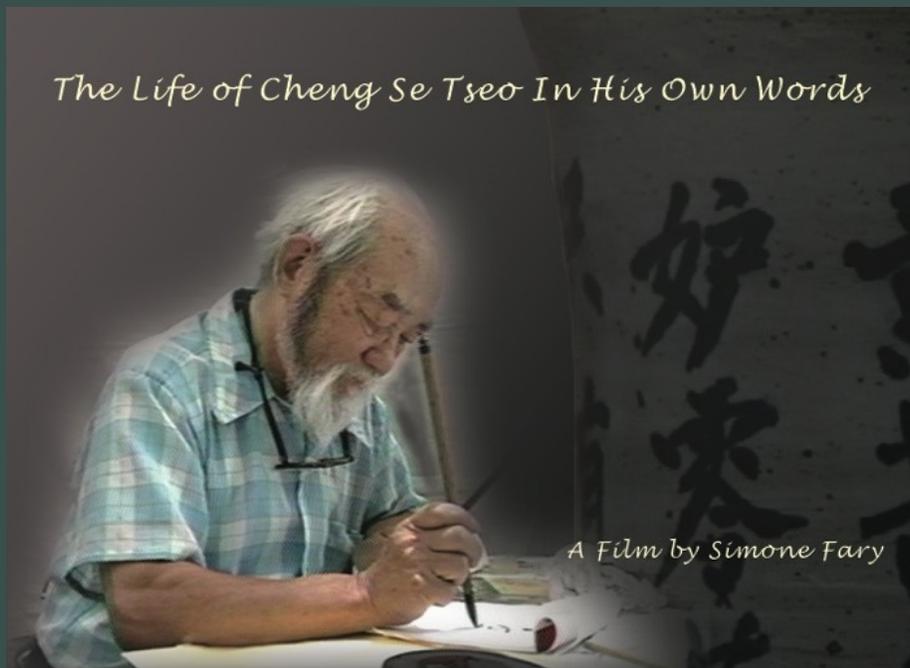


Educator's Guide

The Life of Cheng Se Tseo in His Own Words

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ABOUT THE FILM

Cheng Se Tseo was born in rural Southern China around 1904. In his early years he defeated an opium addiction, served in Chang Kai Shek's Nationalist Army, earned a PhD in the United States and was a sailor in the American Navy during World War II. He returned to China in the chaos of the post war years but had to flee the country again as the Communists came to power. He spent the last decades of his life creating beautiful pottery.

This documentary took over a decade to make, and was a labor of love for the wife and husband team of Simone Fary and Richard Hall. The film was completed as a memorial tribute in December of 2002 and went on to be broadcast on two Pennsylvania public television stations.

Dr. Tseo's life itself is also a story of perseverance and commitment. He underwent many struggles in both his native China and his adopted home. At the end of his life his final career as a potter brought him much joy and became a tool for him to pass on his wisdom to younger generations.

OBJECTIVES

Upon hearing and discussing Dr. Tseo's story, viewers will have a better understanding of how:

- Human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to different cultures through the story of one resilient individual.
- Cultures are dynamic and change over time.
- Gender expectations for women and men can vary in different times, countries, and even regions.
- Dr. Tseo's story is one small example of the many connections between American and Chinese history and culture.
- Historical events and circumstances can impact individuals like Dr. Tseo and cause them to migrate to new homes and start new lives.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

National Council for Social Studies

Themes presented in *The Life of Dr. Cheng Se Tseo in his Own Words* and this Facilitator Guide align with the following organizing strands from the National Council for Social Studies:

Thematic Strand 1. CULTURE

Thematic Strand 2. TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

Thematic Strand 4. INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Thematic Strand 9. GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

This film and guide can be used to create new, or supplement existing curriculum to deepen student comprehension of these themes.

Common Core History/Social Studies:

This oral history can serve as a primary source in order to:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.5](#)

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6](#)

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9](#)

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#)

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CONTENT ADVISORY

At 6:50 Dr. Tseo describes how his young students were killed for being Communists. Hearing this may be disturbing to some viewers.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



My history with the Tseo family dates to 1987 when I was a film student at Penn State. A mutual friend tried to set me up with Dr. Tseo's son George, but only friendship developed. George introduced me to his father. Like many students, I had seen him walking around campus with his distinctive shuffle but knew nothing about him. As I got to know the family better (even living in their house for my final semester) it became apparent that Dr. Tseo had lived quite a truly remarkable life, and that perhaps I should document it for posterity.

Since it was my first film, I didn't really have much of a plan or any sense of the challenges I would face. If I had known how many unpaid hours would go into the making of this film I might have seriously reconsidered. Fortunately I didn't.

One of the many challenges was that Dr. Tseo's thick accent was hard for many to understand. The time consuming solution was to transcribe our interviews and edit them into a script for his son George to read. Another challenge was figuring out how to condense and organize such a broad, sprawling life into a story suitable for film. Eventually we came across the idea of using the creation of one of his pots as not only way to structure the story, but as a metaphor for his life itself.

In spite of these and many other challenges, the making of this documentary, and my friendship with the Tseos remain a highlight of my life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss the role of perseverance in Dr. Tseo's life.
- Give an example of an instance where Dr. Tseo's life led him to an outcome or place he didn't originally intend. What traits allowed him to thrive under new circumstance?
- Many of his peers felt Dr. Tseo should remain in his rural area as a post master, since this job was the rare "golden rice bowl" that would provide a comfortable lifetime income. If you were Dr. Tseo, would you have listened to this advice?
- Explain what the expectations were for unmarried men and women with members of the opposite sex whom they weren't related to in the rural area Dr. Tseo grew up in. How was this different from what he experienced in the city? How would your life be different if you lived in such a culture?
- What were the results of hyperinflation for the Chinese after the war? What would happen if hyperinflation occurred here?

- While Dr. Tseo's art was beautiful, he also used it to pass on his philosophy. Do you believe in "art for art's sake", or prefer art that delivers a social message. Why or why not?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

the 1800's

China was not a unified country, but rather divided into provinces overseen by feuding warlords. Great Britain realized that great profits were to be made by selling opium grown in its Indian colonies to the Chinese. The Chinese tried to resist during The Opium Wars (1840-1842 and 1856-1860), but were too weak to avoid humiliating defeats. Opium flooded the country and further weakened it. In addition, foreign powers were able to force China to grant "concessions" of territory.

However, some intellectuals felt that China could regain its place in the world by embracing modern ideas from the West. Over the years many Chinese students were (and are still) sent abroad to learn and bring these ideas back home. This included Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, who studied in the U.S. and Japan and would eventually play a crucial role in reunifying the Chinese Republic. Dr. Tseo was also part of this tradition.

1904



The estimated year of Dr. Tseo's birth remained a time of great chaos in China as well as poverty and backwardness, especially in rural areas such as his. Widespread opium addiction affected many Chinese families, including Dr. Tseo's.

Conditions were particularly hard for women, who were constrained by many social expectations. Arranged marriages were the norm. Binding women's feet was a very painful and debilitating practice that existed in China for many centuries, and continued even after being legally banned in 1911.

1912

Establishment of the Republic of China

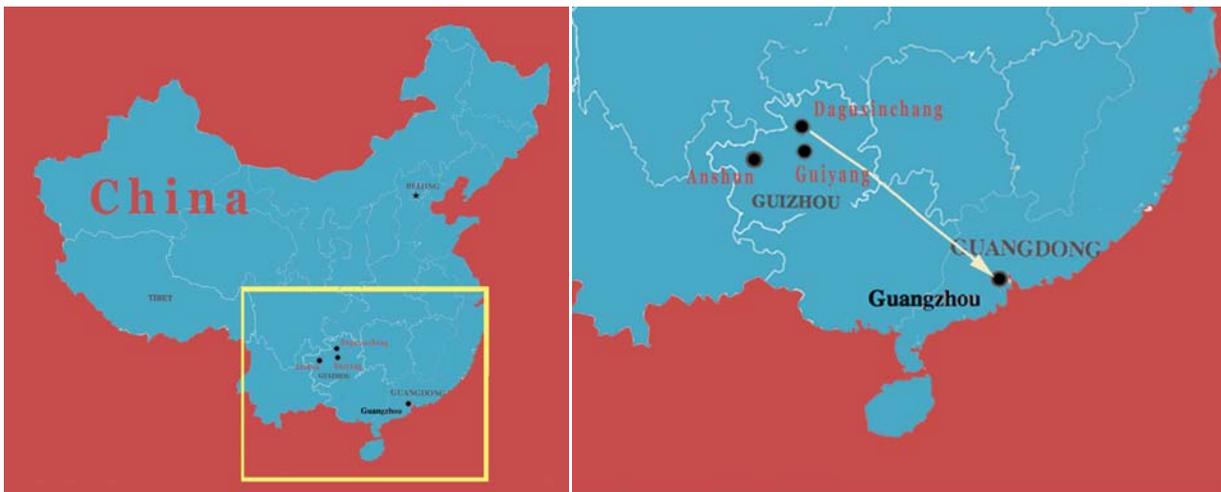
1913



Sun Yat-Sen establishes the "National People's Party". This is called either the Kuo-min-tang or Guomindang. The warlords still remain in control in many parts of the country.

1921

Chinese Communist party (CCP) was founded in Beijing. The Communist also opposed the warlords.



Dr. Tseo's 6-month walk

1927



Chang Kai Shek consolidates power within the Kuo-min-tang and turns on his Communist allies in a bloody purge that included Dr. Tseo's students. A ten-year civil war between Nationalists and Communists begins.

1936

Communists and Nationalists officially form a "United Front" against invading Japanese.

1937 - 1945

War of resistance against Japan, with the help the U.S. and other allies. Dr. Tseo is a student in America, then works in the Post Office and joins the Navy.

1946 - 1949

Civil war between Communists and Nationalists resumes. Dr. Tseo returns to China after the end of World War II.

Near the end of this period Dr. Tseo speaks of the hyperinflation that occurred. According to the Cambridge Dictionary hyperinflation is “a condition where the price of everything in a national economy goes out of control and increases very quickly” This has occurred in the Weimar republic in Germany and contributed to WWII. More recently it occurred in Zimbabwe.

1949

The Nationalists are forced to retreat to Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China is formed under Communist rule. Chaing Kai Shek ruled Taiwan for 25 years until his death at age 87. Dr. Tseo returns to the U.S. to start a new life.

RESOURCES

About the period of Chinese history that Dr. Tseo experienced:

Websites:

Timeline of Chinese history 1700 – 2008. <http://www.indiana.edu/~e232/Time2.html>

Books:

The Generalissimo - Chiang Kai-Shek and the Struggle for Modern China by Jay Taylor. This 2009 comprehensive look at Chiang’s life goes from his earlier years when Dr. Tseo knew him to his 25-year presidency of Taiwan.

The Opium Wars - The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another. W. Travis Hannes III, PhD and Frank Sanello’s 2002 book tells the story of these two wars and long lasting consequences on the Chinese

Restless empire: China and the world since 1750. Odd Arne Westad’s 2012 look at China’s complex foreign affairs over the past 250 years, starting with the invasion of Burma in the 1760s.

Wealth and Power - China’s Long March to the Twenty-First Century. Orville Schell and John Delury’s 2013 look at key players in modern Chinese history includes a chapter on Sun Yat-Sen and another on Chaing Kai-Shek.

Videos:

China: The Roots of Madness (1967) <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.616322> and *The Battle of China* (1944) https://youtu.be/iww_Psy4QHo are in the public domain and available for free. They are both propaganda films made by the U.S. government that provide some useful information and graphics about Chinese history. They might also make interesting comparisons of documentary used for propaganda versus oral history or other purposes.

China: A Century of Revolution (2007). This 6-hour series provides an informative mixture of archival footage and interviews. The first hour focuses on the years when Dr. Tseo was first awakening politically.

About the Chinese Diaspora

Websites:

History of Chinese in America: An Interactive Timeline
<http://www.mocanyc.org/learn/timeline>

Books:

The Chinese in America - A Narrative History by Iris Chang - This 2003 book is a comprehensive overview of the entire 150-year history of the Chinese in America.

Sons of the Yellow Emperor - A History of the Chinese Diaspora by Lynne Pan. This 1990 text examines Chinese immigration to various countries starting in 1500.

The Chinese-American Heritage by David M Brownstone. This 1988 text serves as a concise summary of both Chinese history and the Chinese American experience.

Chinese Americans by Dusanka Miscevic and Peter Kwong. This 2000 “coffee-table book” provides a good summary of the Chinese American experience and many high quality illustrations and photos.

Videos:

The Chinese in America. This free 3 part series available from C-Span’s American Artifacts features historian Charlie Chin discussing the history of the Chinese in California, and giving a tour of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

<http://www.c-span.org/video/?312722-1/chinese-america-part-1>

<http://www.c-span.org/video/?312877-1/chinese-america-part-2>

<http://www.c-span.org/video/?312877-1/chinese-america-part-3>

Becoming American: The Chinese Experience. This 263 minute 3 episode series from Bill Moyers/PBS tells the story of Chinese Americans from early immigrants in California to present times.

EPILOGUE

Given Dr. Tseo's longevity we always assumed his son George (the narrator of the film) would lead a similarly long and productive life. Sadly, we lost him to a brain tumor in 2005, at the far too young age of 47. He is survived by his wife Hui Fu, and their two children who carry on the family legacy of living busy, productive lives as fully integrated Chinese American citizens.

ABOUT NERDSMAKEMEDIA

Nerdsmakemedia specializes in educational media in a variety of formats including documentary and other instructional video, online learning, instructional design, curriculum, eBooks and Wordpress websites. Our other historical films include:



[American Feud: A History of Conservatives and Liberals \(2016 version coming soon\).](#)



[Confounding Father: Luther Martin versus the U.S. Constitution \(coming soon\)](#)