible] to another country uh it—so it's everything dead stop. So the Hong—the Hong Kong people thought they better shift some of the assets uh over to uh this country [**CW:** Mhm]. Just in case communists play rough [laughs] yeah, and uh so they bought the company called Allright Parking. Uh the founder of Allright Parking uh used to park uh buggies [laughs] and the—later on the Model T came and he thought this parking business is—should be good [**MT:** Mhm.] yeah. And the—so he still smart enough, went to high—the uh law school and get his law degree but he established the company called Allright Parking yeah. The Allright Parking uh their business plan is... uh buying land, holding it, and pa—making money with parking, then someone the—in the urban downtown area, when someone wants to build a high rise then you can ask... uh you make money [**MT:** Mhm.] yeah. So half of their, their business from parking, the other half are from uh real estate, yeah. And uh so Hong Kong people know uh land, yeah, yes so they bought the company from the New York Exchange and so they asked me if I would come help them to uh to do the real estate

development, yeah, and the—luckily I did because in the 80's, uh the whole country uh there's a convention called Urban Land Institute, and everybody go there. There's about fourteen thousand members, just to hear one lecture, yes. The... short term economy, yeah, and the speakers are really uh heavyweights, and they talk about uh when—when in the 80's, '85, one guy said, "you know I have some bad news for you guys", he said, "the whole country in—in five years, won't be any office buildings won't be any apartment building any hotels any housing." Yeah the whole—and usually in a recession, the architects get hit first [CW laughs] yeah [laughs] yeah and the—and the uh also it's—it's bad for the architect is they usually spend the time and effort first so by the time recession come they cut uh...you're in bad shape, so Houston—the oil was from forty dollars down to six, yeah. And the... three years later uh... the real estate went kaput, yeah. [MT: Mhm] And then three years later, all the bank went, so for—for that period, uh the architects if you're lucky you don't have business, yeah otherwise, otherwise people don't pay the bill and you owe, yeah. So I was lucky with a company, yeah, and th—when you're doing uh big pictures like that, it—the individual effort doesn't count. It doesn't matter how good you are, yeah. So... so you—you—the architects usually uh... are vulnerable. [MT: Mhm. Um how-] So I enjoy Houston [MT: Oh] a great deal. Yeah and then, so the Allright Parking has 90 cities, so I'm in charge of the 90 cities, so I make the rounds, yeah and uh I usually book my te—tennis uh game first [all laugh] yeah, so it was another changing of my career, yeah. So I was wearing the owner's hat, yeah. Uh... so it was—it was fun, yeah.

MT: Mhm. Um how long did you work for Allright Parking before you retired?

TC: Uh... I worked—see I was fifty-four, came here, I retired sixty-six, so uh it was quite some time [MT: Mhm.] yeah. Yeah, and the um, I—I enjoyed it uh because uh uh by—so many cities you can travel all—all over and the uh you—you meet a lot of interesting people we have projects in—in uh Canada yeah, yeah, yeah.

MT: Um do you spend a lot of your uh free time playing tennis?

TC: Yes, yes. And also uh I forgot to mention I also uh uh very active in volunteer work. [MT: Mhm.] Yeah in Chicago I was the president of uh Evanston Art Center which is a school uh has galleries, has eight hundred students, and uh thirty eight faculty members, uh, it's in the suburbs of Chicago, yes. And uh so I was—somehow they—they asked me to become president, so [laughs] so uh I said no no—I said I'm too busy you know as a young architect I don't have time to—yeah. They say "well, uh... you should come to the board meeting if you are in town and uh and if we need you and you think you can help us, then you do it." [MT: Mhm.] Yeah, and Margaret was teaching there, yeah so, so I got to know the people. I feel obligated. I say yes. Six months later they fired the—the director. They—the board. And so they came to me they said "TC, you're designing museums you know the—the circle uh could you, you know, uh the head of the search committee uh to find a new director for us." Yeah. I thought it was important, yeah. So I agreed, yeah. And they—"we'll give two people as assistant." And uh "they do the leg work, you—you just, yeah uh put your input." As soon as I said yes, then I recognized, it's more than just finding someone, right. You have to define who you are [MT: Mhm.] when you offer a job. It's—first thing they say "what you want me to do?" Yeah, and then you have to decide what's your uh short term goals and long term goals, uh and what's your budget so uh it was involved, yeah. Uh it was like—in the meantime, Chicago Art Institute was hiring a director [laughs] and the Museum of Modern Art was [laughs] hiring a director and they pay ten times more [laughs] than what we offer [all laugh] and it turns out, there's no one trained as a museum director [MT: Mhm.], yeah. Uh so... so anyway that was another experience. And then like in Hong Kong, I helped them to design the uh uh s—tennis stadium in Victoria Park. Yeah I was on the board of uh uh the tennis association. [MT: Mhm.] Yeah that was another experience uh with working with British people. [MT: Mhm.] Yeah, and the—tennis is big in UK [MT: Mhm.] yeah, so they run the uh professional tennis, it's called Grand Prix, yeah. And the uh, like the head of the board is the chief justice, and then the jockey club vice chair and bank of Hong Kong uh chair,

yeah. So I was invited because I helped them design the uh the facilities, yeah. And uh one time, Jimmy Connors wants to come, and uh they asking for appearance money, which illegal at that time, yeah. And I thought how could the chief justice going to—going to solve that problem, yeah. [MT: Mhm.] Uh it—the UK people is very good in—in double talks [MT: Mhm.] yeah [laughs] so—so here he comes to meeting, he said, "you know, Jimmy Connors wants to come, and uh we want him, but he's asking for... appearance money, yeah." He said, "we need a friend" [laughs] "to help us out." So one of the board members say you know, "I have textile company, and we will create a t-shirt line for him", yeah, "and we'll pay him." Yeah, and all he has to do is just come and sign off [laughs] yeah, so it was simple, yeah. [laughs] Yeah the Hong Kong people do a lot of these uh interesting things. I also learned the free marketing. There's a big bus... uh which is—it runs around the Hong Kong, yeah. And it's regulated, because it's public service, and there's minibus, like a van, yeah. And the... the big bus charged one dollar for the fare. The minibus charged two dollars, yeah because they are faster, they are air conditioned, yeah. And then the minibus halfway... to—to downtown... reduced from two dollars to one dollar. Because distance is shorter, people don't want to pay extra dollar, yeah. Now if it's rain [laughs], they charge three dollars [laughs] now in this country people call gouging, right? [CW laughs] yeah because uh... because it's irrational because you know it's raining and I'm driving slower and nobody wants to get wet and uh make money. [MT: Mhm.] yeah Hong Kong people y—eh—they do thinking like that, yeah. And they would put up a... say jean factory, yeah, yeah. Jean was in fashion, you know, boom! Ten of them established. And next year, blouses in fashion [laughs] jeans gone, [all laugh] here comes the blouse. Yeah, yeah uh... so in this country, uh everything is uh set price, more or less, yeah. You don't ask—you don't y—yeah haggling is uh, is looked down upon. [MT: Mhm.] Yeah, but i—in life though, it's a uh—in so many ways, it's a negotiation. [MT: Mhm.] Yeah, you get to recognize your—your pros and your cons.

MT: Um so you're the head of the tennis association here in Houston, right?

TC: Yes.

MT: Um so what do your duties include, like working for the...

TC: Okay we run uh... I've been with them uh for something like twenty years now [MT: Mhm.] yeah. Uh... we run all the leagues. We have uh four thousand people playing at any given time, yeah. And we also run something like uh fifteen uh tournaments. Juniors, seniors, and uh mixed doubles and women and women. Uh so—so we uh it's been in existence for like fifty, sixty some years, and uh I joined them uh f—and the uh uh well because I love tennis, yeah. And also so you meet a group of interesting people, they are, yeah. Um... so then we also uh... for instance uh uh when Li Na the Chinese uh star uh... she's now making the best uh... uh endowment (?) uh player, even better than Maria Sharapova, yeah. [CW: Mm.] [MT: Mhm.] Yeah when she was fifteen, she came here, and got a scholarship in—in Newcombe Ranch, yeah. [MT: Mhm] And uh we—we go there t—there are two of them one like [inaudible] then there's another boy uh—so w—we go there pick them up. We uh provide their dinners and we play some tennis, and so make a home away from home. Yeah they were fifteen, sixteen, yeah. And I even arranged lessons, yeah, f—for her, yeah. And p—I played with her against some of the club members. We wiped everybody. [all laugh] And the—and the she—the—at fifteen uh she joined the—the—the city, all the players, they were government supported, yeah. So once you joined it was like joining the army, and y—you sleep there, you go to school there. Everything is—yeah, and she—she was came from very poor family. The father died. She and the mother has a—like a... a twelve by twelve room. And they rent half of it to people playing mahjong [TC and CW laugh] and the uh uh so—so—she was from uh... she—so when we arranged lessons for her, and she already showed her concentration, determine... determination, yeah. Yeah so I had the privilege, you know, support her, and then there's another Chinese girl—twenty-nine years old, and came to Houston and uh she asked me said uh she said "Mr. Chang" she said "I'm twenty nine years old" he was uh... China number one, yeah, in doubles. She said uh "I'm going back. My professional career is over. " Yeah, "so I'll probably just teach." She said "I would like to stay here, and

go to school and uh have a second career... make a better life." Yeah, so I told her I said, " I'll help you, but you—the first year or two will be difficult because your language and the uh—you have adjustments c—cultures yeah." So she agreed, so she stayed, and uh finally I found her a—a teaching job in tennis. And uh four years later she married a uh Irish boy. [all laugh] And I had to give her away because her parents couldn't come, yeah. And uh she now has two kids, yeah, one is ten, one is eight, yeah. They live in, yeah they happily, so we still uh keep touch with each other, yeah. And the—there's several occasions like this, yeah. Mm.

MT: Mm Chelsey did you have any questions?

CW: Um... when you first came to America did you feel like you experienced any discrimination because you were a Chinese person coming here...

TC: [inaudible] Try it again.

CW: Um [laughs] when you first to came to America [**TC:** Yeah] did you feel like you experienced any discrimination because you were Chinese?

TC: Oh, the uh... well I went to th—Belmont uh North Carolina or Charlotte uh... [**CW:** Mhm.] it's deep south, yeah. And the... the racial feelings still there [**CW:** Mhm.] but the Chinese, they considered as a guest, as a visitor [**CW:** Okay.] yeah. When I went there, they have a bus. They have a train station—separate bathrooms, uh coloreds and the... and the uh the —the buses even empty they go back—stay in the back. Yeah, s—so so so it was very pronounced, uh I see that, yeah. [**CW:** Mhm.] But they—uh, as a Chinese, uh somehow uh from my experiences, they treat us more or less as a uh, as visitors, yeah. And uh we are—our group of people's different than Chinatown people. Yeah, the Chinatown people oh—but the way I was named I was hired as a uh... uh architects for—uh for Chinatown... in Chicago. Yeah, they were building a uh second Chinatown, uh there were two associations. One is called Xi Xing, the other one is called An Liang, uh so they used to in downtown. And they both had a—like a—uh a town's war. Yeah, so one moved to South, uh, 22nd Street, yeah. And the—the other one stayed downtown and they want to move to the North. The federal government bought their property, and they—so they asked me to be their architect, yeah. And I have the pictures, showing—showing that. Uh, so they sent me to San Francisco, uh to talk to the uh Chinatown fathers, yeah, to learn how to build a Chinatown, yeah. Uh... so you know, it—the list is—if it uh is familiar you know you have the—got the city council approved the name of the Chinese street and name—name of the Chinatown, and uh... uh you established community uh halls and the so things like that, yeah. Uh, but then they told me a story, they said that one of the uh... national party wants Chinatown vote... uh as a block, yeah. Then China then can deliver it, so we told them, if they change the quota, that time th—the quota for Chinese only five thousand. The British, the German, the French they have fifty thousand, sixty thousand, and they never used it—you know never—yeah, but China uh the wife cannot come, because no quota, yeah you can't immigrate [**MT:** Mhm.] uh so it was this—one number one issue with Chinatown people. Yeah, you can have uh—you can get married, you get children, but they cannot come. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah they the the—the immigration quota is only five thousand, yeah. I could not practice uh as an architect. Uh I qualified as a structural engineer because that's needed. But once you get the green card to work, you're still not allowed to practice because you're not a citizen. And citizenship the waiting period is like ten years. Yeah, yeah so that's the handicap. Yeah, so the Chinatown people—San Francisco told the party, "if you get rid of the quota, uh you will get our votes. " Yeah and two years later they delivered. Yeah, uh yeah, yeah now the problem they then [inaudible], it didn't stop there. You know, all of a sudden [inaudible] one apartment you have uh, one family. Now all of a sudden, the uncle came, the—the wife came, the father came. It becomes three or four families. Yeah, in Chinatown with all the people, they can't absorb—there's not many job openings. So you have juvenile delinquent problems. People are hanging [laughs] around street corners. He says—he used to the Chinatown—he jokingly said, "you know, crime is for adults only" [laughs] "and now all

of a sudden they—all the youngsters joined in". Yeah, so—so when you do something you get to thinking of all the—all the consequences. Yeah, which is good advice, yeah. So—so I ran into uh—a lot—a lot of situations which a normal architect don't—don't, yeah.

MT: Um how long did it take for you to—for the rest of your family to come over to America?

TC: Uh yes we uh...w—the three of us youngsters, we were lucky we escaped to Taiwan. And the three sisters, uh they stayed behind. And they were... uh they all had a girlfriend they are getting married, and they going to Taiwan is a—it may be—be a risky [laughs] business. Yeah, it could be totally wiped out. So, they choose to stand, and because uh they have the overseas connections, and they were listed as a uh—blacklisted, yeah. Uh, so they all had... pretty rough life, yeah. [**MT:** Mhm] One of the youngest sisters, uh... he's more uh left oriented, yeah, and so he went to... Harbin (?) University, yeah. He married a classmate when the party asking for—go to the uh... west wood, yeah the countries to develop the—so they—they volunteered uh the Xinjiang is a—is a like uh...from New York to San Fransisco, yeah it's a long way. And, and the conditions ver—very rough. Yeah, and so—so that's one of them, and then my older sister uh married uh my brother's classmates, and he j—he during war he was in the—in the army, yeah. He was in India fighting Burman (?) War. Yeah, so he has that background plus my sister's connection to—to Taiwan. He said every time he says movement and—and they be perched. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah, yes and then during the Cultural Revolution they didn't have enough time to—food to eat, so she lost all her hair, yeah. Uh... like my other sister in Shanghai she's a teacher. Yeah, at is—principal in the—middle school. She's uh... but again because connection, and they were roughly treated, yeah. But they all survived, so we get the two of them, uh... and their family out, and they were doing uh... I told them, especially my older sister has four kids, yeah, so I told them, learn a trade, because they don't speak English, yeah. You know, y—plumbing, electric or a—anyway, they—they came [laughs] each one have a child, so three families—oh actually four yeah, we get her other sister out first. The three of them, they rent a house, and uh so six adults and three children and with the father so the ten of them. They worked in the Chinese supermarket uh seven days a week. And to them, you know to work in the air condition, they feed you [laughs] they uh, they pay you [laughs] and so the s—seven day week plus some overtime [**MT:** Mhm.] yeah. Uh, three years later they all had enough money to put down a down payment. Uh... and then they remodeled the house, and rented some rooms out to help the—the—the [inaudible]. And today—and the—the where they bought the property, I say it's about three blocks away from uh Apple's campus [**MT:** Wow.] Cupertino. Yeah, yeah and the—all their children, they have five of them, their children, uh two of them are doctors, one works for uh... uh IBM, and one is a pharmacist, so they all do well, and then they—the children at that time they were yeah th—five or six seven, yeah. They make adjustment uh within a year, they speak good English and yeah. It's a successful and we had a family reunion uh... forty-eight people showed up. [**MT:** Wow.] Yeah, yeah I'm the oldest one. [**MT** and **CW** laugh] Yeah all from my father's side. [**MT:** Mhm] and not including my mother's side. Yeah, uh so... as immigrants if you work in this country, uh you survive. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah.

MT: Um...uh I had a question for—about your childhood. [**TC:** Yeah.] What was it—you said that you experienced like Japanese occupation in China?

TC: Oh we hated the uh of course everybody hated the Japanese. They are rough. Yeah, as you know [laughs] uh... yeah they—they—they are—they do, yeah they uh... I don't want to compare to Nazis the—which one is worse, I don't know, but probably Japanese just as bad, at least. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah, and so we d—no Chinese—like even though later on I had a uh... structural engineer, we become very good friends, we're a team, his name is Yamamoto [laughs] which was the captain—lead the fleet, bombed the uh uh [laughs] Pearl Harbor. Yeah, yeah, yeah, and uh yeah so we don't like Chine—uh Japanese, yeah. [**MT:** Mhm.] But even though later on I have, you know, individually uh... we have friends. [**MT:** Mhm.]

MT: Um so what was it like when like the Japanese occupation ended? What was it like in China?

TC: Uh we never exposed the uh—after the war when they—they surrendered [**MT:** Mhm.] and uh my father was the first wave of people to went to Nanking to take over, yeah. [**MT:** Mhm.] So—so uh... so that time yeah Japan was very cooperative [**MT:** Mhm.] There were no incidents, yeah. They turned over the weapons, but the mostly, they turned over t—to the Communists [**MT:** Mhm]. Yeah, yeah.

MT: [to CW] Um do you have any questions?

CW: Mm, no, no more.

MT: Um is there anything else that you want to say for—to be archived?

TC: Uh I think it's a great thing, uh you know when I first... my brother's friend, was telling us is that—he said 1948 he was here in Houston. He was a professor, yeah. Uh, it's only—something like four hundred Chinese in this country, yeah. Yeah, uh in the city, yeah [**MT:** Mhm.] so—so one nice thing about Houston is uh... ninety percent of people or more are all immigrants [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah they all come from somewhere. Yeah, so that gave you the uh, the benefit of uh a metropolitan—true metropolitan, yeah. There's no really dominance, yeah. It's uh—so it's open. You get lots of great restaurants. [all laugh] And also about Rice, I just have to say. [coughs] Uh... Rice is uh very uh community uh friendly, yeah. I have a—my brother lived in Palo Alto for forty years, and I visited—we did the engineering school at uh Stanford. And the uh—they are very uh—for forty years I asked my brother, you know he knows a lot of people there. I said you ever uh anticipated uh, like he played tennis—"you ever played on Stanford tennis courts?" "No!" [laughs] "You ever attended a music performance?" "No." Yeah and uh the Stanford they have a—from the main gate to the campus, there's about a mile or so, eight or ten blocks, and it's a—it's like a... a... demilitarized zone. There's no activities. You can't walk it because it's that far. And even if you get to it—like Margaret had a show uh exhibition there, yeah and uh uh y—you have to feed the meters, yeah. Uh, the short term parking is very limited. Every time I visit there for uh I illegally park. [all laugh] Yeah, yeah but then—there's a different setup. Yeah, uh I—we live in Evanston which is next to the Northwestern campus, yeah, and the—and Northwestern is also very nice oh—yeah. Well of course she went there so we know um lots of people, yeah. Mhm. So we—we are very fortunate eh... uh... we always lived a very full life, yeah. [**MT:** Mhm.] Yeah, we didn't have any children, that's yeah, and the uh I'm also very good in uh... in—because of my dealing with uh uh you know, all different kinds of people different practice—situations uh the only thing I really regret uh i—I don't know enough about financing [**MT:** Mhm.] yeah, because as an architect I know like O'Hare Field then I know exactly where the expressway going to—to come, uh what intersection and this were swamp land [laughs] they were trying to sell it for four hundred dollars a square f—acre. And today it's four million or—or eight million [laughs] [**MT:** Wow.] Yeah, yeah and uh... s—so uh most students are say—they don't pay attention about financing, yeah. Like uh I have some niece go to uh Harvard uh business school, yeah, yeah so t—so the uh... uh they have something like uh—nine hundred uh students, yeah. And the ratio is like nine to one. Uh... w—fo—small class. The—they're... it... so it all depends on—on your—your... your grades, the questions you ask and the answers you give. Half of the—the gr—the grades are based on that, yeah, yeah. So I think as a rule, yeah the school doesn't provide enough essential financial uh...uh training. [**MT:** Mhm] Yeah.

MT: Well I—since there's no more questions it's like [**TC:** Oh, okay] It's—thank you for uh [**TC:** Thank you.] [**CW:** Thank you.] allowing us to interview you for the archive.

TC: Okay, yeah thank you.