

My Life with CAT

by Robert C. Y. Chu

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Cynthia Chennault*

CAT Employee (1954-1962), Taipei, Taiwan. Manager of Passenger and Cargo Sales (1957-1962). Currently, President of World Express, Inc., General Sales Agent for United/Lufthansa Group in Taipei. (Photographs Courtesy of Robert Chu)

I was born in Shanghai and graduated at the age of 20 from St. John's University in 1948 with a B.A. in Economics. It was a well-respected university established in 1879 by the Episcopal Church, adapting U.S. Education Systems. Soon after graduation China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) hired me in its Business Department and assigned me to work in Taipei. As you know, CNAC defected to the communists in December, 1949. So I was stranded in Taiwan. The General Manager of CNAC in Taipei organized a travel agency and asked me to help manage it. At the time it was the only travel agency familiar with international travel and had good contacts with Pan American World Airlines, which was the largest U.S. carrier at that time.

Moon Chen used to phone me with questions about travel on Pan Am and other matters, and we got to know each other through our phone conversations. One day in 1954 he asked if I'd like to join CAT as a Manager Trainee. I happily accepted the offer. So Moon was the one who recruited me and gave me the opportunity to start a new career in the airline industry.



Robert Chu

The photos illustrate many years at CAT. I hope they'll be of interest also for the documentary. CAT's sales office, where I worked as Sales Manager during 1955-56, was located at Tsing Tao Road, No. 7. The photo to the left shows me at my desk. Notice also the photo of General Chennault hanging on the wall.

Moon Chen was a great boss and friend. I learned a lot from him. He taught me how to communicate with people and do my job well. He even took me with him on a sales trip to Japan in 1956. This was my first trip to see war-torn Japan. I regret losing contact with Moon as he suddenly left the office when the company was taken over by CIA and I didn't even have the chance to say goodbye. So sad to note that he passed away in 2009.

Lew Burrige was our VP for Sales. He was a great leader and led our team to a successful commercial operation including the launch of the Mandarin Jet. The photo below is of one of CAT's sales conferences. It shows Lew to my right, and across the desk from Lew is Director of Sales, C.K. Tseng.



C.K. Tseng, Lew Burrige, and Robert Chu

By this time, I had moved to CAT's home office – the large four-story building on Chung Shan.

I believe the most important development during my time there was CAT's entering IATA and we signed interline agreements with some of the world's leading airlines for increased interline relationships and sales. And of course, the launch of the Mandarin Jet service which was Taiwan's only international air service at that time connecting Taiwan with Hong Kong and Japan.

The introduction of the luxurious Convair 880 "Mandarin Jet" was a famous milestone in passenger travel in Asia. The photo (right) was taken during the sales conference that launched the Mandarin Jet.



CAT's Annual Traffic and Sales Conference That Launched the Mandarin Jet (*Robert Chu is Seated Far Right*)

I thoroughly enjoyed my eight years working for CAT. I resigned in 1962 in order to form my own company, World Express Inc., representing several international airlines. I left on very good terms and Hugh Grundy and Var Green came to the opening reception of my new company. While at World Express, I continued to work closely with CAT. When CAT moved its headquarters to another location in 1968, Hugh Grundy, then CAT President, gave me the pleasure of taking over the old landmark building on Chung Shan Peilu as my office (1968-1974). The building was still in good shape at the time.



In a group picture of CAT employees, Hugh Grundy stands at the center and you can see me in the second row, third from the right.

World Express Inc. is currently General Sales Agent for United Airlines and Lufthansa. United is operating a daily flight between San Francisco and Taipei.

At the 2010 CAT Reunion held in Taipei it was great to see some old friends again – and meet their grown-up children. I'm 93 and go to the office twice a week to check and answer my E-mails. I play Mahjong three times a week with some regular friends.

Wishing you good health at this time of the pandemic and a happy Christmas and New Year!