

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Albert T. Quon
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Interviewer: Jean Wong

Notes

Albert Quon was born on May 24, 1903, in Hoiping. He has 2 brothers and 1 sister. Albert is number 2 on totem pole. His grandfather was in porcelain business. Father was from merchant class and had contacts with foreigners, and learned English, then migrated to U.S.

In 1878, Albert's uncle came to U.S. to be liaison between Chinese railroad laborers and employers.

John Spreckle owned most of land in San diego. John's brother Adolph of Sea Island Sugar Company of Honolulu was the one who suggested use of Chinese laborers to build railroad.

In 1888, Albert's father went to San Diego with uncle and established curio shop called Quon Mane and Co. in La Jolla. At that time father was about 19 years old. Father was born around 1869. He served as buyer and traveled back and forth between China and U.S. and worked for 20 years as buyer. Father died at age of 44 in 1913.

Albert came to U.S. to go to school. He spent the last 2 years of high school in San Diego. In 1925, he entered USC and majored in business administration and law was his minor field.

In 1928, Albert graduated from USC. After graduation, he traveled around U.S. including to museums for 2 months. Albert's older brother was also in San Diego and worked in curio shop.

Albert took on family business. Importer of similar merchandise. Became wholesaler rather than retailer and broadened business to cover other parts of U.S.

Nature of business: Quon & Quon Co.

Albert went back to China and started Q & Q Co. and intended to stay in China. American merchandising Corp. (AMC) was his first American customer. AMC supplied goods to 18 large department stores in U.S. Q. & Q. Co. started in Beijing in 1930 because the merchandise found there would be saleable to Americans.

Went to craftsmen and custom-ordered merchandise. Merchandise was usually things of practical use--useful and very nice things, e.g. cigarette holders, ashtray, cloisonne things. also modified goods to suit American tastes, e.g. softer colors.

Notes (cont'd)

Albert Quon was a selective exporter at that time. Utilized cheap labor of China to make merchandise of general utility for American market.

In 1933 and 1934, invented pewter rim bowl to hide cracked bowl rim from Ming Dynasty bowls he bought from noodle shop in Beijing.

During War in China Albert returned to U.S. to collect accounts and couldn't return to China due to the war. He felt reluctantly stranded in U.S. In contrast, he felt sense of being at home in China.

He reestablished in China for few years till Communists took over and then closed down business in China and later turned to Japan for importing Chinese merchandise.

Albert has 4 children, 3 daughters and 1 son, who were all American born. In 1931, Albert married in Nanjing.

Albert and wife met in college. He spoke Mandarin with wife in Nanking. Children had tutors in Cantonese and Mandarin, who came twice weekly for about 7 to 8 years.

Albert Quon was the first Chinese to live in Beverly Hills.

After War, Albert wanted to take family back to China to enrich them in Chinese culture but decided against it since China was too chaotic. But not living amongst Chinese broadened his children's outlook.

While student at USC some places didn't rent to him because he was Chinese and in some Los Angeles restaurants and theatres, Chinese were not allowed. Albert Quon didn't mind the discrimination too much since he intended to return to China.

Chinese compared to Jews: heard that comparison made in recent years.