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University of California
Berkeley, California

ALEXANDER (“SANDY”) CALHOUN
The Asian Art Museum Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens and Martin Meeker
in 2013

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[End of Interview]

Alexander (Sandy) Calhoun was born in Shanghai in 1925 to American parents. He was raised in China, the Philippines, and Switzerland. He served in the military at the end of World War II and was stationed in Tokyo after the war's end, where he worked in Civil Censorship Detachment. After completing law school, he moved to San Francisco where he became an expert in maritime, which led him to live in Tokyo in the 1950s. Upon returning to San Francisco, his wife Connie became involved in the Society for Asian Art, an organization that played a key role in bringing the Brundage collection of Asian Art to San Francisco. Calhoun was appointed to the San Francisco Asian Art Museum Commission shortly after it was established in 1969 and has been involved in the institution, in some fashion, ever since. In this interview, Mr. Calhoun discusses the museum's early years, the key exhibitions it staged, its leadership, and governance issues.

Interview #1 January 10, 2013

[Audio File 1]

01-00:00:05

Rubens: It's wonderful to be here starting our interview about your role with the Asian Art Museum. And I'd like to begin with where you were born and what your formal name is.

01-00:00:32

Calhoun: Well, my name is Alexander D. Calhoun, Jr. D for Dewey. And the Dewey comes from the fact that my father was born in 1898 and that was the year of the Battle of Manila Bay, where Admiral Dewey defeated the Japanese--the Spanish admiral, pardon me, the Spanish admiral. And so I'm a junior, although I've dropped the junior. And I was born in Shanghai, China in 1925 and I lived there until 1937, so until I was twelve. And then the Japanese, they had come from Manchuria through North China and were attacking in the vicinity of Shanghai. So my parents went on a regularly scheduled home leave. In those days you had home leave every four years. And they left me in a boarding school in Switzerland until 1939 because of the political disturbances in Shanghai. I think it was during that period, or maybe a little later, that the Japanese sank one of our warships, the Panay, P-A-N-A-Y, which was part of the Asiatic fleet. In those days the United States had an Asiatic fleet which operated on the Yangtze River, as well as on the coastline. And it was to protect commerce from pirates and stuff. We even had a US District Court located in Shanghai in what was then the International Concession. And then in '39—

01-00:02:29

Rubens: Well, can I stop you just for one moment? Tell me how your parents came to be in Shanghai.

01-00:02:34
Calhoun:

Well, my father started out, his first job, was with a precursor or predecessor of Citibank in Manila. And my mother went to Manila with a group of teachers from the University of Minnesota and she was teaching math at the University of the Philippines and so they met there. Must have been about 1919, I think. And—

01-00:03:03
Rubens:

Your mother's name is?

01-00:03:04
Calhoun:

My mother's name was Minna, M-I-N-N-A, and her maiden name was Schick. S-C-H-I-C-K, and they were married there. And then they were transferred to Shanghai where my father spent most of his career, although he then returned to Manila in 1939, which is when I rejoined them. Because Manila was supposed to be safe. And it was, I guess, then.

01-00:03:36
Rubens:

Did you grow up knowing Mandarin?

01-00:03:40
Calhoun:

No, no. In Shanghai the first school I went to was the local German school, called the Kaiser Wilhelm Schule. And I was there for two or three years, I don't remember how long. But then the Nazis became more and more influential and my parents took me out of that school. And then I went to the Shanghai American School. So I never went to any Chinese school. I played with my amah. In those days almost everybody had an amah to take care of the children, your children. And so she had children and we were playmates. But she came from the provinces near Shanghai, so they didn't speak Shanghainese that well. And whatever I had learned I've forgotten long since. Which is too bad because now the Shanghai people are all over the place and they all want to talk Shanghainese and I have to admit, embarrassingly, that I don't remember it.

01-00:04:47
Rubens:

That's how they referred to it? Shanghainese?

01-00:04:51
Calhoun:

Shanghainese or Shanghai dialect, yes.

01-00:04:55
Rubens:

So we'll pick up again in '39 when you rejoin your parents but anything particularly that was formative for you at the Swiss school?

01-00:05:07

Calhoun:

Well, it was a tiny boarding school in the mountains and they had a very sensible approach to education. If the ski conditions were great, we had a holiday. And then when the weather was poor, we made it up. And I loved it. I think it had an influence on me. Ever since then I've loved hiking and loved the mountains. My wife and I, every year we used to spend ten days or two weeks backpacking in the Sierra Nevada, so that probably had some influence on that.

01-00:05:50

Rubens:

So I had interrupted your story. In '39 you rejoin your parents.

01-00:05:55

Calhoun:

Yes, in Manila. And I went to the Manila American High School. So I didn't learn any Tagalog, which is the Philippine national language, which is kind of too bad. But I was there two years and then my parents thought I should be in a more competitive better school. So in 1941, again, they went on home leave, the summer of '41, and they brought me back and put me in boarding school at Andover in Massachusetts. And I did my last two years of high school there and then that was in '41, right. And the war started and I was there during the war. And my father had returned to Manila and he was in prison camp there, interned in what's the old University of Santo Tomas, which was at one point the oldest university under the American flag when the Philippines were a commonwealth. And then the Japanese moved some of the prisoners to an agricultural research station that the University of the Philippines had at Los Baños, which is about an hour outside of Manila. But my mother and my younger brother and I were here and I graduated from Andover in 1943. And in those days, when you were eighteen you reported for the draft. So I was drafted in 1943.

01-00:07:52

Rubens:

Obviously aware that your father was in a prison camp.

01-00:07:57

Calhoun:

Oh, yes, yes.

01-00:07:58

Rubens:

Any communication between—

01-00:07:59

Calhoun:

Well, I think a couple of times during the whole span of the war my mother got a little postcard with some relief organization, I don't know, the Red Cross, I think. And then there was an occasion when certain people were repatriated. There was an exchange. The Japanese diplomats were put on a ship. The ship was called the Gripsholm, at least one of the ships was. G-R-I-

P-S-H-O-L-M, I think. And so some of the fellow prisoners, ones who had not been living in Manila but maybe were en route or the diplomatic people or Red Cross people, they were released by the Japanese in exchange for the Japanese people who were in this country. And so, of course, when they arrived my mother went down to New York to meet the ship and to get what news she could get.

01-00:09:08

Rubens: Just before we turn to your war service, which I think is a critical turning point in your life—

01-00:09:14

Calhoun: Right.

01-00:09:14

Rubens: —shall we just say something about your family's values or sort of what the tenor of the household was. Clearly they valued education. There's no question about that.

01-00:09:26

Calhoun: Oh, yeah. Because sending me away, it was a difficult decision, I'm sure. But, well, my father never had the opportunity to go to college. So he felt that was a great disadvantage and he educated himself. And he just worked harder than the people who'd gone to college. So he became a very educated man. But it was by dint of self-education. And I was always a good student. I graduated from Andover. Well, I got some history prizes and stuff. And then later I graduated from Harvard in just two years, Phi Beta Kappa and *magna cum laude*. So that was an accomplishment. I worked hard.

But my Army service: Why is that relevant to my being in the museum or involved with the museum? Well, when I graduated from Andover in June of 1943 I was told to report to Fort Devens, or Camp Devens—it was an Army camp outside of Boston which was where all the new recruits reported—in September. So I had the summer to dispose of. And my mother suggested that I go to summer school at Columbia University because they were giving an intensive course in Japanese language and history. And Columbia's always had a good department of Asian studies. So I did and as a result of that, somehow or other, it got on my Army record, I guess because when I finished basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, that's B-E-N-N-I-N-G, Fort Benning, Georgia, which was the biggest infantry training center, and I received orders to report to what was then called the Military Intelligence Service Language School. And essentially that was the same school that now is in Monterey for foreign language teaching for the Army. But during the war they had to move the Japanese part of it to the middle of the country because all of their

potential teachers, people of Japanese descent, had been relocated off of the West Coast, out of California. And our teachers were all either first generation Japanese who'd been educated in Japan and then immigrated here or some second generation Japanese who had gone back to Japan for education. And they were the native speakers and the best people. So—

01-00:12:46

Rubens:

Who were your teachers at Columbia? I'm interested that your mother wanted you to study Japanese history and language.

01-00:12:53

Calhoun:

She said, "You're a high school graduate. You don't know anything."

01-00:13:02

Rubens:

You'll be going to the war.

01-00:13:03

Calhoun:

So, "You'll be dog meat. You want to try to get some kind of qualification." And I don't know exactly what was her thinking but they knew the MacArthurs from before the war when General MacArthur was the commander of the Philippine constabulary. So maybe she thought I might join part of his team in Australia or New Guinea. I have no idea what her thinking is. But she was a very smart lady and she was Germanic. Very strict. And she probably saved my life. Not that you couldn't have gotten killed in the Pacific also but—

Anyway, I went to the University of Michigan, MISLS, and studied Japanese for a year. This is all as an enlisted man, of course. And then they had a postgraduate six month program at Fort Snelling in Minnesota, which is between Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Oh, this is really coming back. And I graduated and was commissioned a second lieutenant. And then I was sent to the Philippines. I was on a train with a lot of other soldiers to San Francisco and then we got on a ship here at Fort Mason, which is a park now. But the piers that we used to get onboard ship are still there. And we ended up in Manila.

01-00:15:03

Rubens:

We're talking late '44 by now?

01-00:15:06

Calhoun:

Yes. Even later. Probably early '45, spring, maybe the spring of '45. The Philippine campaign was just winding down and we were there. The Battle of Okinawa was taking place and we were there preparing to land in Japan as soon as the Battle of Okinawa was over. They were just kind of wiping up that. So when the war did end, I went to Japan on a ship and I think I arrived

there about September of '45. It was fairly early. I think the war ended in August and I was there. And I was in Tokyo, Japan until sometime in the spring of '47, late spring. Because I came back and started college at Harvard in the fall of '47. And in Japan I was assigned to something called the Civil Censorship Detachment, which is part of SCAP, MacArthur's headquarters. The Supreme Commander Allied Forces but it was P. So Allied Powers. The headquarters of the Supreme Commander Allied Powers. And the Censorship Detachment was the old Japanese censorship office which the occupation took over. And the occupation operated through the Japanese government agencies because that's the only orderly way to operate. In contrast to Iraq, where there was no government left and you had chaos and turmoil, in Japan everything operated very orderly. There was no violent acts against the occupying soldiers. So the Japanese are a very disciplined people and used to taking instructions. So all of a sudden, instead of saying that you couldn't criticize the emperor we said, "Oh, yeah, you can criticize the emperor but you can't criticize MacArthur." He was sort of the new emperor. And they understood that. That was the way things worked.

And within the Civil Censorship Detachment there were different sections. There was a press and publication section. There was a movie section to censor movies. And then there was a live entertainment section, theatrical and anything that involved living—like flower arrangement. I mean most of them were apolitical and didn't require any censoring. But in principle we were in charge of all that. And, of course, we had the Japanese staff that we inherited from the Japanese government. So that was a great job. There wasn't really too much responsibility. And it was Japanese culture so you were exposed to Japanese culture, classical performances. They had the equivalent of the Radio City Rockettes called the Takarazuka Theater, which was all women and women played men's parts and they had a chorus line and all that stuff. But that was just a minor part of it.

01-00:19:09

Rubens:

You're fluent in Japanese at this point?

01-00:19:12

Calhoun:

Well, I wouldn't say that. But I speak Japanese fairly well. Used to read and write it but I haven't used that, so it's gotten very rusty.

01-00:19:30

Rubens:

By the way, were you concerned at all about fallout from Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

01-00:19:35

Calhoun:

No, no. People weren't really too concerned about it. I don't know. It happened but people didn't realize that it—at that point, frankly, we were just so relieved not to have to land on the beaches of Sagami Bay. And Hiroshima and Nagasaki are quite far away from Tokyo. And I don't think people understood about the lasting effects of radiation. It was just a great big bomb. And the US had sent teams of scientific people, military and civilian, that were supposed to investigate the aftereffects of it. And so we'd meet them. But they were just beginning to study it and their work was all classified so we didn't know much about it.

01-00:20:31

Rubens:

And I remember you saying when we had our pre-interview that there was a certain sense—and I'm not sure where you were locating that sense—about some Americans acting as or being perceived as carpetbaggers. What did you mean by that.

01-00:20:51

Calhoun:

Well, that's probably an overstatement but I think in the military we were—well, we were not allowed to eat in Japanese restaurants. The reason given was that it was to save food for the Japanese because there was a terrific food shortage and MacArthur got food imported to distribute to the Japanese. I think there was also the purpose to avoid fraternization and perhaps friction, to try to keep the occupying troops separate from the local population. But then there were a few civilians who came to Tokyo. Very few could get there. But if you did, and I think this was in connection with Gump, Richard Gump. And he was one of the few civilians who were in Tokyo not working for the Army or military but as private citizens. And there were a few who came over. For example, Citibank, they were allowed to reopen and National Cash Register and some other businesses were. There's some Canadian businesses. And so we sort of envy them because they were able to go to Japanese restaurants, live in Japanese inns, and enjoy the full panoply of Japanese culture, whereas we were somewhat restricted, even though our job was to oversee Japanese culture. So we might have thought of it in those terms but I don't think we ever used the word. And Mr. Gump was there. He was buying up art objects. Of course, it was a terrific opportunity because people were destitute, really, and the US dollar was worth almost anything.

01-00:22:57

Rubens:

Did Avery Brundage have any agents working in Japan at that time?

01-00:23:05

Calhoun:

Not that I'm aware of. No, I don't think so. But he might have made a trip out there sometime then but I'm not aware of any.

01-00:23:18

Rubens: So anything more you want to say about your experience there; it's impact on you? You're there close to two years.

01-00:23:25

Calhoun: Well, I would say the way this ties in would be that I got even more interested in Japanese culture and Asian culture in general.

01-00:23:35

Rubens: Okay. By the way, did you ever have encounters with MacArthur himself?

01-00:23:40

Calhoun: Well, yes. I was invited to tea because my mother wrote Jean MacArthur a letter saying, "My little boy is in Tokyo," so I got an invitation. They were living in the American embassy and I was invited to tea there. General MacArthur made a brief appearance and then excused himself.

01-00:24:07

Rubens: Did he make a particular impression on you?

01-00:24:11

Calhoun: Well, he was kind of austere but he only came for a few minutes. And Mrs. MacArthur said, "Oh, here is Cal and Minna's little boy. He's grown up to a second lieutenant." And I can't remember what he said.

01-00:24:27

Rubens: Do you think we should now turn to your return to the United States? You went to Harvard for your undergraduate degree. Had you already applied to Harvard when you graduated Andover? It's kind of a feeding school.

01-00:24:50

Calhoun: Yes. I had been admitted to MIT and Harvard. If they had accepted you before, then when you got out of the war they were obliged to take you, which resulted in a huge crowding and the dormitories were all full. For a few years they had to work through this.

01-00:25:21

Rubens: When you applied, did you have a major in mind?

01-00:25:25

Calhoun: No, no, no. I applied. I just knew I didn't want to be in the Army. At that time, it was just a given. If you were drafted, you reported. I guess there were obviously pacifists and people that sought other ways of—but it really was kind of not—it wasn't acceptable, I guess is the word you'd use now. So you just went in the Army and you just hoped to hell it wouldn't be too long. It wouldn't be forever. The feeling was that it was going to be forever.

01-00:26:07

Rubens:

I should have asked you how your stint in the army came to an end.

01-00:26:14

Calhoun:

Well, when the war ended, of course, they were happy to get people out. However, because we spoke Japanese we had to stay in until we had served forty-eight months. So I stayed. That's why I stayed in from the end of '45 through the middle or so of '47.

01-00:26:40

Rubens:

So then you chose Harvard because? Over MIT?

01-00:26:43

Calhoun:

Well, if I were to go back, if I were to go to MIT—I wasn't really interested in becoming an engineer and I would have had to take a lot of courses which I didn't have to take at Harvard because Harvard they gave me credit for learning Japanese. That satisfied my language credit. And so I was able to get through Harvard in two years, whereas in MIT it probably would have taken four. Might have been a better education but at that time, having spent four years out of currency, you sort of felt—I didn't realize I was going to live to eighty-seven. So I thought that life was passing me by and, hey, I better get going.

01-00:27:32

Rubens:

Anything to say about what you did between the spring and the fall of '47?

01-00:27:39

Calhoun:

Well, I was discharged at Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base here and I had some friends at Berkeley. So I went down and visited them. And they had a jeep, I think, that they loaned me or some kind of car. So I spent a week or so driving around the Bay Area and it seemed like a really nice place. So probably the impression that led me back here. And I don't remember what else I did. I went to Harvard and got started as soon as possible.

01-00:28:20

Rubens:

Were there a lot of vets entering when you did?

01-00:28:26

Calhoun:

Yes. Harvard has houses which are dormitories, basically, but each house had a separate dining room and stuff. So those were all full. So I didn't get into a house so I shared an off-campus, I guess, room with some friends, one of whom had been in the Army with me. And then later there was an opening in one of the houses, Winthrop House, and a person I knew from Manila prior to World War II was in that house and he invited me to join his suite of rooms. They had I think three bedrooms and a living room. So I moved in with him. His name was Fernando Zóbel de Ayala and his grandfather had been the

admiral of the Spanish fleet that lost to Dewey in Manila Bay. So it's just an odd coincidence. But anyway, we were roommates there. He later became a prominent modern artist in Spain but he's since deceased.

01-00:30:09

Rubens:

And I assume that it wasn't such a cultural adjustment for you at Harvard because of having been at Andover. You were familiar with a certain class and caliber of student.

01-00:30:27

Calhoun:

Well, first, I'd been in an American family and then I'd been in these ex-pat American schools which, I mean, they exposed you to American values and stuff. And then I had been in the Army for four years and that's quite an experience because there are people from all different backgrounds. And I was put into a group to study Japanese that supposedly had higher IQs but they came from Brooklyn and they came from the South and they weren't racially integrated but they were socially and culturally from many different backgrounds. So in addition to being exposed to Asian cultures, I was exposed to a lot of different American cultures in the Army, which was a valuable experience. I didn't appreciate it at the time. So I feel pretty comfortable wherever and whoever.

01-00:31:48

Rubens:

Well, we'll get back to reflecting on your experiences abroad. But to continue with your experience at Harvard, did you by then know what you were going to study?

01-00:31:57

Calhoun:

No, no. I didn't have a clue. So I majored in history. Well, it was easy because, well, I had been very fond of history at Andover. I had a wonderful, wonderful professor. Two wonderful professors there. One in English, one in history. English it was Emory Basford and history it was I think Professor Darling. I think it was Arthur Darling but I'm not sure. But he was a terrific professor. And I won a couple of history prizes. They gave me a set of books. And so I must have made an extra effort in writing a paper or something like that. So history seemed like a natural major. I wish I had also majored in economics because that's so important as you go through life trying to make a living and understanding what's going on. But I didn't. So economics I sort of had to do what my father did and try to educate myself.

01-00:33:10

Rubens:

But were you drawn to Asian history, to Japanese, to Chinese culture and history?

01-00:33:14
Calhoun:

Well, I majored in Far Eastern history. I had Professor Fairbanks, who was a famous person in that field.

01-00:33:22
Rubens:

Legendary.

01-00:33:24
Calhoun:

And then I think I had Professor Reischauer also. To get an honors you have to—in other words, graduate *cum laude* or *magna cum laude* or something, you have to do some extra work so I wrote a paper. And my paper, I was just trying to remember it, it was on the Japanese political party system in the twenties, a gentleman named Itagaki, who was the founder of one of the early Japanese political parties. So, yes, I guess I was interested in history and in the Japanese political system from having studied it and lived there.

01-00:34:16
Rubens:

Was there a drive to move to law or to business or to—

01-00:34:24
Calhoun:

No, no, no. No. When I graduated from college I had a lot of GI Bill credit left. They had a wonderful program where they paid all your tuition for a certain period of time depending on how long you'd been in the Army. You earned credits. And then they gave you a hundred dollars a month. So having been in for four years I had plenty of those. So it seemed a shame to waste them. I didn't want to go to work. So my father suggested law school. He said, "That will be useful no matter what you do." So I went to law school.

01-00:35:13
Rubens:

You didn't want to, if you will, dabble in the intellectual culture?

01-00:35:20
Calhoun:

Oh, become an academic?

01-00:35:21
Rubens:

Well, to just take more classes, perhaps in different fields. You had the GI support. You could have—

01-00:35:26
Calhoun:

Well, I was in a hurry to get through. I was offered a—I don't know the name of it but they had some scholarships. Not the Rhodes Scholar. I applied for a Rhodes Scholarship but didn't get it. But they had something that was similar in its benefits, although not quite its procedures. And I was offered one of those to go to Oxford for a year. But I was in too much of a hurry. It was a big mistake. And I could have gone to a combined law school business program.

Law school's three years, business school's two years, in four years you do both.

01-00:36:12

Rubens: At Harvard?

01-00:36:14

Calhoun: At Harvard, yes. But I didn't do that because I was in an idiotic hurry. So I went to law school and I also made what I thought for a long time was a big mistake. I joined the reserves, inactive reserves. But when the Korean War started they were looking for Chinese linguists and I started Chinese as an undergraduate at Harvard. As part of the Asian studies program. So I was recalled by the Army during the second year of law school. With some difficulty I got myself deferred until the end of the second year because I was recalled around Christmas time. Having just started the second year I was devastated. But I went down, I think, to Governor's Island in New York where the headquarters of the Army Reserve was and talked to some colonel and persuaded him to let me finish the year.

01-00:37:28

Rubens: And where did you go to law school? How did you make your choice?

01-00:37:31

Calhoun: I went to Harvard Law School.

01-00:37:34

Rubens: But you decided not to do the business program?

01-00:37:37

Calhoun: I decided not to do the business, just the law school. So then I reported to the Army in June of—it would have been '51. And was expecting to be sent to Korea but eventually—I hung around Washington waiting for orders and I got ordered to what was then the Armed Forces Security Agency, which is now called the National Security Agency. And basically that is communications intelligence. Code, breaking codes and listening in on communications.

So I was in the Army again for a year and a half doing that. But I was stationed near Washington in Arlington, Virginia. So I went to night school at George Washington Law School and got my degree. You could take the bar exam even before you finished law school if you were in the Army. That was a special. So I took the bar exam and passed it in DC and then I was going to be released in 1953. I reported in June of '51. So a year would have been the end of '52, I guess. Yeah. So I interviewed in Washington and New York and I took the New York bar exam in the very beginning of '53. And then I got a letter out of the blue. It was forwarded to me from the Harvard Placement

Office and it came from a small law firm in San Francisco that specialized in maritime law and they had written the law school placement office saying they were looking for someone with an interest and background in Asia. And so the placement office—some of these institutions really work well sometimes—they forwarded the letter to me and so I was still in the Army. I got myself made a courier and caught an Army flight out with a bag of something or other, probably chocolates, to San Francisco. And I spent a few days here interviewing the firm that had contacted me and then other firms here. And I thought, “Hey, my memories of San Francisco were terrific.” Everybody I knew was going to New York and Washington or someplace like that or their hometown if they had a hometown. Well, by now, my hometown, Manila, was an independent country and I would have had to become a Philippine citizen and give up American citizenship. So I thought, “Well, let’s try San Francisco.”

01-00:41:06

Rubens: Now, you’re recruited, as it were. Had you specialized in maritime law or contractual law and/or—

01-00:41:16

Calhoun: No, I’d never taken a course in maritime law. I’d only been on a sailboat once or twice.

01-00:41:24

Rubens: And so you had a general education in terms of the two years at Harvard and the last year at George Washington.

01-00:41:29

Calhoun: Yes. At Harvard, I studied mostly Asian history and Asian political science. And then just general courses. And I made the mistake of going through too quickly. So I missed a lot of courses that I should have taken, would have liked to have taken.

01-00:41:50

Rubens: By the way, I think that Judy Teichman, who you would meet in your work with the Asian Art Museum, said that you played polo when you were at Harvard.

01-00:41:58

Calhoun: Yes. That’s not really relevant to this, but I was captain of the Harvard polo team. It’s kind of a joke but we won the intercollegiate polo tournament the year I was captain. Well, we had some graduate students from Argentina and then a few of us who had played it before. We had no ponies, no horses. We had no place to play and we never practiced. But we had some ringers who were pretty good players from before.

01-00:42:37

Rubens:

I actually was going to ask you if there were Asian students at Harvard. I don't imagine Asian Americans but were there—

01-00:42:49

Calhoun:

Well, there were some students from the Philippines. And because I had lived there for two years just before the war, and my roommate was from the Philippines, we were kind of a little group of students from the Philippines. And they mostly came from very prominent families because nobody else could afford to do that. So I still maintain a good relationship with those of them that are still alive. And over the years I've represented a lot of Philippine interests in this country, some of them pro-Marcos, some of them anti-Marcos. The Philippines is a small community and they all know each other. They're all related. Everybody's somebody's cousin. And sometimes one faction's on top, sometimes another. And somehow or other, over the years I was able to span that gap. A lot of them like to take some of their money out of the country and invest it somewhere else and San Francisco is a fairly popular place. Over the years I helped some of them buy banks here and stuff like that.

01-00:44:23

Rubens:

I just have a couple of disparate questions before we start taking up your time in San Francisco. When you were saying where fellow law students went, that they went to New York or Washington or some went back to their hometowns, you referred to the Philippines as your hometown. Did you have an affinity for that culture and or the people?

01-00:44:54

Calhoun:

Yes. My mother and father met and were married there. They regarded it as their home. And then when I was stationed in Japan, I was able at least once, maybe twice, to get a flight down and visit my parents. My father went back out and opened the bank again. So I was in Manila briefly right after the war in the late forties, I guess it was. Yeah. And then at Harvard I had other friends, too, but I was kind of a little bit the center of the Philippine students there because I was a little more established, having been to Andover, I guess. Something like that. But anyway, I tried to look out for them and we sort of socialized with each other a bit. And then my parents were back in the Philippines then. So that was my home. If I could have gone out there and practiced law, I probably would have because it was my home. I knew all of these people who were very prominent there and my father was still managing Citibank, which was possibly the biggest bank there at that time. So it would have been a good natural place to go. You had a lot of advantages. But it was no longer part of the United States jurisdiction. They were independent.

01-00:46:42

Rubens: How long did your father—did he retire there?

01-00:46:46

Calhoun: No, he came back to New York. I'm not sure just when. Maybe in the late fifties, early sixties. In the fifties at some point. Because he was in New York when we were in Japan. So it would have been in the early fifties, maybe. And he retired I think in '63 in New York and they lived in New York and then he was a consultant to various banks that were expanding internationally. And finally my mother and father moved out here and retired at the Sequoias here.

01-00:47:27

Rubens: Now, one more question as a transition. In your narrative, it's a sort of evolutionary one. You had been in Shanghai and you had then been in Manila and then, of course, during the post war occupation in Japan. So you had an affinity for Asian culture and then study it at Harvard. But looking back, can you reflect on what those experiences meant to you? You were familiar with three different cultures. How did it shape you?

01-00:48:07

Calhoun: Well, yes, it certainly has but at the time I certainly didn't realize it. But I find it quite comfortable relating to—they're different cultures. The Japanese people, Japanese culture is very different from Chinese and the Philippines again is different. It's more like a colonial Spanish culture. But I feel quite comfortable in all of them and I think I have an affinity for relating to Asian people, which has been very helpful to me in my practice because I've had a lot of Asian clients, Japanese and Philippine. Especially when everyone was trying to take their property out of the Philippines and get away from Marcos. And now Chinese clients. So—And I don't know how it is but, first of all, I speak a little bit of their language. Secondly, I'm familiar with their customs and their values and their traditions. I'm not an expert. I'm an American. But at least I'm somewhat familiar and sympathetic to them.

01-00:49:36

Rubens: Well, so I guess in the course of your business practice and then your involvement with the Asian Art Museum, we'll talk more in-depth about your understanding of those cultures.

01-00:49:48

Calhoun: Yes. But I don't think it has come from the Asian Art Museum. I just think it has come from living and so forth. For an example, I met a Chinese gentleman yesterday who was interested in the Asian Art Museum, so I arranged for him to have a tour. Then he invited us all to dinner last evening and he bought a winery up in Napa. So we were talking and then I was saying, "Well, I'm going to be eighty-eight next year," and that's a big deal in China because

eight sounds like prosperity. Ba. So ba-ba means two prosperities. And his youngest son is going to be fifteen on the same date that I'm going to be eighty-eight. So he said, "I will supply all the wine for your birthday." [laughter] Well, he probably won't but we just kind of felt friendly with each other. And talking about these coincidences and stuff. And most Americans, they wouldn't figure out what to talk about, just feel comfortable. And he doesn't speak any English and my Chinese is minimal.

01-00:51:14

Rubens: That's a good story.

01-00:51:14

Calhoun: But I do think I have an empathy with Asian people.

01-00:51:23

Rubens: Well, it's certainly going to be reinforced by your work. Because you ended up being in Japan for a number of years with your law firm.

01-00:51:35

Calhoun: Right, for four years.

01-00:51:36

Rubens: What was the name of the firm that you ultimately joined?

01-00:51:40

Calhoun: Well, here in San Francisco, when I joined it was Graham & Morse. And Clarence Morse and Chalmers Graham were the two partners, two named partners. Then Mr. Morse went to Washington and got a job in the government as chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission and he stayed there. He got Potomac Fever. So then it became Graham, James & Rolph. And then Mr. Rolph became a judge in the superior court here, so then it became Graham & James. And it was Graham & James for a long time, until about ten years ago they merged with; they were acquired by a firm that started in Cleveland back in the nineteenth century, Squire, Sanders & Dempsey, which is now Squire Sanders. So I've been in the same firm sort of all that time, which is very kind of unusual nowadays.

01-00:53:03

Rubens: How would you characterize the firm when you first came into it? How big was it? How did it rate in San Francisco?

01-00:53:11

Calhoun: Well, it was a small specialized firm serving the maritime industry. And so within that narrow field it had a very fine reputation. It was one of the four or five leading firms. There were five partners and I was the only associate. So I was the water boy. I did all sorts of things and worked hard. But then after

having been with it two years, they kind of sent me to Japan. They bought me a one way ticket on a freighter for a hundred bucks and I went to Japan to look into prospects. And Japan was just coming out of World War II and the Korean War had given the economy a big boost, so there was lots of opportunity there. The firm didn't really have much of anything going on there. So I got a job with a lawyer who was there but I kept my relationship with the firm because neither my wife nor I wanted to be there permanently. So I had a wonderful experience. Within a couple of months of being there, one of the shipping clients that we had here and that I then served there, the employees locked the management in the building. It was kind of a strike. It was a sit-in but it's not a sit-in, it's a lock-in. And the manager called me and I had just gotten there. And said, "Well, you're our lawyer. Take care of us." So I talked to some Japanese colleagues and basically you don't hire another lawyer to solve the problem. There is a certain class of people that specialized in dealing with labor unrest, of which there was a lot right then in Japan. And they were kind of strikebreakers and they were related with the employee association and they had channels to the head of the labor union and they worked out some settlement. So I learned that you don't have to be an expert as long as you go out there and find out and get some experts.

[Audio File 2]

02-00:00:27

Rubens:

What kind of legal work were you doing with the firm?

02-00:00:44

Calhoun:

During the two years before I went to Japan. Well, I was doing typical—well, not typical maritime work exclusively but I had handled a number of collisions. In those days, ships seemed to collide with each other more often. There were more. Ships were smaller but there were more of them. And radar, although it had been around since World War II, a lot of the people didn't seem to know how to use it. They seemed to steer into each other rather than away. And we covered a lot of the coast. A couple of times I flew up to Portland to cover collisions that were in the Columbia River. Once one of our clients' ships ran into a Coast Guard ship and our clients, Japanese crew, they were terrified because they had run into this government vessel. So the way those things worked, the Coast Guard would hold a hearing and then they would determine who was responsible. And then most of the time you settled who was liable for what damages based on the Coast Guard's hearing. So the first job of the lawyer is to go and interview the crew and find out what happened and then to represent the crew members at the hearing and try to bring out the most favorable story that is truthful but not emphasize any defects. And often the crew would be so terrified they would change the

records and stuff, which is just the worst possible thing because then it puts everything in doubt. So you try to get there in time to prevent the crew from doing anything like that. So these were collisions.

02-00:02:33

Rubens:

Changing the records? Literally going in and saying—

02-00:02:36

Calhoun:

Oh, I'd get on the little boat and go out and climb up a rope ladder and get on the ship before they got into land, if possible. Or go out on the pilot boat and get to them before they had a chance to improve but really muck up their story. If you did something wrong, you're responsible for it and that's the best solution generally. Anyway, that was a lot of fun, going out. Even now we have a house where we can see the ships coming in and out and I get kind of homesick for those days. [laughter]

And then, of course, there is the cargo. They didn't have containers then, so they had individual packets of cargo and often they were damaged. Sometimes the stevedores would purposely drop it so that they could see what was in it. Maybe it was booze or something like that. At least that's what we thought. They would deny that but—

02-00:03:46

Rubens:

Well, not really. I've interviewed several longshoremen who talk about the big coats they wore with lots of pockets so they could stick purloined goods in them.

02-00:03:52

Calhoun:

Yes. That would happen. And then, of course, the longshoremen would be injured and the crews men would be injured. In those days a lot of ships carried fish meal. They'd bring it up from South America for fertilizer, sardine. And fish meal can heat up or other bulk commodities, if they get wet they can have spontaneous combustion. So then when you open up the hatch, all of a sudden the flames come out like a volcano and then you have to decide is it negligent because the ship owner let it get wet while it was being loaded. Maybe it was in the rain or something. Or was it because there was some huge storm that washed water over. So it was who was responsible, if anyone. But I was actually hired to help Mr. James. And he was involved in antitrust aspects of the shipping cartels. This is more than you want to know?

02-00:05:05

Rubens:

No, no, I'm interested.

02-00:05:06

Calhoun:

There's the 1916 Shipping Act and it provided for a limited exemption from the antitrust laws. And the shipping industry, especially international shipping people, always thought that they were international and they didn't have to worry about American laws, especially antitrust laws. But actually, they were subject to them. And they were permitted to have these cartels. The cartels were permitted to set rates but there were certain things they couldn't do. So I helped Mr. James with those aspects of maritime law, which is really more regulatory and administrative law. So that was interesting. I went back to Washington a couple of times and argued matters.

02-00:06:06

Rubens:

And did you say you also did litigation?

02-00:06:09

Calhoun:

Well, of course, collisions can result in litigation. And personal injuries. I did some of that.

02-00:06:19

Rubens:

So you were going into court yourself, not just—

02-00:06:21

Calhoun:

I did. I did. Most of my experience was in investigating it to prepare for litigation and most of the time it'd be settled when you knew what the situation was. But on two or three occasions I litigated in court. Yeah, yeah, yeah. One of my friends had a case which was a fender bender case where two cars collided and the other car sued our car and it was basically insurance companies. And he was going to be out of town, so he asked me to take the case for him. And I didn't know what I was doing. But we countersued and there was just a wonderful young judge down in San Mateo who helped me along. And we won a judgment against the party that sued us. So he lost his case and we won our counterclaim. So after that I figured I'd better get out of litigation. It would never get better than that. But it was good experience and since then I have overseen litigation but I haven't gone to court. Going to court is kind of frustrating because you go there and you just sit and wait and then finally they give you ten minutes to make an argument. This is not a trial. This is pretrial motions and stuff like that.

02-00:07:55

Rubens:

So you seem fairly skilled and experienced by the time you go to Japan.

02-00:08:03

Calhoun:

Well, not really.

02-00:08:07

Rubens:

Is that how you felt? Did you feel like you were a fish out of water?

02-00:08:10

Calhoun: Well, in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king, right?

02-00:08:16

Rubens: But you knew the language. You had lived there.

02-00:08:19

Calhoun: Oh, yes. I knew the language and I was there and I didn't have anybody else to turn to except Mr. Blakemore. He was a wonderful man and a great lawyer and a great mentor. He was a person who already had a law firm practice. Basically he hired me. I helped him. But he let me develop my own business on the side but I helped him with his clients. And I was with him for four years and it was a great experience. He instilled in me certain standards and values that served me well over all those years.

02-00:09:10

Rubens: Can you just give an example of those or sort of generalize what those were.

02-00:09:17

Calhoun: Well, he was very thorough. He was just a wonderful man. It's hard to give an example. If I think about it, I'm sure I would. But he's just a marvelous person and very capable person. He was from Tulsa, Oklahoma and prior to World War II he'd had a scholarship to study Japanese in Japan. So he already had a background and had been in the occupation and helped rewrite some of their laws and things. So he was quite scholarly as well as being a journeyman lawyer.

02-00:10:02

Rubens: And when you say developed some of your own business, how are you doing this?

02-00:10:07

Calhoun: Well, I developed it in the name of Graham & James. My specialty was maritime law, right, and there were Japanese shipping companies that had accidents outside of Japan and they would come and consult with me. What's the law there? And then there were foreign shipping companies that had collisions or other problems in Japan. And like this one man. I've told you about this labor problem. That was a shipping company but they had offices in Japan. So I started with my two years of experience in shipping law and then also the Japanese, they had these cartels that governed the cost of the freight rates. So to and from Japan and the United States. And they would meet in Japan as well as in the United States. And so I would give them advice, too, on antitrust aspects. So that was the start. And then things would come along. If someone had a problem I tried to help them. There were people who wanted to setup trusts for other people, their Japanese girlfriend or something.

And then I got one call from Shell Oil, from a lawyer friend of mine, and he represented Caltex and Shell Oil needed some help but he couldn't handle it. He had a conflict of interest. So he called me and said, "Would you like to do some work for Shell Oil in Japan?" Well, here I'm three years out of law school. I said, "Yeah." So they needed help with financing a petrochemical complex. It's like Richmond but ten times as big. And no one had done the financing for such an installation since the 1920s. So I figured, well, if no one's done it since 1920s or early thirties, they don't know any more than I do. [laughter] So I contacted a friend of mine to whom I'd been introduced, a more elderly person, senior person who was a prominent professor at Tokyo University Law School. And he introduced me to a Japanese law firm, the senior partner of whom had been the minister of justice. So I figured, well, if they can't figure it out I don't know who can so we did it jointly. You worry about it but after they don't wake you up at night for a while you figure, "Yeah, you can do it." So it was a wonderful experience because if I had been here in a big law firm I don't think I would have been given that much responsibility or freedom or opportunity because there would have been a lot of people ahead of me in the order.

02-00:13:36

Rubens:

And so are you immersing yourself even more now in Japanese culture?

02-00:14:04

Calhoun:

Oh, yes. Yes, of course. And my wife had never been to Japan before so everything was new and interesting. And we had some introductions to some very wonderful Japanese friends who we got to know quite closely as friends, not as business contacts or that. Friends and neighbors. And she was a young mother so there were other people who helped her with that. And the pace of life was slower then. So you could see and get acquainted with almost everybody and prominent people. We joined the Tokyo Lawn Tennis Club and the Crown Prince used to play there. And going back to polo. I was invited to demonstrate polo to the Crown Prince and did. So everything was sort of open and people had time, where they wouldn't have that now. They'd be too consumed with their other responsibilities. So it was great. A very fortunate experience.

02-00:16:16

Rubens:

At that time were you really participating in more of an everyday life of Japan? Are you going to restaurants?

02-00:16:36

Calhoun:

Oh yes. So five years after the occupation ended and long after the food shortages improved. I think by '55 that things were better. Yeah, we were very interested in Japanese culture and food. Connie took some lessons in Japanese

cooking. And you used to be able to call the local sushi restaurant and then a fellow on a bicycle would deliver sushi to your home. And then for a while Connie was very interested in flower arrangement. And also when we first came back here, as a pro bono matter, I organized the local entity, local non-profits for a couple of the flower arrangement schools, although some of them were not non-profits. Some of them were for-profit. The Sogetsu, S-O-G-E-T-S-U, and the Ohara, O-H-A-R-A schools. And now when I meet some of the ladies with whom we worked then but with whom we sort of lost touch, we all have a very enthusiastic reunion and they're all very appreciative of these little things that were done years ago. Then later, I did get what they call a Kunsho, which is an imperial award from the emperor and I think I have an old newspaper clipping. But anyway, it's basically the foreign office recommends to the imperial household and then they approve it. And it's for services in promoting US Japanese cultural and business interchange. And it's quite an honor. It's very—When I did get it, which is much later, it was still rather exceptional because I was younger than usual. Usually you have to be in your eighties and I think I was in my sixties. I'm sorry. I jumped forward a bit there.

But in Tokyo—I would say all of the foreigners in Tokyo at that time were very interested. Japan is a unique civilization. It's a civilization. It's not just a country. And it has a distinctive culture. It has its own language, its own cuisine and I guess its own religion, sort of. Well, it does because it had the Shinto as well as—.And so it's interesting in today's world to be living in a civilization, a unique civilization and a culture in such a small area and a limited number of people. So I would say that even people who weren't interested in Japan before they went there generally became quite interested in Japanese culture and there were all kinds of groups for foreigners and Japanese to get to know each other. The Japanese, of course, were very interested in learning about the rest of the world because they had been isolated since the early thirties, since the twenties. So there was a lot of enthusiasm on both sides.

02-00:20:58

Rubens:

What kind of groups that you're referring to were there?

02-00:21:01

Calhoun:

Well, most of these groups would be for the women because most of them were not employed so they had time on their hands. So they would be cooking, flower arranging, literature. But to exchange information about each other's culture. And then as far as the men were concerned, mostly we were working. So we would get exposed to these other cultures in the workplace. Of course, being a lawyer you have to know about another culture because

you're operating in it. You're trying to help your clients understand it and function in it. And then I was trying to help my Japanese clients understand and function in American or European culture.

02-00:22:01

Rubens:

You gave that wonderful example of learning about labor practices and how to handle it.

02-00:22:04

Calhoun:

Yes. That was one example. But there were all kinds of examples of that sort. Especially when you were negotiating. We're very legalistic and emphasize contractual terms and people read them very literally. In Japan, things are more based on relationships and so a contract, at least in those days, was more a statement of intent. And if circumstances changed so that the contract became uncomfortable, they would expect you to adjust it. Whereas the Americans would say, "Hey, no, a deal's a deal." So trying to explain to each side the other side's point of view and how neither side is wrong, it's just they have a different approach and how do we get around these two different approaches and come to a solution that is in everybody's best interest. Well, that's basically what my job was. So of course you'd be interested in the other culture because in order to find a solution to that problem you got to understand their approach and so I became pretty good at that.

02-00:23:40

Rubens:

Yes, it sounds like you became pretty good and it went well. So I want to be devil's advocate here and say were there moments where you thought, "Oh, this is not how I should be operating or I've misunderstood what's taking place here"? I don't mean embarrassing moments necessarily.

02-00:23:58

Calhoun:

Yes. Well, the one thing I do remember was very early on. There was a company here called the Leslie Salt Company and they used to have salt ponds in the peninsula and they used to export salt. And now it's completely uneconomic because they have these huge salt producing areas in Australia and Mexico. But they did and they were looking to buy a small specialized ship, a salt carrier, from a very traditional Japanese ship owner from the Osaka area. And involved in this was a gentleman named George Ishiyama, who was an American of Japanese descent. And George was the broker in this. And I was representing the Leslie Salt Company and George was the broker trying to make it happen. This gentleman was sitting cross-legged on his bed, on a bed. He was very Japanese looking. And I was sitting there like t his negotiating. And George took me aside after a little while. He said, "You're never going to get anywhere," he said. "When you sit with crossed arms like that, that projects a very negative. You're saying no and you're not

going to get to yes by saying no all the time.” So I think almost anybody knows that that’s a closed movement and it’s very negative. I didn’t recognize that. So I still remember it. And I was so embarrassed to be screwing up the whole deal. And, of course, George wanted to close the deal because he wouldn’t get any brokerage fee if he didn’t. So he was very helpful to me. He didn’t intend to be helpful, he meant to be critical. But—

So that’s one. But I think that is not limited to Japan because in this country, as well, if you want to do a deal you don’t go in like this. You go in like this. Hey. But I learned it in the Japanese context. And perhaps it’s even more significant there than here. But body language is very important and I did learn that.

02-00:26:37

Rubens:

Did the Japanese businessmen and lawyers you were working with wear western coats and ties?

02-00:26:47

Calhoun:

Yes, this gentleman didn’t. He was a traditional Japanese from the Osaka area. Osaka area is a very commercial area and they have a saying that when people meet each other in the morning, the greeting is not hello, it’s, “Have you made any money today yet?” It’s *Moukarimakka* as they say. Say, “Have you made any money yet?” But most of them do, yeah. Most of them were dressed in coats and ties. Although in summer there was no air conditioning so it’d be very hot, so people would be in shirts and short sleeves and stuff.

02-00:27:25

Rubens:

I was going to ask, conversely, did you in your home come to adopt some Japanese attire, specifically for that reason? I’ve read that the summers are so hot.

02-00:27:36

Calhoun:

Yes. We didn’t wear Japanese clothes but we—

02-00:27:41

Rubens:

Probably took off your shoes.

02-00:27:42

Calhoun:

Yes, we took off our shoes and our second house was a traditional Japanese farmhouse which had been in the mountains, taken apart and brought into the city and rebuilt. So it had all *tatami*, all mat floors and it had a central pillar that they call a *daikoku bashira* a central big tree pillar sort of. And a *doma*, which is a dirt floored room, which is the first room you go into. And it was tied together. It wasn’t nailed. So when the earthquakes came it shook like crazy and it was terrifying. But it was safe because it had the flexibility to

flex. And, of course, we didn't have any central heating and we didn't have any air conditioning. So you just lived that way.

02-00:28:38

Rubens: Did you travel while you were there?

02-00:28:40

Calhoun: We traveled in Japan and also we traveled in Southeast Asia a number of times, couple of times, yeah. Because we had a couple, two, three maids to take care of our children, our twins born there. So we were able in a way we wouldn't have been able to here to leave them with our maids who were very, very responsible. Actually now we wonder how we had the nerve to do that. But we did. Yeah.

02-00:29:10

Rubens: Well, you had had your own experience with your amah. You knew that—

02-00:29:14

Calhoun: I don't think my parents ever left me alone with her though. But they may have.

02-00:29:18

Rubens: Well, maybe this is a good stopping point. We can build on this platform. I wanted to know if there were any particular cultural forms you were especially interested in at this point. Were you interested in art? You choose to live in an old Japanese farmhouse.

02-00:29:38

Calhoun: Yes. I was quite interested in the theater, the kabuki and the nô theaters. Those are two traditional theaters. And we were friendly with Mr. Ohara, who was the founder of the Ohara Flower Arrangement School. And he invited us once to Kyoto. So I took the train to Kyoto overnight and then he took us to a nô presentation on the grounds of a temple. It was a special series of performances and then he took us to a restaurant called Chinzan-so which was one of the most exquisite Japanese restaurants ever in Kyoto at a place called Arashiyama, which is on the riverbank. And during the fall the foliage turns red. So, yeah. And we bought some Japanese dishes and things of that sort. Yeah, we were quite interested in Japanese aesthetics, I'd say. And we'd visit museums. I wouldn't say we were very scholarly but the Japanese are very—they have a pretty highly developed aesthetic sense. Particularly decorative art. They have a wonderful decorative art. The museum is having a show of Larry Ellison's collection this coming summer. They're only going to show about fifteen or twenty percent of it, or part of it. But he has continued to collect recently. And he just immediately preceding director Emily Sano is his advisor, his consultant. So I urge you to come see that exhibit.

Interview #2 April 4, 2013

[Audio File 3]

03-00:00:06

Rubens:

This is our second interview with you, Sandy. And I think what we really want to start doing is documenting your more than forty-five years involvement with the Asian Art Museum. We interviewed your wife Connie today about her involvement with the Society for Asian Art and it sounds like you get perhaps introduced to it, and ultimately the museum, through her [Connie Calhoun].

03-00:01:00

Calhoun:

Yes. The Society for Asian Art, I believe it was Connie who first became involved in it. As she has explained, she was active with what's now SFMOMA and I don't know just how that transposes to the Society for Asian Art but a number of the people who are active in SFMOMA became active in forming the Society. And so I believe that they involved her in the Society and she was a young person and she could type and do other things and so she became quite active there, while at the same time and perhaps continuing even more involved with SFMOMA. And then I don't think I really became involved until somewhat later. I note from the copy of the minutes you gave us for the annual meeting on June 6, 1966, when Connie was nominated as a Director for the Society that I was on the nominating committee of the society. So I must have been involved maybe in the mid-sixties. But by then I believe that they had raised a bond issue. When Brundage gave his collection, the first part of the collection because, of course, he later gave an additional part, and he continued collecting throughout this period, one of the stipulations was that the city raise a bond and build a separate wing to the de Young for the collection.

03-00:02:32

Rubens:

That's in 1960.

03-00:02:33

Calhoun:

As early as 1960.

03-00:02:36

Rubens:

Yes. There's a 2.75 million dollar bond approved to add the wing to the de Young.

03-00:02:39

Calhoun:

Yes, yes. Well, the ladies involved with the Society for Asian Art were very active in promoting that bond issue. I remember that. And probably at that time also Fritz Jewett and Rudy Peterson and some other of the community. It

was a community thing because there was a feeling that San Francisco, as the gateway to the Orient, should have a collection of Asian Art and a museum to show it and it shouldn't go to L.A. There's a little bit of a civic rivalry there. And then the mayor, Joseph Alioto, I think he was mayor at the time, he became a strong proponent of that. So I remember at some point he and Fitz Jewett and some others went to Chicago and negotiated with Brundage and persuaded him that if the city raised the money and built the museum, that he'd give the collection. I wasn't involved in that. I would just hear about it.

03-00:03:54

Rubens:

Did you have friends who were involved in that, though? Did you know Fritz [George] Jewett at the time?

03-00:03:58

Calhoun:

Well, I knew Fritz Jewett through my wife Connie because she'd grown up in Spokane [Washington] and the Jewetts were very prominent there and Connie's family knew the Jewetts. And so we knew Fritz and his wife Lucy through that connection and then otherwise, too. But I never was terribly close to him.

03-00:04:30

Rubens:

Okay. So how *do* you become more involved? You're not involved in the bond measure. By '64 the construction for the wing is beginning. It won't open until '66 and '69 is when the second Brundage collection comes in and the Asian Art Foundation is created and then the Asian Art Commission to which you're appointed.

03-00:05:08

Calhoun:

Well, there was always a lot of tension between Brundage and the trustees of the de Young. And then there was tension between Mr. d'Argencé, the director of the museum. And I believe the general understanding was that Mr. Brundage sort of insisted that Mr. d'Argencé be the director as part of the package of giving his collection. And not unnaturally, there was tension between d'Argencé and I think it was Ian White who was the director of the de Young at that time, who was a good friend of ours, incidentally.

03-00:05:58

Rubens:

So you were friends at the time. How had you known him?

03-00:06:00

Calhoun:

Yes, at that time and since then. Well, before then he was at Harvard. And I don't think I knew him at Harvard but he was a good friend of my roommate at Harvard. So we'd known him for a long time. And he's a terrific guy.

But there was inherent competitive rivalry and stuff. So Brundage wanted a separate group to be in charge of his collection. And then he also wanted an acquisition fund setup. And so my recollection is that as a condition to giving the rest of his collection, which included some objects that he hadn't given in the first transfer, and other objects that he purchased subsequently—there were some objects in the museum that Mr. Brundage had acquired but hadn't paid for or hadn't paid for entirely. And so part of raising an acquisition fund was to pay off what was owed on these objects. I don't want to overemphasize that but that was a part of it, which amused everybody. So as a condition to giving the rest of it, he wanted a governing commission. I don't understand just how it worked out to be a city commission rather than an independent board. But anyway, it ended up as a line item in the city's charter and there's an Asian Art Commission. And I don't know how I happened to get on the Commission but the two of us had been active and I had been very active in the Japan Society. And in those days there wasn't much to do with China because the communists were in control of China and we had no relationships. And the trade and investment with Japan was growing. So it may have been because I was active in the Japan Society. And I had been asked by, I think, Mr. Peterson, Rudy Peterson, who was president of the Bank of America, had asked my boss if he would help to revive the Japan Society during the sixties because the Japan Society went way back. But during World War II it became moribund. There wasn't much support for Japanese culture.

So similarly to Connie's role, my boss said, "Oh, yes, he'll do it," and then he turned to me and said, "Sandy, we're going to revive the Japan Society." So he became president and I did all the work.

03-00:09:06

Rubens:

What was his name?

03-00:09:09

Calhoun:

Chalmers Graham. So we set about raising money for it and then we hired—I think John Dwyer was the first secretary, a friend of mine who had been in Japan in the Army at the same time we'd been there. And organized lectures, events. We sponsored performances. One of the most notable was the gagaku classical dance from the Imperial Household which came here and we presented them in the Herbst Theater. And then we reactivated the society, which continues today. So possibly because of my role in that I was invited to join the commission, as a commissioner.

03-00:10:23

Rubens:

Certainly your legal skills must have been attractive.

03-00:10:27
Calhoun:

I don't think the legal skills had much to do with it. But my practice at that time as a lawyer was focused on representing Japanese companies. So my relationship with them would help to bring them in as members of the Japan Society and to a lesser extent to support the museum and the commission. Although, as you noted, the commission in those days was pretty much Caucasian. I believe the first non-Caucasian commissioner we had was a gentlemen, K.L. Woo, who came from Shanghai and his wife Lily was a famous beauty there. And their family were friends with my family, so that's how I got to know them.

03-00:11:21
Rubens:

Did you bring him on?

03-00:11:22
Calhoun:

Well, I recommended that he be invited to join. And then subsequently we had Alice Lowe and a number of other Chinese members. And then we had the president of the Bank of Tokyo of California, Mr. Shibata, who came on. So over the years, gradually it's been—and it is a city commission so there is a desire that it be representative of the community and that it have diversity. So now it's quite a diverse group.

03-00:12:05
Rubens:

So do you remember what it was that you did with the commission in the early days? Do you remember the meetings, the issues that you took up? One of the big issues had to do with resolving Brundage's estate; what he owed to dealers and what would come to the museum. Early on there were issues about the operations of the museum. At some point a grand jury came in because there were issues about the safety of the elevators and some other things that I noted when I read the minutes of the commission.

03-00:12:42
Calhoun:

Well, I don't remember those details. They were really part of management to deal with, although the commission's responsibility was to ensure the safety of the collection and I think to not exploit but to sponsor the collection. Not just to keep it in a basement. So we built a museum. It was a beautiful wing. Some people still lament that it left the old home and moved to the Civic Center. But I would say the principle issues were exhibits and bringing people to the museum. You want the people to come see the permanent collection, but what really gets them in are exhibits. And I believe, if I recall correctly, I was president of the commission when we had the Chinese archeological exhibit, which was in 1975. And that was a huge success. We now have an exhibit [*China's Terracotta Warriors: The First Emperor's Legacy*, 2013] with similar pieces from the same period. We have some of the clay soldiers

and horses from Xi'an and it's a fantastic collection today. Anyway, it was a very noteworthy collection then. It had been in Europe, I think to London and to Paris and then in the U.S. to the Met and to the National Gallery. So by the time it came here, there had been a lot of publicity. So we had more people come to see the exhibit than any of the other places where it was shown, these bigger cities, yeah.

03-00:14:42

Rubens:

It was one of the first blockbusters.

03-00:14:44

Calhoun:

So it was a blockbuster. And we made what was for us a lot of money on it, which helped with the museum a great deal. And then a little later I think I was chairman of the exhibitions committee but no longer president of the commission and we had the Korean Exhibition, *5,000 years of Korean Art*.

03-00:15:16

Rubens:

That exhibit was in 1979, and I think you were still chair at the time.

03-00:15:18

Calhoun:

Well, then, I must have been chair then and maybe—

03-00:15:20

Rubens:

You had been on the acquisition committee for quite a while, and you're chair of that in 1977. There seems to be some overlap while you're chair of the commission.

By the way, I want to ask you about any trips you may have made to Asia in preparation for the Chinese exhibit. Because as early as 1971, in the minutes of the Art Commission, there's a motion regarding a trip that will be sponsored to mainland China in July 1971 — there will be thirty-five people going. Were you a part of that?

03-00:16:30

Calhoun:

No, I wasn't. Maybe the staff went to discuss the possibility of the exhibit. That's probably it. Because they would have had to go there and make a pitch that it come to San Francisco. And then discuss the arrangements because there were political sensitivities and the safety of the objects from China.

And then when we did go in '74, because it had been such a success in San Francisco, the Chinese invited us, I think on our own nickel, to go to China and to tour some of their museums and to visit Xi'an. And we did. Connie was in school by then. So I took my daughter instead and we went with the other board members. And the Chinese hadn't let many foreigners in, so that was considered a great plum. It was. I think that explains that. So there would have

been staff who would have visited China before the exhibit came here. And the timing sounds about right because it takes two or three years to organize these things.

03-00:17:57

Rubens:

You then travelled to Asia with Marjorie [Bissinger] Seller in 1976?

03-00:18:06

Calhoun:

Yes. And I was pretty involved with Mr. d'Argencé, who was the director. Then after he left [1985] I was not as involved for a while with the new director. Well, I was no longer chair. And other people came in and were more active. And so my most intense activity was in that period that Mr. d'Argencé was there. And then just from time to time I've been active since then. Most of the time the staff manages the museum as it should and there's always a little bit of a tension about the board getting too involved in management decisions or not being involved enough. So I would become involved when there seemed to be something that needed some—that I could contribute to.

03-00:19:11

Rubens:

One of the issues that you take up—the commission minutes cites letters that you write on behalf of the Asian Art Museum—has to do with the relationship to the de Young: whether there should be two separate admissions or what percentage of a single admission should go to the Asian Art Museum and what to the de Young.

03-00:19:42

Calhoun:

Well everybody came through the de Young entrance. There was some thought of having a separate entrance. That was discussed ad nauseam.

03-00:19:52

Rubens:

Yes, that showed up in the minutes repeatedly.

03-00:19:54

Calhoun:

And I think for special shows we did have a separate entrance and collected a separate fee. But as I recall, for generally, the general admission during when they didn't have a special show, people came in the de Young and then the issue was how to divide that. And then, of course, it's one building. So although it's a separate wing, the security is kind of combined. The heat and light I think comes from one source. But frankly speaking, I was never interested really in those details.

03-00:20:36

Rubens:

I can understand that, but it's striking to me the amount of time taken up at meetings by administrative issues.

03-00:20:36

Calhoun:

And that's why Mr. d'Argencé probably—that was part of management. And those things would give rise to tensions. People should overlook them and rise above them but they don't always do that.

03-00:20:59

Rubens:

Did you have some allies on the commission that you felt more close to than others? Marjorie Seller is someone that you worked with on committees, for instance, in this particular case of determining the proportion of admission funds.

03-00:21:16

Calhoun:

Yes. Well, I had a lot of respect for Marjorie. And she was very close to Mr. d'Argencé. But she was also a sensible mature person. She had friends who were on the board of the de Young, so she would be a good person to work out these things.

03-00:21:38

Rubens:

She had been one of the original commissioners, then known by her first husband's name, Marjorie Bissinger and—

03-00:21:42

Calhoun:

Yes, she had been married to Paul Bissinger, Senior. He was a prominent businessman. They were in the hides business and exported hides to Asia where they were made into leather and leather goods. So that's why he would be interested. And I think he took Marjorie on some business trips and that enhanced her interest.

03-00:22:11

Rubens:

I just see that you worked closely with her on different committees together.

03-00:22:13

Calhoun:

Yes, yeah. She was terrific.

In these groups there always is a little bit of tension but I can't recall any in particular. D'Argencé was a Breton. They're people from Brittany, in the northern part of France. And they're not French. At least they don't like to admit they're French. They're Breton. My daughter-in-law comes from a Breton family. They're stubborn tough people. And d'Argencé was a stubborn tough guy and he had to be to hold his own. And he had very strong views as to how to exhibit objects. He and Mr. Clarence Shangraw, who was the chief curator under him, I thought they did a terrific job exhibiting objects but they tended to just exhibit a few and focus the lights. Make a dramatic exhibit. And there was a lot of criticism of him, that most of the objects were in the basement. And later directors have taken them out and have exhibited many

more of them. But then you get kind of a cluttered gallery. In some ways it's better. In other ways it's less dramatic.

03-00:23:55

Rubens: So, for instance, when you become chair of the Korean Exhibition Committee do you have any direct relationship with the curators?

03-00:24:09

Calhoun: Tell them where to show things? No. They would be so mad if I had. That's why I was a very successful president, because I didn't interfere with them. They would collaborate with the Korean museum curator.

03-00:24:31

Rubens: So were you doing any legal work at all that facilitated acquisitions for the museum?

03-00:24:37

Calhoun: No, no. The commission is a city commission. The museum is owned by the city. The city has a very competent legal—I don't know if it's a legal department. Mr. Herrera is the city attorney now and they have assigned lawyers. The lawyer assigned to the museum, who is my lawyer for the commission, was Judy Teichman, who you are going to talk to. She's a good friend but she was an excellent lawyer and a very practical lawyer. And she would try to figure out solutions to problems, not figure out problems to solutions.

03-00:25:29

Rubens: So what would be an example of those problems?

03-00:25:30

Calhoun: So she was excellent. And on detailed negotiations, like negotiating with the representatives of Brundage's estate, as to what we would get, what the family would get. She took care of that, and she did a wonderful job.

03-00:25:50

Rubens: So you were not an interface then?

03-00:25:52

Calhoun: No, no. She would talk to me and I would say, "Yeah, that sounds good." And I can't really remember what I did. I guess it wasn't very much. [laughter]

03-00:26:05

Rubens: Well, I think you did a lot. For instance, there's the issue of the Asian Art Museum's relationship to the Society for Asian Art. You write a memo specifying the relationship and the programs they'll run or services they'll provide

03-00:26:31
Calhoun:

Yes. They ran the docent program, I think. I think they still do, as far as I know. So there are tensions there. They want a nice room for the docents and the museum doesn't have room and space. And so you have to work those things out. And mostly they would be worked out by the director and the president of the society.

03-00:27:04
Rubens:

But someone's asked you, or you take upon yourself, to write the memo that sums up the relationship and I guess it's right before you're president of the commission.

03-00:27:13
Calhoun:

Yes. I don't remember it but I probably did.

03-00:27:16
Rubens:

Well, as I said earlier, there appears to be a lot of attention at the commission meetings to the minutiae of governance and administrative structure. And so there was an attention to details that would of course elude you now in retrospect.

03-00:27:37
Calhoun:

Well, that's right. Well, you know, if we didn't have any big disaster, then I probably don't remember it. Because all these things went along smoothly. But there were tensions with the de Young and there were tensions with the society. And my main job was to dampen the tensions down and try to see that they were resolved and didn't explode. Well, later, of course, there was the whole issue of moving to the Civic Center and there are different views on the desirability of that.

03-00:28:39
Rubens:

And how involved were you on that?

03-00:28:40
Calhoun:

I was no longer too involved in that, I don't think.

03-00:28:46
Rubens:

One of the other big issues confronting museums in general in the seventies has to do with dealing with antiquities, about the provenance, the legality, the ownership.

03-00:28:59
Calhoun:

Right, right, right.

03-00:29:01
Rubens:

I don't see that coming up in any of the documents—

03-00:29:07

Calhoun:

Well, I think probably we avoided much of it. Not because we were so smart but Mr. Brundage had purchased most of his stuff before. I think there was a treaty and anything after 1970, I think that was—

03-00:29:23

Rubens:

There was the UNESCO Convention agreement.

03-00:29:25

Calhoun:

It was a later treaty but it went back to 1970. But most of his stuff had been bought before that, so that would reduce the issue. The other thing is that we didn't have much of an acquisitions budget. So we didn't buy a lot of stuff. So the Chinese under communism had a saying, "If you do a lot, you make a lot of mistakes." You could say if you buy a lot of stuff from Asia, you run into problems with antiquities. If you do a little, you make a few mistakes. If you do nothing, you don't make any mistakes. And that was kind of the rule under communism and that was per force the rule under our acquisition policy because we didn't have much money.

And we were careful. Well, I think Mr. d'Argencé was careful. We made some acquisitions. Mrs. Seller and I and another group bought some lacquers. And we bought them through one dealer and there was some criticism that the dealer was too friendly with d'Argencé. He was a French dealer. Well, Mr. d'Argencé was not French but Breton. And so he liked to deal with him. And we tried to be sure that there wasn't anything funny going on. You can never be absolutely sure, but as far as we could tell there was no evidence of any impropriety. And so fortunately we were quite aware of this when we bought some things from—I think we bought some pottery from Vietnam or something like that. And it later turned out that the dealer who brought these in and sold them had violated some of those rules. We checked immediately and I think we found out that we hadn't bought anything from him or something. So I'm chairman of the ethics committee of the commission today and have been for a long time. And we have strict rules on acquisitions. We have strict rules on promoting collections of our trustees. We have just had an exhibit of calligraphy that's owned by the husband of our vice chairman of the commission, Jerry Yang, the founder of Yahoo.

Two things you got to look out for particularly: that your curators decide what to show and how to show it and, two, that you're not helping him to build up the value of his collection so he can sell it. And so I think we complied with that. We are having a collection from Larry Ellison, of his Japanese collection. And our prior director—

03-00:33:06

Rubens: Sano, Emily Sano.

03-00:33:08

Calhoun:

Emily. She's his advisor now. She helps him buy all the stuff. And he's not going to sell his collection. He's still building it. And his lawyers in their draft of the agreement put in some stuff about giving them some control over what was done. We said, "No." We have this written ethics rule and so we said, "No, no. You can't do that." So we're very conscious of it and we have an excellent ethics committee chair, if I say so myself. [laughter] Well, so far knock on wood. Pride cometh before a fall. All of the directors have been very aware of these issues and the board has been aware, the ethics committee has been aware. You can't ever be sure. No one's ever perfect. But we have spent a lot of time and attention on it.

03-00:34:19

Rubens:

Could you characterize for us the different function of the commission from the foundation?

03-00:34:26

Calhoun:

Well, the commission is a city board and they're responsible, I think, and it depends—the commission has to decide. But I would say their mission should be to preserve the collection, to see that it's safe, to see that it's conserved. You don't just put it in a basement and let it rot or have fungus grow on it, with all respect to Connie's study [Mrs. Calhoun is a mycologist]. So that's a big responsibility. Now, I've been thinking about this the last few weeks. And then I guess the building. The commission has some responsibility to see that the building is maintained. It's part of the city's capital budget, so it's probably a very difficult responsibility to discharge but that's a responsibility. And then it seems to me that, more than that, it has to develop the collection. It has to make it available to the public. It has to make it available to schools. Nowadays, all Monday is reserved for school visits. And so it has to, in a good sense, exploit the collection by making it a part of the city's social fabric. So I think that's what they do. The foundation, the original purpose, was to raise money, because originally the city paid almost all of the expense of running the museum. Now the city contributes about a third, or 30 percent or more. And the rest comes from the foundation. And this is typical of city museums. The de Young is the same way, the Legion's [of Honor] the same way. I think they're city museums but they have a foundation that raises the money.

03-00:36:57

Rubens:

A separate entity.

03-00:36:58
Calhoun:

A separate entity, a non-profit entity. Well, back when I was really involved, I know there was a lot of tension between the board of directors of the de Young and the society. I can't remember what it is, the museum society, whatever. Because the board of directors appointed by the city, they ran it but the society raised most of the money to run it. So the people who raised the money, they want to have a say.

So when we first setup the society [the Asian Art Museum Foundation] we arranged for the membership to be pretty much the same, the society and the commission. And over time that has gradually changed because you've got to add people who contribute money who may not be suitable for the commission or interested in being on the commission. The commission has to operate under city and state laws, including sunshine ordinances. You can't have a meeting unless you give public notice. You can't discuss anything at the meeting unless it's on the agenda, which is in the public notice. And it is not just the commission as a whole. Any quorum of any subcommittee of the commission, if they even get on the telephone they have a meeting and you have to keep a record. Whereas the non-profit entity doesn't have to comply with all this. So gradually they have gotten separate membership, pretty much, and so far it seems to be working fine. But I remember in the past they had a lot of trouble in the de Young and the society people wanted to have more say in the management.

03-00:39:13
Rubens:

And so you're attributing this more harmonious relationship between overlap of who's on the commission and who's on the foundation?

03-00:39:20
Calhoun:

We started out to try to avoid that problem. But now we don't have as much of an overlap. But it still seems to be working okay. And in the case of the Asian Art Museum, there's a contract between the society and the commission and the contract provides for the society to basically run the museum. And Judy Teichman, she had a big hand in that contract. I didn't have a big hand in negotiating. But the commission has to be sure that that contract is fair to the city and I'm sure Judy did. I don't really know what's in the contract now. At one time I'm sure I read it. And the director, he's a city employee. But part of his compensation is paid by the foundation.

So it's all kind of complicated. But if people want to make it work, it'll work. And if they don't want to make it work, there's all kinds of things that can create problems. But so far everything seems to be doing fine.

03-00:40:48

Rubens: Martin, do you have some follow up questions you'd like to ask while I go through my notes.

03-00:40:57

Meeker: Yes, let me just ask you a little bit about some points that we talked about earlier.

03-00:41:15

Calhoun: Sure.

03-00:41:17

Meeker: One of them was I wanted to follow-up about the Japan Society. The way in which you talked about it made it sound primarily like an arts and cultural organization. And I wonder the degree to which the Japan Society was similar to the Asia Foundation. The Asia Foundation, of course, had economic development as a concern. It had educational connections. Part of it maybe even had a political dimension, meaning they were interested in fostering democracy as opposed to other political systems that might have emerged throughout Asia. Did the Japanese Society have any of those sort of economic development or political development concerns?

03-00:42:02

Calhoun: Well, the Asia Foundation is a grant making organization and they actually—I probably know more about it than you want to hear. But they're kind of unique in that they're a line item in the state department budget. So they get a certain amount of money every year from the Congress to spend any way they want. Well, not anyway they want but to make grants and also to cover their overhead. The Japan Society, they don't have any money to give away. The Asia Foundation also contracts with [US]AID and with foreign governments, with the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, to make grants. The area is, as you point out, sort of to promote civil society. Also they have an environmental program. They also have a promotion of economic and—

03-00:43:12

Meeker: Particularly free market economics. Particularly free market economics.

03-00:43:18

Calhoun: Like they have a thing in Vietnam where they try to promote getting rid of obstacles to forming businesses. And they make a survey of the different provinces and rate them, where it's easiest to start a business, where it's hardest, and they try to get them to compete with each other to make it easier to start businesses. And yeah, I would say the rule of law, the protection of intellectual property. I wouldn't say free market. Yeah, free market but in terms of these specific underlying conditions for a free market economy.

03-00:44:11

Meeker:

Well, I guess a predictable circumstance in which to conduct business. So like you said, rule of law meaning that there's due process.

03-00:44:19

Calhoun:

Well, if you have a rule of law: the observation of contracts and enforceability of contracts. And, of course, they do a fair amount of work in observing elections. They underwrite the cost of these people who go and oversee elections and stuff like that. But it's very different, mainly because they put out money. The Japan Society is kind of a tiny little organization and they don't have hardly enough money to pay their staff, much less give anybody any money. And as you say, they were originally organized to promote mutual understanding and culture, art. Not so much political, not so much economic. In recent years, to try to make themselves relevant they have sponsored economic lectures or discussions or panels and stuff like that. They have become less and less significant as other organizations—now everybody goes back and forth to Japan and half the people are married to Japanese. Not half but there are a lot of interracial marriages. There's a lot of cultural exchange and everybody—well, in 1960s nobody ate sushi and now you can't go anywhere where there isn't a sushi parlor. And I'm not as active there as I used to be. But my impression is that they're in an endless search for significance. And you have to change. There's no point teaching people about sushi now because sushi has metamorphosized and we now have the California roll. So they're kind of searching. For a while they were kind of pushing anime because that's part of American culture now. And I'm not quite sure what it is but the young people go for it.

03-00:47:01

Meeker:

Animation.

03-00:47:02

Calhoun:

Yes. So in promoting cultural and political and business understanding, but mainly cultural.

03-00:47:15

Meeker:

So it sounds to me like the main goal of it, particularly when you get involved in the fifties or early sixties, is to jumpstart cultural connections between the United States and Japan after they clearly had been severed during the Second World War.

03-00:47:26

Calhoun:

Yes, during the war. During the war and even before the war, our image of Japan was of this little monster with a bayonet. And people didn't know about sushi, they didn't know about Japanese cars. There weren't any Japanese cars. And they didn't know about a lot of—well, now, what? Japanese movies,

comics. So they were trying to introduce a people that was totally underexposed to that to that.

03-00:48:09

Meeker:

Do you remember any particular successes? Did the Japan society play a role in introducing [Akira] Kurosawa to the United States or—

03-00:48:18

Calhoun:

Well, they did. I think they sponsored some films. And certainly there's somebody in Berkeley who's an expert on Japanese film. And they sponsored talks by him because that would be an important part of Japanese culture. And their resources are rather limited. It would be great if the museum had a theater where they could have Japanese film. But they have international film festivals here and they have Japanese films.

03-00:49:03

Meeker:

So about the commission, when you joined it in 1969. This was a big transition point because there was no Asian Art Commission before this. It was the second negotiation with Brundage that changed it from the Brundage wing of the de Young to the Center for Asian Art and Culture—I think it was called— and that created the commission and the foundation. And I think it's pretty clear from your own personal experience why you had an interest in spending some of your free time on the commission. And you also mentioned about Marjorie Bissinger, her husband's business interests in Asia. I'm wondering if you can just give me a general sense of the other commissioners. Was there like a broad shared sense about what their interest in serving would have been?

03-00:50:02

Calhoun:

Well, in taking a look at the names of commissioners from when I was chair, there's one Japanese commissioner, Nobuo Ishizaka and he was here representing Toshiba, which is the Tokyo Shibaura Electric Company. They're like General Electric in Japan. And they had a family foundation and gave—I remember they gave ten thousand or \$15,000 to the museum, which was quite a lot in those days. So he was probably the first Japanese. And he's a very sophisticated fellow. He's a good friend. I don't know why Fritz Jewett was interested in Asian art but he was and he was a big financing supporter. Mr. Hume. I think it was his wife, Betty, who was really interested. But they were interested in art. They have some French impressionists in their home here. When we came back from Japan, they were friends with Connie's parents, so they let us stay in their home. They were off traveling somewhere for two weeks while we looked for a place to stay. I'll tell you, we couldn't find anything that resembled their home that we could afford. [laughter] Mr. [Gwin] Follis. He was the head of Standard Oil. And all the oil companies,

they do business all over the world. They sell oil in Japan. George Hopper Fitch, he collected Indian miniatures and he's given a number of them. His estate recently gave one. Bill Goetz, I don't know why he was interested in it. Reg Grady. Reg Grady was an officer with Wilbur-Ellis. Wilbur-Ellis represents a lot of American manufacturers in Asia.

03-00:52:11

Meeker:

Is that related to Judy Wilbur?

03-00:52:13

Calhoun:

Yes. That was her husband. Mrs. Edward Harrison. Well, they were from Hawaii. And you know Hawaii has a lot of interest in—her husband was a lawyer here. But I think that her interest maybe came from the Hawaiian connection. Alan Christensen. Alan Christensen was the president of Marcona Mining. Marcona Mining was 50 percent owned by Utah Construction and 50 percent owned by Cyprus Mines. Cyprus Mines is in LA and it had mines in Cyprus, which is in the news these days. Oh, copper mines that dated back to the Roman times. And Harvey Mudd was the president. The Mudd family were big there. They have a Harvey Mudd College there.

03-00:53:15

Meeker:

Can I ask just a broader question about these people? I appreciate this because it sounds like all of these people have a pretty deep personal and/or commercial or business connection with Asia.

03-00:53:29

Calhoun:

Yes.

03-00:53:30

Meeker:

And the way that Brundage talked about the purpose of the museum was I think that he had an aesthetic appreciation for the art that he was collecting and a historical interest in it. But he also talked about it becoming a bridge of understanding. This was the language that was regularly used. I'm wondering if you got a sense from your fellow commissioners the purpose, or the reason for serving on the commission, and thus the purpose of the museum, was the fact that all of you knew the Asian culture and Asian people to a much greater degree than people in the United States and that perhaps people in the United States didn't have a very informed or sophisticated understanding of Asian people and culture and that by participating in this you could maybe assist with those connections.

03-00:54:25

Calhoun:

Well, when I said what the commission's responsibility, the third was to make some use of the collection. And education, of course, would be a principle use. To educate the public, to educate the school—you know, younger people.

The museum now has a very active education program and they send people to schools and schools come in. All that takes money. So in the early days they didn't have much money. So that was part of their program but it didn't amount to very much. But now I think it's a big part of their program and they've gotten additional resources for that. Yeah. I would say that that was part of the concept. Mr. Christensen, whom I just mentioned, they had iron ore mines in Peru and they sold all their ore to Japan. And they bought the ships that carried the ore from Peru to Japan in Japan. So he had that connection. He also then bought a lot of art. He got interested in art. I think a lot of it is Southeast Asian but there's some Japanese and he's given his collection and given substantial funds to the museum. He's dead now but I think his daughter is still a significant contributor to the museum.

So these people maybe got involved in business and that got them interested and then they happened to be there and they became collectors and became interested in this. And then the ones that are like—well, Mrs. Shorenstein, she was—Phyllis, she was very interested in the art. And then they were interested in it as being a civic—something that would make San Francisco a more attractive city, both for the residents and for tourism. And cities, everybody thinks they should have a university, they should have a library, they should have a museum.

03-00:56:51

Rubens:

Alioto's very clear in his oral history that he considered the acquisition of the Brundage Collection one of his outstanding accomplishments. That the City should establish a museum with the pre-eminent collection of Asia art in the country.

03-00:56:59

Calhoun:

I don't think people articulated too specifically. They just thought that a city like San Francisco, that was identified with Asia—at that point Los Angeles wasn't what it is today, although it was not insignificant. But San Francisco, it certainly shouldn't let Los Angeles have the best collection of Asian art. That it was part of being a city, part of being a metropolis.

03-00:57:27

Meeker:

So just one final question and there may not be much here. So in addition to 1969, the name changing from the Brundage Collection to the Center for Asian Art and Culture, then I think it was, what, about '73 or so that they changed it to the Asian Art Museum. Was that just like a surface branding change? Was there any debate about that as far as you recall?

03-00:57:54
Calhoun:

Well, I think that the Center of Asian Art and Culture was part of the educational concept. That it was more than just exhibiting objects. That there would be programs. There would be other art besides just the pictorial art. And they have some musical programs. But they're somewhat limited by their facility. If they had a bigger facility with a theater and so forth, then they would have more performing arts. So I think that was part of the educational function, bringing Asian arts here so people could educate themselves, learn more about it. And then, of course, it became the Chong-Moon Lee because he gave \$15 million to move to the old main library. And under the new director, Jay, Jay Xu, I think that there are a lot—they have children's programs. They have demonstrations in connection with the exhibits. So you'll see quite a lot of educational activities there.

Interview #3 April 19, 2013

[Audio File 4]

04-00:00:06

Rubens: Good afternoon, Sandy.

04-00:00:08

Calhoun: Good afternoon.

04-00:00:09

Rubens: It's our third interview. We've met once previously to outline some of the things we would be talking about but we've only recorded two interviews. And it's the 19th of April 2013 and there's just a whole range of things that I'd like to talk to you about—to really just get at, substantively, your experiences with being on the commission and your relationship to the art museum. And I thought we had done a nice little overview of how you became involved with the museum through the society and then also the Japan Society and some of the early days when you were chair of the acquisition committee and chair of the commission during the wonderful Korean exhibit. And you also have, this is what I'd like to begin elaborating today, some interesting reflections on d'Argencé and what it was to work with him. He retires in 1985 and he's replaced by Rand Castile a year later. There's an interim director for a while. And I'm wondering if you have any observations about how it is that he came to retire.

04-00:01:37

Calhoun: Well, I don't remember any particular circumstance. But a museum director has several constituencies. He's got the board. And he's got his staff and he's got the public. And when it's a city museum he then has the city, too. And over a period of years, he has to make decisions which displease one or another of those constituencies. And these accumulate. And so I think that happened with Yvon, Mr. d'Argencé. And so at the end of ten years or maybe it was a little bit longer, he had caused a number of trustees or commissioners to become dissatisfied. And so there was pressure to remove him.

04-00:02:38

Rubens: There was pressure?

04-00:02:38

Calhoun: Yes, yes.

04-00:02:39

Rubens: How did you particularly feel?

04-00:02:41

Calhoun:

Well, I thought rather highly of Mr. d'Argencé but I could understand people becoming annoyed by him because he had his own views and he held them very firmly. And he was somewhat dismissive of the trustees and the commission because we weren't museum experts or specialists and it was his nature kind of to dismiss other people's opinions. He didn't want to brook much interference with his management of the museum. I guess I was chairman while he was the director and it was fine because I'm kind of a hands-off person. And as long as he was doing his job, and I think it was then that I was chairman of the acquisitions and exhibitions committee. In those days the committee covered both. And we had the Chinese archeological exhibition and everything went smoothly and we had a big attendance and made money. And so there wasn't any reason really to interfere, for me to interfere. And he had a good staff. Clarence Shangraw and others. The main job of the commission and the foundation then, as always, is to raise money. Of course, the commission is responsible for making sure that the collection is preserved and that it's safeguarded and that it's exhibited. But to do all of those things you have to raise money.

04-00:04:41

Rubens:

Well, was there some articulation about what kind of director they wanted to then come in? Mark McLoughlin was an interim for a year and then Rand Castile was hired, who had come from the Japan Society in New York.

04-00:04:58

Calhoun:

Yeah, in New York.

04-00:04:59

Rubens:

He had been director of their gallery. Had you known him?

04-00:05:03

Calhoun:

No, I knew of him. But I don't believe I knew him personally. And I don't think I was involved very much in the search or in the decision and I was not close to Rand Castile. There were other directors who were closer to him. So I wasn't too involved in the commission during those years. Not as much as when Mr. d'Argencé was the director.

04-00:05:34

Rubens:

He's there from 1986 to 1994. Those are pretty crucial years. Eighty-six is the beginning of Mayor Feinstein promoting the civic restoration plan and then there'll be the charter amendment granting the permission, the control over the new property at Hyde and Fulton and there's just this whole opening up. There's the campaign to raise fifty-nine million, almost sixty million dollars for the bond issue. And then that's when the commission is reorganized and so

committees are moved from the commission to the foundation, I think to give the foundation a freer arm in raising money.

04-00:06:34

Calhoun:

In the early days the city contributed 90 percent of the funds for the museum to operate. Now I think it contributes maybe 30 percent or less. So as the foundation contributed more and more money to the operations, the foundation board wanted more and more to say about how the money was used. That seems to be a natural evolution with museums. I think the same thing happened at the de Young earlier. So at some point in there they entered into an agreement between the commission and the city and the foundation. And the foundation was delegated a lot of authority for the day to day management of the museum and the control over the funds that the foundation contributed. And Judy Teichman had a lot to do with structuring that arrangement and drafting it. So she would be able to tell you more about that.

04-00:07:48

Rubens:

We talked to you about that. So you weren't specifically involved.

04-00:07:50

Calhoun:

I was not involved. She represented the city and I was not chairman so I was not involved except to I guess approve it at some point.

04-00:08:02

Rubens:

This was also a period when Dianne Feinstein was really pushing for the museum to have more engagement with and representation from the Asian communities in San Francisco, particularly Chinatown. And, of course, you know we're talking to Alice Lowe, who was a great facilitator of that. And then at the same time, Dianne Feinstein is leading several delegations to Shanghai, setting up Shanghai as a sister city and appointing people to commissions from the Chinese community, to the city commissions in general. Did you have any interaction with Feinstein and with this aspect of her?

04-00:08:51

Calhoun:

Yeah. Well, I had always felt that there should be more diversity on the board. When it originally started it was almost all Caucasians from the establishment here. As you mentioned, Alice Lowe, she brought in—and there were—

04-00:09:11

Rubens:

You had mentioned K.L. Woo.

04-00:09:13

Calhoun:

He was a very early member.

04-00:09:16

Rubens: But he comes in during your tenure.

04-00:09:19

Calhoun: Well, I introduced him to the board. And recommended that they bring him on. And also there was a Mr. Ishizaka, Nabuo Ishizaka. And he was put on the commission. And he was a friend of mine.

04-00:09:46

Rubens: Through business?

04-00:09:48

Calhoun: No, not really through business. I knew the business world in which he operated but he was not a client of mine. He was just a friend. And I had known his family in Japan. His father had been a very prominent person, kind of the head of what they called in Japan the Keidanren, K-E-I-D-A-N-R-E-N, which is sort of like the chamber of commerce here. And there may have been some other Japanese. I don't recall exactly who. It's quite a while ago.

04-00:10:32

Rubens: There was Aizawa. Hatsuuro Aizawa.

04-00:10:34

Calhoun: Hatsuuro Aizawa. He's a Japanese American and I knew him also. And he sort of represented the Japanese American community, which is more of a local community in which the mayor would be more interested in even than Japanese businesspeople. And Hats was very active in the Japanese American business community. He had a printing company so he published a lot of notices and this and that sort of thing. So he knew a lot of Japanese American organizations.

04-00:11:11

Rubens: So I interrupted you really. But in terms of knowing Feinstein and engaged with—

04-00:11:16

Calhoun: Well, I don't recall being engaged with her in this. I just don't.

04-00:11:23

Rubens: So Shanghai is being set up as a sister city and you I think at the same time are involved with Osaka, with the—

04-00:11:33

Calhoun: Well, Osaka was the first sister city relationship and Mayor Feinstein was the one who instituted that. And I think that was the original San Francisco sister city, the first one of all. And it's still active. I was chairman of the sister city

committee for many years and managed to devolve that responsibility a few years ago. And they're about to have their annual meeting later on this month, I think.

04-00:12:08

Rubens:

So you're involved with so many societies that all sort of dovetail into promoting Asia.

04-00:12:17

Calhoun:

Yes. They're all trying to promote knowledge and understanding and activities between San Francisco and Asia, and particularly in the case of Osaka, of course, a sister city committee. And Osaka participated every year. You know we have a cherry blossom festival which I think is taking place right now in Japan Town. Japan Town itself wasn't a sister city project. It was a redevelopment project. But the director of the redevelopment agency was very sort of internationally minded and he was a great promoter of the Japan Trade and Cultural Center, called Japan Town.

04-00:13:11

Rubens:

So at the same time you become involved with the Asia Foundation.

04-00:13:20

Calhoun:

That was 1984 I think. When the relations with China reopened, we had no contact at all and they established something called the US-China National Committee I think it was called. It assumed the duties that the State Department would normally do, because this was before we officially recognized China but it was after Nixon made his breakthrough trip. And I was on that committee. And my principal responsibilities were entertaining visiting Chinese groups.

04-00:14:10

Rubens:

And how did you come under that committee? Through the Asia Foundation?

04-00:14:15

Calhoun:

No, I don't know how. Through one or another of my activities I was known to the people in Washington, because it headquartered in Washington. So one such group had representatives from what was then called the Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade and this was a government university that trained all of the people who worked in the foreign trade companies. At that time everything in China was nationalized, so the import/export companies were all government companies. And they also trained the people in customs. They didn't train the diplomats. But in the international commercial area, it was their graduates that staffed all these organizations. So I introduced them to the then president of the Asia Foundation.

04-00:15:23

Rubens: Haydn Williams.

04-00:15:24

Calhoun: Haydn Williams. And sort of as a result of that, and the chairman of the Asia Foundation was a friend of mine, Brayton Wilbur, Jr. They invited me to join the board of the Asia Foundation. At that time you needed a sponsor to go to China and the BIFT, Beijing Institute of Foreign Trade, sponsored them and they set up a library at the institute and they were able to in time have a representative there.

04-00:16:04

Rubens: So the general question is whether you're traveling to Asia and what is the relationship between being members of all these organizations and your service to the Asian Art Museum?

04-00:16:18

Calhoun: Well, they really weren't directly related.

04-00:16:24

Rubens: You were working at the time, too.

04-00:16:26

Calhoun: Well, I was working so it was mostly to do with my work. But as a result of the Chinese archeological exhibition [*The Exhibition of the Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China*, 1975], the museum was invited to send a group of its trustees. I was part of that group. Basically we had a tourist's tour. But we did sort of focus on visiting museums. It was very early on so there wasn't too much developed in China in those days.

04-00:16:59

Rubens: Yes. I think this is before the period we're talking—I think this is in the late seventies.

04-00:17:06

Calhoun: Maybe earlier than late seventies.

04-00:17:08

Rubens: Seventy-six, around there.

04-00:17:09

Calhoun: Yeah, yeah, earlier than late seventies.

04-00:17:11

Rubens: Yeah, okay. So ten years later has it stepped up more? By the time Emily Sano comes on as director, I came across in the minutes that you do travel.

That Emily had met you in Japan. No, you hadn't gone with her but Johnson Bogart—

04-00:17:43

Calhoun:

Jack Bogart, yes. Well, I used to spend about three months of the year in Asia. Not just Japan but Asia. And then we opened our law office in Beijing in 1979 or 1980, right in there, very early on. But that had really nothing to do with the museum. And it would only be that I was in China or Japan at the time that somebody else was there. And then we'd get together. With Jack Bogart we went on a tour of galleries. Emily was with us. And Jack bought a figure, which is in the museum, a haniwa. Haniwa is kind of a prehistoric clay figures. H-A-N-I-W-A. And you can see it in the Japanese gallery now.

04-00:18:45

Rubens:

So I've taken us off a little bit from a historical progression where I was asking you to comment on two things, on both your interactions with the directors and then with the city impulse to have more interactions and do more trade with China. One way was setting up sister cities.

04-00:19:05

Calhoun:

They didn't really interact with the museum to any great extent that I can recall. But there were people that were involved in them. For example, one of the trustees now, he's the Japanese, Terry—is it Terry? Matsuura. His Anglicized name is Terry but it's Isao Matsuura. Well, he's been very active on the foundation and he's very active in almost every organization having to do with Japan. And he was the president of Sanwa Bank, S-A-N-W-A, Sanwa Bank of California. But they then were acquired by another bank. But he retired here and he's very active in the Japan Society and in other organizations.

04-00:20:41

Rubens:

All right. So you're saying that these things are all circling around each other and they're—

04-00:20:45

Calhoun:

It's more that the same individuals are interested in a number of different areas, the museum being one, the Japan Society being another, the Japanese American Chamber or the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Northern California, Mr. Matsuura's active in that, too. All those things.

04-00:21:05

Rubens:

The Asia Foundation.

04-00:21:07

Calhoun:

They don't necessarily support each other but once in a while they do. And in the early days, I think the Asia Foundation, well, Haydn [Williams]. He was on the commission and also president of the Foundation. Later on they sort of drifted apart. Now they're doing joint programs again, largely as a result of Haydn Williams and Judy Wilbur having given some funds to be administered by the Asia Foundation but to be used for the museum to bring curators from foreign museums here for visits. And they've had a number of exchanges and then they've also had a meeting of museum directors from all over Asia here. And those have all been funded and sponsored by Haydn and by Judy.

04-00:22:13

Rubens:

And so I think there's precedence for that starting in the nineties and I think it's the trip that I was talking about with—

04-00:22:24

Calhoun:

Yes, we called him Hats Aizawa. His name is Hatsuuro.

04-00:22:34

Rubens:

That has to do with a jointly sponsored exhibit with the Kyoto Museum. Those kimono textiles.

04-00:22:42

Calhoun:

Yes. I don't recall that. But I do recall that when Feinstein was mayor, that we visited Japan and that she went. A number of us were there. And then she also I think went to Shanghai when that sister city relationship was established. By then I think she was a senator. I don't think she was mayor anymore. But I don't recall. Well, she was invited to go to Beijing and meet with the Premier because he had been mayor of Shanghai when she sponsored the sister city relationship. So that was unusual for someone who wasn't a top government official to meet with the Premier.

04-00:23:42

Rubens:

Right. And I think her husband, Richard Blum, had already had some—

04-00:23:48

Calhoun:

I think he may have gone with her. Our whole delegation was not invited. But she and maybe one or two other people went. Maybe she and the director went to Beijing.

04-00:24:03

Rubens:

Well, I'm wondering if we could move on a little, unless you had any more reflections just on that period.

04-00:24:10

Calhoun:

No, no. I wasn't as involved in that period.

- 04-00:24:13
Rubens: So I'm wondering if maybe we jump over and we talk about when Emily Sano becomes director, because you said you didn't have that much relationship with Castile. He leaves in '94. Was there any inside story about why he leaves that you were party to?
- 04-00:24:36
Calhoun: I'm sure there was but I don't recall it and I don't know if I ever knew about it.
- 04-00:24:43
Rubens: All right. So this is the mid-nineties. I didn't know if you had a sense about what the commission was looking for in a new director that would be—
- 04-00:24:53
Calhoun: No, I don't recall.
- 04-00:24:56
Rubens: Sano comes from within. She had been at the museum for a couple of years.
- 04-00:25:02
Calhoun: Yes. I don't know what her position but she had been in the museum. She came from Dallas, I think.
- 04-00:25:08
Rubens: She had come from Fort Worth.
- 04-00:25:10
Calhoun: Fort Worth, yeah, yeah. She may have been the deputy director and curator of Japanese art or something like that, yes.
- 04-00:25:22
Rubens: The chief curator and deputy director and chief administrative officer.
- 04-00:25:25
Calhoun: Yes.
- 04-00:25:26
Rubens: No doubt they did a national search and then found—
- 04-00:25:30
Calhoun: I don't know. My understanding is that she was recommended by, and if you'll give me the list of members—
- 04-00:25:48
Rubens: Here, let's check '96, right—

04-00:25:51

Calhoun:

Yes. Glenn Vinson. I think Glenn Vinson knew her from Texas and I think he was her sponsor, so to speak, and then obviously she would be approved by the board and the commission.

04-00:26:11

Rubens:

Meaning you must have lent your support if—

04-00:26:15

Calhoun:

Well, yeah, I'm sure I voted for her. She's had great qualifications. And she did a great job.

04-00:26:22

Rubens:

You liked her as a—

04-00:26:24

Calhoun:

Yeah. I wasn't that close to her either.

04-00:26:29

Rubens:

She certainly was long serving.

04-00:26:32

Calhoun:

Yeah. I did play a role in her retiring in that she had been there a long time. There were problems with the morale of the staff and with her management style and so I urged the chair to actually carry out an annual performance review, which while it was supposed to happen, never happened. And so I did play a role in evaluating her performance and then finally a decision that she should retire.

04-00:27:24

Rubens:

I see. So this is done behind the scenes?

04-00:27:29

Calhoun:

Well, I don't know how behind the scenes it was. It was done at meetings and raising issues about performance reviews. The chair should conduct it. There should be a committee and then the chair should report. And that didn't happen. So there was a little bit of tension. The chair didn't particularly appreciate my urging this.

04-00:27:57

Rubens:

But you must have been disturbed. I don't know if people came to you but from your observations you thought you should take this initiative?

04-00:28:05

Calhoun:

Well, as I said before, things accumulate. As you noted, Emily had been there a long time. She really had managed the move from the park to the civic center, which was a huge project. And it went off without hitch. She did a

terrific job on that. But then the museum was a lot bigger. The staff was bigger, the budget was bigger. And I think it was necessary to review her performance in this new setting. And I think as a result of those reviews, a change was worked out. It made it possible, smoothly, for her to seek a new career. She's now a consultant to—

04-00:29:07
Rubens:

Larry Ellison.

04-00:29:09
Calhoun:

Yes. That's not a bad job. [laughter] She probably makes more now than she did at the museum. And also she's able to help Mr. Ellison, Larry, acquire objects. And the museum always had a very limited budget. He probably has a bigger budget than the museum.

04-00:29:27
Rubens:

Well, I'm wondering if we can come back the period when she does move the museum, the whole campaign to prepare for that move. She'll come in about a year after it started. You're on the steering committee for the Campaign for the New Asian. And I have a brochure here. Judy Wilbur, I think, was heading some—

04-00:29:52
Calhoun:

Yeah, she was really heading it up.

04-00:29:55
Rubens:

And Bogart.

04-00:29:56
Calhoun:

And Jack, right. Jack really devoted I think all of his—I think he'd retired from the real estate business and he'd devoted all of his time and effort to that. And they did a terrific job raising the money.

04-00:30:14
Rubens:

So tell me about you. So you're on the steering committee.

04-00:30:17
Calhoun:

Yeah. Well, I don't have a lot of money and so if you don't have money you don't play a big role in raising money. And I've never been a big fundraiser. Even though I was—

04-00:30:31
Rubens:

You had a lot of contacts, though.

04-00:30:33
Calhoun:

Well, I did, and I may have helped raise some money from the Japanese business community. But I really didn't play a large role in raising the funding to move the museum. Judy and Jack did. And, of course, the Korean gentleman who gave fifty—

04-00:30:58
Rubens:

Oh, sure, Chong-Moon Lee.

04-00:30:59
Calhoun:

Chong-Moon Lee. He gave the fifteen million, which was kind of the key gift.

04-00:31:07
Rubens:

Who brought that in?

04-00:31:11
Calhoun:

Well, you could talk to Don Meyer. You're probably not going to. He was a colleague of mine and he had been in—

04-00:31:26
Rubens:

You mean literally at the firm or on the financial—

04-00:31:27
Calhoun:

At the firm, yes. He worked for me. I met him in Korea when he was a Fulbright scholar there. He had gone to law school and he spent a year or two with his wife in Korea. At that time we had a small office there, so I introduced him to our office there and I told him that if he ever came back to California, I'd like to talk to him. So he came back and he came to work for us. But he continued his interest in Korea. He still is very interested in Korea. I don't know that he introduced Chong-Moon Lee but he knew a lot about it. and Chong-Moon was going to make a big gift to Stanford and they ran into some kind of snag. And so he was looking around where he would achieve the appropriate recognition and the museum picked him up. And Don was involved in that. Don is kind of a little bit troublesome. He asks embarrassing questions. So I don't know how welcome his involvement was but he was involved.

04-00:32:51
Rubens:

What would be an embarrassing question?

04-00:32:56
Calhoun:

Well, Don and I both raised questions about the refinancing of the bond and that'd be an embarrassing question because you're questioning people's judgment in doing that.

04-00:33:14

Rubens:

So should we talk about that a little bit now?

04-00:33:19

Calhoun:

Yes, we could go to that. The original bond was I think for \$102 million or something like that and then they refinanced it and it went up to 120 million and then it went up again.

04-00:33:39

Rubens:

We're not talking about then the \$52 million campaign that Judy Wilbur ran in '94?

04-00:33:46

Calhoun:

No. Well, the campaign would have been to raise money, I guess. And then the \$52 million didn't cover the cost. So they had to pay for the construction and it was more than the money they had. The city I think sold a bond for 35 million, something like that, and that covered the earthquake proofing supposedly. Seismic retrofitting. Then the group, steering committee, they raised money. But the cost of the whole thing was more. So where does that money come from? Well, they were able to sell a bond and that provided enough money to cover the cost. The money they raised, plus the seismic refitting, plus proceeds from the bond. And they had some leftover which they invested, of course.

04-00:34:56

Rubens:

But we're talking in '94. Is this what we're talking about?

04-00:34:58

Calhoun:

Well, I don't remember the dates. No.

04-00:34:59

Rubens:

Okay, right. So what was your questioning? What were you concerned about?

04-00:35:06

Calhoun:

Well, I was concerned about their investing the money in stocks rather than in US government securities. See, at that point they would have gotten a little more interest than they were paying, so there would have been a little bit of a differential. But the perceived wisdom at the time was that you should invest in stocks because over the years they did better. And that worked okay until 2007 or 2008 and then they took—now it's back up so now they're doing okay. And then there also was this problem that when you used the bond money to build a building, you still have to pay the bond off. The foundation didn't own the building. If you owned the building and it was a commercial thing, a hotel, you would pay it off from the earnings. But with a museum it doesn't throw off a lot of operating earnings, profits. You're lucky if you may break even. So where is the money to come from to pay off the difference

between what you owed and what you have? And the thought was, "Well, if we invest in stocks, that'll climb and we'll pay it off." Because we have thirty years. The bond is thirty years. But unfortunately it went down instead of up. Now it's recovered so the gap is closed but there's still a gap.

04-00:36:59

Rubens:

So I'm just not clear. Were you going to propose an alternative? Did you think that there should be investigation?

04-00:37:05

Calhoun:

Well, no.

04-00:37:09

Rubens:

Were you on the investment committee?

04-00:37:09

Calhoun:

I've never been on the investment committee.

04-00:37:12

Rubens:

Okay. But there was a finance committee you were on.

04-00:37:14

Calhoun:

Well, I don't think I was on that either. I don't know.

04-00:37:16

Rubens:

Also an audit committee.

04-00:37:20

Calhoun:

Well, I was chairman of the audit committee. But the responsibility of the audit committee is to make sure that the numbers are accurate, that people aren't fudging their numbers. People aren't stealing money but not showing it on the books. And so the audit committee has no responsibility or authority to invest funds or to plan the budget for the future. But anyway, over time the debt grew and they sold swaps which turned out to be contrary to expectations. Produced a loss rather than a gain.

04-00:38:17

Rubens:

And swaps meant? I didn't understand what that is.

04-00:38:20

Calhoun:

Yeah, I don't understand it either. Except that their debt was in a fixed interest rate. And they changed that to a floating interest rate. I guess the floating interest rate was less than the fixed interest rate, although I don't recall it clearly at the time. And then they want to swap to convert the floating interest rate back to a fixed interest rate.

04-00:38:58

Rubens: Okay, hedging its interest.

04-00:39:00

Calhoun: Hedging the interest rate. But as with many such transactions, when everything went to pieces in 2008, that went to pieces. And suddenly they were having to pay a much higher interest rate than they were getting.

04-00:39:22

Rubens: JP Morgan is the—

04-00:39:26

Calhoun: Well, JP Morgan, I think they underwrote the bonds and they recommended the swaps. They did that. And I think they also invested the money. So they were on all three sides of the transaction. So one could question that.

04-00:39:49

Rubens: So were you questioning that in any way publically? Well I mean in the commission meetings?

04-00:39:56

Calhoun: Yes, a little bit. Quiet. Quietly. Just raising an issue about it. Is this a good idea. And then they'd say, "Well, everything is okay." But my memory of that is just that I raised these questions. Is that okay? Are you concerned about that at all? And, of course, JP Morgan, everybody thought they were terrific and in those days nobody really was worried much about the economy.

04-00:40:31

Rubens: And wasn't someone from Morgan on the commission?

04-00:40:34

Calhoun: Yeah. I think there was a young man from JP Morgan. He got off the commission after things went to pot. And I think the chairman of the committee then was the same gentleman who recommended Emily. And he was very strongly in favor, of course, of what they were doing because he was chairman of the committee that was recommending it.

04-00:41:01

Rubens: Sure. Now, I want to just pull it back because I note that you're on the steering committee for the Campaign for the New Asian. Do you have any memory of what your obligations were?

04-00:41:14

Calhoun: No, I don't. I think I just had been active with the museum for a long time, so they put me on the steering committee. And I may have helped raise some

money from some of the businesses, although my recollection is that we were sort of disappointed in how much we got from them.

04-00:41:39

Rubens: And did you work closely with Wilbur and Johnson or they were really the ones out there shaking the trees?

04-00:41:48

Calhoun: I think they were the ones raising the money, yeah.

04-00:41:54

Rubens: She is quite an amazing person, Judy Wilbur.

04-00:41:56

Calhoun: Oh, yeah, she still is. She's still very active.

04-00:41:58

Rubens: Just really took that Proposition B, Yes on B Campaign, and just drove it through.

04-00:42:07

Calhoun: She's done a terrific job.

04-00:42:10

Rubens: And did she actually bring on Bogart? He was new to the commission relatively.

04-00:42:20

Calhoun: Yes. She may have. I don't know if she did. But she may have. But he came in and he must have been interested in Asian art because he collected things and he really, as I say, committed his whole full-time to the museum. And traveled. He spent a lot of time with Chong-Moon Lee, buttering him up, and traveled with him.

04-00:42:58

Rubens: Did you ever travel with him?

04-00:43:00

Calhoun: Never traveled with Chong-Moon Lee. I traveled with Jack once I think.

04-00:43:44

Meeker: I'm wondering if we can just swing back a little bit. I know that you had mentioned during Rand Castile's period as director you were less engaged than you had been previously. The way in which people have typically described d'Argencé and his period was that he was very much a scholar and he saw the museum as a scholarly institution. While there are certainly blockbuster exhibits during that period of time, the archeological finds from

China is a good example, it also sounds like he really ran the museum kind of like an academic department. And I'm wondering, from your perspective when Rand Castile comes in, do you get a sense that he presented himself as a strongly different kind of personality with a different agenda?

04-00:44:41

Calhoun:

Well, you're bringing back a few memories. Under d'Argencé there was a lot of criticism that he didn't show enough of the collection. He had just a few objects and they were presented very dramatically with the lighting but there were not a lot of them. And I think Castile came in and they brought a lot more objects up from the collection and kind of crowded the floor. Not a good way of putting it. So he satisfied that complaint about d'Argencé. And I think he was more of a promotional type personality. He was very gregarious and I think he entertained the commissioners and that sort of thing. So, yeah, he was definitely a different personality. More outgoing. Even though d'Argencé was more of a scholar, he did have the Chinese archeological exhibition and then the Korean exhibition, which was the largest and most significant exhibition to leave Korea, I think. And nothing since then has exceeded it. But he didn't listen to people. He thought that you should just have a few objects and you spotlight them. And I think aesthetically that was very appealing. But then people complained because most of the collection was down in the basement. And I think Rand Castile was much more attuned to listening to people and accommodating them.

04-00:46:41

Meeker:

One of the stories that Alice Lowe told us was about this fundraising event that she was sort of mastermind of. It was the Marco Polo event. Do you recall this? Where it sounds like most of the fundraising events had been hosted offsite in hotels and such and then this event, she advocated having it at the museum itself, to kind of turn the museum into a celebratory place. And I think this happened under Castile and I think what she said is something like this could have never really happened under d'Argencé. Does that make sense?

04-00:47:21

Calhoun:

Yeah, I don't recall that but that would make sense. D'Argencé was—yeah, he was not attuned to that.

04-00:47:32

Meeker:

So I wonder about the financial underpinnings of all this, because you had just said that the museum decreasingly is supported by the city, increasingly supported by the foundation.

04-00:47:49

Calhoun:

Well, I think a better way of putting it—it wasn't decreasing. The city's support remained constant but the museum's scale grew. Even in the park it grew. And then, of course, when it moved to the civic center it grew tremendously, the requirements for the staff and everything, and the city support may have increased a little bit but not in any way proportional to the increased expenses. So the fundraising, the pressure on the foundation to fund this difference, was much greater.

04-00:48:25

Meeker:

So it almost sounds to me like d'Argencé and Castile were really men appropriate to the times.

04-00:48:36

Calhoun:

Well, I think so. Yeah, yeah. Well, first of all, d'Argencé was close to Brundage and Brundage was kind of the key. Without his collection we wouldn't have the foundation for the museum's collection. But his personality was as I've explained it and Castile is much more sort of public relations. And I suppose in New York, as president of the Japan Society, he had had to do a lot of fundraising and they had done more sort of exhibits in the galleries and that sort of thing. He was much more outgoing, sociable, and open to sensing the currents around him. D'Argencé might sense them but he wasn't paying any attention. [laughter]

04-00:49:40

Meeker:

I wonder if you noticed any changes in the exhibits themselves. I guess you sort of did talk a little bit about the display, fewer items under d'Argencé and more under Castile. But what about not the permanent collection necessarily but the temporary exhibits that were hosted. Was there any noticeable change when you went to the museum?

04-00:50:08

Calhoun:

I don't recall any change. There may well have been but I don't recall any.

04-00:50:18

Rubens:

They did hire a curator of Korean Art, ten years after your exhibit. It was the first Korean curator in the country.

04-00:50:27

Calhoun:

Well, that was the first in the country. I think maybe the exhibit led to the Korean community here being more supportive. I don't know where the financing for that curator came from. But that was quite an accomplishment.

04-00:50:49

Meeker:

Yeah, that's an interesting question. So Lisa had also mentioned the transformation of the civic center. Clearly a big element of this transformation

was 1989 and the Loma Prieta Earthquake that changed the city a lot. But the transformation was well underway before then. There were these reports in the mid-1980s where you still have this empty lot, right, on Civic Center, and it was decided in the mid-1980s that the old main library was an earthquake hazard before the earthquake and it was decided that they were going to build a new main library on the opposite corner. I'm wondering was there a sense that early on at the Asian Art Museum that there was a desire to decouple from the de Young and perhaps the Civic Center was a good option.

04-00:51:46

Calhoun:

Well, there was a continuing desire to decouple from the de Young and to expand and they looked at a lot of different options. I think one was downtown here in the space just between the Embarcadero and the Maritime Plaza. And another, there was some thought maybe they would go out somewhere near the ocean but then they thought the salt air might not be good.

04-00:52:14

Meeker:

Oh, really?

04-00:52:15

Calhoun:

And then Mrs. Davies owned the lot next to the International Building here on California Street, just up the hill, and there was some thought of having it there. There wasn't much space so it would have had to be a lot of different floors. So I think there was a lot of interest in moving the museum. I think that the city then was kind of stuck with the old main library. I believe they considered turning it over to the courts and they couldn't figure out any appropriate use for it. And so then somehow or other Mayor Feinstein came up with the idea that, "Hey, we could move the museum there." In some ways I think it's worked out very well. The design is good. But in some ways it's not perfect either. There's no big gallery. If you go there, there are a number of smaller galleries and they really need one bigger space where they can show things and they need an auditorium. And there was always the thought that this could be done on the part of the block that's not developed. There's parking and stuff. And maybe someday that will happen. But it solved a problem for the mayor because now there was a use for the old main library. And it solved a problem, maybe created problems, for the museum.

04-00:54:06

Meeker:

Was that understood at the time? Maybe it solved the immediate problem for the museum, which was, one, we need to separate from the de Young because there was a membership issue.

04-00:54:18

Calhoun:

Well, we'd given it a separate identity.

04-00:54:19

Meeker: Correct.

04-00:54:21

Calhoun: And it certainly has done that. And the thought was that it would be good for the city and it would enhance the civic center and I think it's doing that. That's an ongoing process. I just read this morning the latest regular newsletter from Jay Xu and it tells about this current exhibit.

04-00:54:51

Meeker: Terra cotta warriors?

04-00:54:52

Calhoun: The terra cotta warriors. And that's been hugely successful. I've been there a few times. For once their lines—and not only are there crowds on the ground floor, there are many more visitors in the galleries than there usually were. So you might want to have Laura—or I'll forward this mail, this mail to you if I haven't deleted it. But if you don't get it from me, call Laura [Hathhorn] and ask her to send it to you because it would give you a very optimistic picture of what's going on today. An accurate picture. For example, one of the commissioners, trustees, has provided the funding for the museum to open on Mondays only for school groups. So that has greatly expanded its educational function and it's a good exhibit for history. Terrific things are happening right now.

04-00:56:01

Meeker: So there were two bond initiatives, as we have discussed briefly. I believe one was in '93 and one was in '94. The '93 one didn't pass. It was a grouping of several non-profits in San Francisco. And then in '94 the Asian Art Museum decides to float an initiative alone and this one passes quite successfully. Did you have any particular involvement in the campaign, either in an advisory level behind the scenes or perhaps advocating to certain influential people around town that they should support this? Either of these campaigns?

04-00:56:46

Calhoun: Yeah, I'm beginning to recall that. Well, we all tried to enlist support for the second bond issue. We gave money to publicize it and to educate the public. And I think we tried to get the local ethnic organizations behind the bond issue. And I don't recall what exactly I did but I'm sure that I helped do what I could with my involvement in some of the local ethnic organizations—particularly the Japanese organizations. But maybe some of the Chinese organizations, too.

04-00:57:35

Meeker: So beyond the Japan Society, more local community based organization?

04-00:57:41

Calhoun: Maybe more of the business groups, yes.

04-00:57:44

Meeker: Okay. Like chambers of commerce and—

04-00:57:46

Calhoun: Yes.

[Audio File 5]

05-00:00:00

Rubens: Just before we started this tape you were saying?

05-00:00:01

Calhoun: Well, you mentioned the word architect. And that sort of made me recall that one of the big responsibilities of the steering committee was to select an architect [for the new Asian Art Museum in the Civic Center]. And I think Jack [Bogart] and Judy [Wilbur] and Chong-Moon [Lee] and maybe others traveled around interviewing architects. So that was one of their important roles. And they finally selected, I don't remember her name, but—

05-00:00:33

Rubens: Gae Aulenti.

05-00:00:36

Calhoun: Aulenti, yes. It was really Gae Aulenti who was responsible. And she had redone some old building in Paris.

05-00:00:50

Rubens: The Musée d'Orsay.

05-00:00:52

Calhoun: Yeah, the Musée d'Orsay, which is very successful.

05-00:00:56

Rubens: Well, at that time then was there some concern that there hadn't been an auditorium? I'm wondering why an auditorium wasn't part of the original plan.

05-00:01:10

Calhoun: Well, it was funding. Everything cost money. So I think there may well have been some original sketches that had an auditorium. I don't recall. But that would have cost a lot more money. There may well have been some original sketches that had an auditorium. I don't recall. But that would have cost a lot more money. And they had raised so much money and the museum came in a little bit over budget. But I think even if it had come in on budget, they

wouldn't have had a lot of extra money. I'm not sure just how it would work out. But I'm sure if they'd had more money they would have had an auditorium.

05-00:01:54

Meeker:

I realize we're jumping around a little bit here but I did want to ask you a little bit more about these campaigns to raise funds for the museum. And the 1993 one didn't come to fruition. Do you recall anything about what the problem with it was? Maybe there was a postmortem on it. There must have been a postmortem amongst you and your colleagues.

05-00:02:22

Calhoun:

Well, the amount of money would have been bigger because there were a lot of different groups. And I think the conclusion was that that amount was too big and that a smaller amount with a focus could maybe pass. And that the other items on the bond issue, I don't recall what they were, but that there wasn't as much support for some of them as there was for the Asian Art Museum.

05-00:02:59

Meeker:

And so I'd imagine polling was done after the fact to confirm the suspicions and thus justify the move just a year later to another initiative?

05-00:03:10

Calhoun:

Yeah. I would think there must have been but I don't recall it. You'd think there'd be some record of the poll if it was done.

05-00:03:21

Meeker:

Sure. So one of the conversations we had with Alice Lowe that was very interesting is she does in fact talk about going out and putting herself in front of many of the Asian community groups in San Francisco. And the story that she tells is that she heard a lot of criticism at these meetings. And she says, "If I wasn't Asian myself people would have just been polite and nodded their head and then not helped out much." But she says that a lot of these community leaders expressed to her frustration saying, "You never come to us to give us anything, you just come to us to ask us for your help when you need it." And she said that she promised them that there would be a different approach to the Asian communities in San Francisco. And what I asked her in response to that, and I apologize for this long question, but she had been involved in the organization really since its beginning and known that there were a lot of Asian people involved in the organization, certainly on a staff level. And asked her how it felt to hear this criticism of the museum. And her response was, "Well, it was actually justified." And I wonder what your thoughts are on this. Thinking about it maybe just in this context. But the

thoughts about the relationship between the museum and the various Asian communities in San Francisco.

05-00:05:09

Calhoun:

Well, yes. I recall that. I think I recall Alice reporting that. And I would agree with her. But I think there's been a huge change. Partly it wasn't Golden Gate Park, it was small, and the budget was provided by the city largely so that the pressure to go out and try and raise money and get these other communities involved was not as great. Now that it has a bigger budget and it's located in more of a central commercial civic place, I think there's been a big change. If you look at the list of commissioners and trustees, there are plenty of Asians on the commission. Mostly Chinese but Indian. And those are the two largest communities, I think. And at the moment the chairman is of Chinese descent, the director is of Chinese descent, and, of course, our city government, the mayor and the president of the Board of Supervisors. So there's been a change not just at the museum but of the whole city, the power structure. And I think the museum has participated in that movement in an affirmative positive way. But it takes time to effect these changes. They've been made though. When the chairman and the director are both Chinese Americans, you've made a lot of changes.

05-00:07:00

Meeker:

Well, and there must have been an important change then when Emily Sano was named director, too, in 1994.

05-00:07:10

Calhoun:

Well, she's not Chinese, so as far as the Chinese are concerned [laughter] she's unrelated. And the Japanese community is relatively small in the city. With the relocation in World War II, when they came back, most of them didn't come back to the city. They settled in outlying areas in the suburbs. So from a Caucasian's viewpoint, having Emily Sano here was a big move towards including Asians. But from a Chinese, I don't think they had quite the same reaction.

05-00:07:54

Meeker:

That's really actually a very fascinating point because I think obviously people in the United States tend to homogenize Asians.

05-00:08:02

Calhoun:

Well, if you go to the museum's exhibit, they explain that Asia—what is Asia? Well, it's a whole lot of different cultures and people and they differ from each other as much as they differ from us. In the past, certainly Americans didn't—they thought they were all Asians and I'm sure that's still a pretty common view. But I think people up here have become more sophisticated, too.

05-00:08:34

Rubens: I think the amount of money that was being spent on educational outreach really expanded, too, under Sano.

05-00:08:44

Calhoun: I think so.

05-00:08:44

Rubens: There were significantly more school programs.

05-00:08:45

Calhoun: Yeah. There's been a lot of emphasis on education and even more now thanks to this one commissioner who's been very generous and who's really focused on education.

05-00:09:01

Meeker: The second bond initiative was successful and Alice Lowe had mentioned that one of the reasons was because, I believe, in the Chinese districts the vote was above 70 percent or maybe above 75 percent. And so perhaps the margin of victory was to be found in those communities. But then you had mentioned, in trying to unpack some of the difficult financial decisions, and that's probably beyond what we can really dig down into here, but I think kind of looking back upon what happens then in the 2000s with restructuring the debt and the different kinds of investments that are made. Do you have any thoughts on sort of lessons that might have been learned from that period of time vis-à-vis the decisions that were made that then put the museum in some jeopardy?

05-00:10:08

Calhoun: Well, I don't think you want the same entity on all three sides of a deal the way that they had JP Morgan. And I doubt that they would do that again. I think they would get more independent advice. Now, if you build a building and it comes in over budget, you're kind of stuck with it. They're wrestling with that problem now and they're going to come up with some kind of solution, I'm not sure what. So I think that they've learned that having a debt is a very big disadvantage because it isn't that they're bankrupt. They have plenty of money to keep operating. The loan has been restructured now so that it's all owed to JP Morgan. So JP Morgan is a little bit inhibited in becoming too forceful in enforcing it. And in many loans there are a lot of covenants. As Mr. Kahn explained it recently, there are no covenants in this. So as long as they can make the interest payments, they won't default. Interest and principal payments. But they're quarterly payments. And they have plenty of money to make quarterly payments until they hit the end of the money they have. Let's just assume everything is static and nothing changes as far as the external environment. They have enough money to continue making those payments for, I don't know, ten, fifteen years or maybe even twenty. So they won't

become bankrupt for fifteen or twenty years. So it would be better not to use that word. At the end of fifteen, twenty years they got a problem. And then what's the bank going to do? They don't own the building. To effect the restructuring the city has given a kind of a guarantee, a reassurance, kind of. Not a legal binding guarantee but let's say a moral guarantee. But the problem is that they can't go out and raise the money to build an auditorium or to expand until they get this thing out of the way, this debt. And the gap between what they have and what they owe is maybe twenty or thirty million. So if they raise 300 million to expand the museum and create an endowment and so forth, well, maybe some of that can take care of the twenty or thirty million because it's kind of buried in the whole thing. So I don't know if that's their solution but that is a possible solution. You can't go out and raise twenty or thirty million to pay off the debt because no one wants to give money for that purpose. But you could raise maybe 300 million to name an auditorium for someone and then there'd be a lot of other spaces you could name and so that may be the solution they come up with.

05-00:14:08

Meeker:

It's interesting. The foundation really has no assets, or minor assets, from what I understand, other than the brand name, meaning they don't own the building, as you said, and the city owns the collection itself.

05-00:14:18

Calhoun:

No, but they have a portfolio of about—I think it's seventy or eighty million but they own a 102 million. So there's a difference between the 102 and the seventy or eighty. So it's twenty or thirty.

05-00:14:33

Meeker:

So it was the portfolio that allowed them to borrow the money to begin with?

05-00:14:39

Calhoun:

No, no. They were able to borrow the money to begin with because a lot of other museums and hospitals were borrowing money. People had a lot of money and they were shoveling it out. And they got bond insurance from—I forget the name of the company. But it was MBIA or something. It's the biggest. And so the bond insurer guaranteed that the bonds would be paid off. Now, why the bond insurer did that, I don't know, because where was it going to recover it? But anyway, they got the bond insurer. So the people buying the bonds, they were covered by the bond insurer. And then the bank, JP Morgan, they issued what was called a liquidity guarantee where they agreed that if the bonds weren't paid, they would buy the bonds. So you had sort of JP Morgan kind of on it and then the bond insurer on it. And then the bond insurer basically went bust. It is still functioning but if everybody asked them to pay everything they own, they would be bust. And then the time came when JP

Morgan, if the museum missed a payment, then JP Morgan would have to buy all the bonds. So they negotiated this deal where JP Morgan agreed they would buy all the bonds. The bond insurer agreed they would kick in I don't know how many million dollars but a fair amount of money. And so that reduced the amount that was owed. And then the amount of debt was converted to a fixed rate thirty year term loan, like a real estate loan. And it's owed only to JP Morgan so you don't have bonds. And there are no covenants. So they shouldn't go in default until they run out of money to pay the annual or quarterly payments. So there's no immediate problem except that it inhibits their efforts to go out and raise money. And they're really struggling with that, and I think the present people who are working on it, Tony Sun and this Tim Kahn and to a lesser extent Jay [Xu], because he's not a financial person, that they're very competent and they're going to figure out some solution. I'm not involved in it. No one's asked my opinion.

05-00:17:27

Meeker: Well, we just did.

05-00:17:30

Rubens: But you're on the ethics committee.

05-00:17:33

Calhoun: Well, to the extent that there's an ethical problem, I think that if you make disclosure there's no ethical problem. And most of our ethics are concerned with are we buying smuggled art or is the staff taking advantage of their position and fortunately we don't have much in the way of problems. So, as I say, there's no bankruptcy. There's no immediate problem. The museum's operating very well and they don't have an operating deficit. This year they're going to come out with a profit so they'll have something they can use for next year when maybe they won't have as big a show or something. So that's going good. The problem is that they're inhibited from doing any other big things until they get rid of this little gap. Now, if the stock market continues to go up, that reduces the gap. As the stock market goes down again, that increases the gap. That's the kind of uncertain thing.

05-00:18:57

Meeker: Do you have any general thoughts about non-profit cultural organizations engaging risk in that way? Does it seem to you necessary and appropriate because that is in fact how our economy works these days or is it maybe inappropriate for these kinds of organizations given that they are in fact by definition non-profit and thus can't really sustain that kind of risk.

05-00:19:28

Calhoun: Yeah. They have no source of revenue to cover that kind of risk. So I think they should really not undertake that kind of risk. And investors should be

smart enough not to take on that, because the investor's taking on the risk, at least in this case. They could fold the foundation and go bankrupt and wipe it out and start a new foundation tomorrow.

05-00:20:02

Meeker:

And that wouldn't impact the building or the collection?

05-00:20:05

Calhoun:

No, but what it would do is it would affect the reputation of the city and it might drive up the city's costs on all of its bonds, which would be a big number. A big number. So the city has an interest in seeing that that doesn't happen, is avoided. So that's not really a practical solution. It's a theoretical solution. But everybody has enough skin in the game that they want to—the bank has enough and the foundation certainly has enough and then the city has enough that they want to find some solution. And I'm sure they will.

05-00:20:53

Meeker:

Do you think these problems recently experienced have had any impact on the ability of an organization to attract good board members or perhaps substantial donors?

05-00:21:06

Calhoun:

Well, it certainly affects the ability to get donors. If you want to give ten million or twenty million, you'd want to give it in a way that it wouldn't go to pay the debt, that it was insulated. But even more than that, just knowing that it's there, the donors are kind of reluctant to do that. So I think unquestionably it does. They've done pretty well. They've raised money which is under a separate—sort of a designated fund, the director's fund. They've raised several millions of dollars but those have gone into improving the IT and various operational improvements. So they've managed to cope with it pretty well but it's still a big inhibiting factor. Now, as far as attracting board members, they've attracted a lot of very good new board members. I would have thought they might have had more trouble than they have. They don't seem to have had any. And they have a campaign to rotate the board and particularly rotate chairmen of committees and committee memberships and they're actively pursuing that in a measured way. So that seems to be not a problem.

05-00:22:53

Rubens:

Do people sign up for the committees that they're interested in?

05-00:22:56

Calhoun:

Yeah, and they go out. I forget what it's called. They have a program now where they interview new board members and even before they become board members and say, "What is your interest." They try to understand. You have

to fill out a questionnaire. So all this was in theory in place but it wasn't very actively executed. But now they have a new chief philanthropy officer who came from Boston and she's had a lot of experience. And so now they're pursuing it all in an organized, methodical way. And they want to know if you wanted to change to another committee and they interview new candidates to find out what committee they're interested in.

05-00:23:59

Rubens:

And how is the chair of a committee picked? I couldn't find that in the minutes.

05-00:24:03

Calhoun:

I think it's different. Whether there's a nominating committee, whether they do it or whether the chair of the board, I'm not sure. I'm not sure but I think maybe with the foundation it's the chair of the foundation but with a commission it's a nominating committee.

05-00:24:41

Meeker:

You mentioned that roughly coinciding with Rand Castile's term you had kind of stepped back from the organization. What was the reason for this? Was it largely business time constraints?

05-00:24:57

Calhoun:

Well, by any rule of good governance, I should have gotten off of it. But I was still interested. But I had a lot of demands on my time as a lawyer. All you have is time. Well, time and ability. And then I was involved in the Asia Foundation. I was involved as a founding chairman of something called Give to Asia. So I had a lot of other things to attend to and there were other people who were more active in bringing Rand Castile in, who were interested in it. So it gave me a little bit of breathing room. And under Emily, too. I wouldn't say I was inactive because I think I was as active as anybody. But there's usually a group of maybe four or five people and I was chairman of the audit committee but I wasn't on the finance committee, I wasn't on the investment committee. And, of course, with all the problems with the funding, those were very active committees. And I was not on the exhibitions committee, which would also have been an active one.

05-00:26:36

Meeker:

Well, so was it then under Jay Xu's leadership that you became more involved?

05-00:26:43

Calhoun:

Well, I'm not really. I'm involved. Some trustees get involved in interfering with the management of the museum. I don't know how they do it but I know that Emily complained about some of them. And some of them got dropped

off the board because maybe they demanded the curators do this, that, and the other thing. Well, I have always abstained from that. And I've focused, really, when I've been a chairman of a committee—if I'm chairman of the audit committee I was quite active on that. And the ethics committee. Fortunately we don't have a lot of ethical problems but once in a while we do and we've dealt with them very satisfactorily and discreetly. We don't want to be on Ross and Matier [political columnists for the *San Francisco Chronicle*].
[laughter]

05-00:27:53

Meeker: [laughter] Nobody does.

05-00:27:55

Calhoun: So, so far knock on wood.

05-00:27:59

Meeker: We had asked about the differences between d'Argencé and Castile. I'm wondering if you can similarly tell us a little bit about the differences between Castile and Emily Sano. Did she come in with a particular agenda that differed in any substantial way from Castile?

05-00:28:19

Calhoun: Well, I think she's more scholarly than Castile. I think that she had her hands full. Castile had the museum in the park and there were no big changes, no big challenges. Then she had the museum move. Now, that was a huge challenge. The fundraising is a challenge. The planning for the move is a challenge. Expanding the staff is a challenge. So I think she was very focused on meeting all those challenges, which she did successfully. And those challenges produced stresses and they required adaption to a larger institution and I don't know how successful she was in handling that. I think that may have been the problem. That and just the natural evolution of relationships. As I mentioned with Yvon [d'Argencé], every decision he makes he's going to make somebody mad. So after you make enough decisions, you've got a coterie of people who are mad at you.

05-00:29:38

Meeker: Well, it seems rare to me that any chief executive, whether in a profit or non-profit, sticks around for a long enough time—

05-00:29:46

Calhoun: They have the same sort of problem, yeah.

05-00:29:46

Meeker: —ten years. Yeah.

05-00:29:48

Calhoun:

Only the chief executive usually packs the board with his buddies and it's a small board and they're dependent on him and so they don't do their job. But with a nonprofit you have to put people on that contribute money and time and they're more independent of you. You can put a few of your buddies on but mostly you can't because you're not buddies with all these very rich people. So it's a little different.

05-00:30:26

Meeker:

It seems clear that the organization, the museum had a good relationship with Dianne Feinstein. And maybe first of all confirm or complicate that?

05-00:30:38

Calhoun:

She and Dick Blum committed six million dollars for a theater, which then, because it didn't get built, lapsed. Yeah. But yeah. I would say that the subsequent mayors were—the museum wasn't as close to their heart as it was to Dianne. Now, I think Jay has made a big effort to cultivate support from the city by providing services to the city. For example, expanding the educational outreach of the museum and making an effort to get to know the mayor and the board of supervisors and to make them realize that the museum is supporting education in their districts. So I'd say the relationship is now better than it's been in a long, long time.

05-00:31:47

Meeker:

Can you maybe also then distinguish Jay Xu from Emily Sano? Did you play any role in his search committee?

05-00:32:00

Calhoun:

I was not on his search committee, no.

05-00:32:02

Rubens:

Did you get a sense, though, from your fellow commissioners or trustees about what kind of qualifications they were really interested in?

05-00:32:11

Calhoun:

Well, first of all, he came in fresh. He didn't have fifteen years of accumulated weight. And he has a tremendous amount of energy. He's very politically astute. He has I think dealt with the staff in a way that has improved their morale. I think he's involved them and given them recognition, which they weren't getting before. And so, so far I'd say the staff morale is better, they're functioning. His relationship with the city is good. He has added new people to the board who are contributing more and he's been a tremendous success.

05-00:33:20

Meeker:

Do you have any things you want to follow-up on?

05-00:33:22

Rubens:

Well, I have one throwaway question. This is a really silly one but there are a lot of black tie events. There's a lot of socializing. Were you at the museum when Queen Elizabeth and Ronald Reagan went to the museum? Do you remember that?

05-00:33:59

Calhoun:

I must have. I don't remember it but I must have been there. The people serving on the boards of museums, they don't get paid anything. So being paid is not a motivating factor. So what do they get out of it? Well, if they love art, art, they're collectors, they're serious collectors, then they get the pleasure of knowing and associating with the curators. But most of them don't. So it's a public recognition and it's a chance to meet and associate with other influential people. So I think on all boards they make an effort, more than this museum has, to have events where the trustees, or whatever they are, meet with each other and socialize. And the museum is beginning to expand those efforts. I think they will continue to do so. And it seems to be a necessary feature of successful non-profit boards.

These events are also fundraisers. Like a lot of nonprofits have an annual event. And the museum has maybe one or two a year. I think they've tried to do no more than two but maybe one. And recently the charges for those have gone way up. Not quite like New York but much more than they used to be. And I was skeptical but the attendance has been—the more they charge, the more people buy in. And so it's been an important contributor to funding and it's been very successful.

05-00:36:13

Rubens:

These events of course take place at the museum. It's a beautiful locale for it

05-00:36:17

Calhoun:

Yes. They take place at the museum. And you hire these people and they put a tent outside, so it's partly in the museum, partly in the tent. And then there was an event earlier this week, I think it was, or last week. Anyway, it was a talk by a lady who has a gallery in New York City. For thirty-five years she's been interested in contemporary Japanese ceramics. So she gave a talk and then there's some trustees, Paul and—I think it's Kathleen. Mrs. Bissinger. Katherine I think it is. Anyway, they collect contemporary Japanese ceramics and so do some other trustees. So theirs were on an exhibit. A few of theirs were on exhibit. And they had, oh, maybe a hundred people turn out. It was a very successful event. So that's a combination of appealing to collectors and people who have a scholarship interest.

05-00:37:36

Rubens:

And fundraising.

05-00:37:38

Calhoun: This one didn't raise any funds in particular. It was a privilege for people who contribute a certain amount. So you're giving people value for their money.

05-00:37:52

Rubens: So in a way you've really been very modest in our discussions about what your contributions have been to the—

05-00:38:00

Calhoun: They've been modest.

05-00:38:02

Rubens: You've been a commissioner, you've been on the foundation, you've chaired many committees. We've gone over some of the real critical milestones of the development of the museum. I'm just wondering if anything stands out in your mind as your greatest contribution, of what you feel that you were most engaged in and what you contributed.

05-00:38:39

Calhoun: I don't think my contributions have been that great, to tell you the truth. When Jay first came, I gave him advice on a couple of occasions which I think was very helpful to him. You might ask him. I don't know.

05-00:39:02

Rubens: Your reputation is that you're someone that people in the museum can go to, to ask is there a conflict of interest. John Stuckey, the AAM librarian, was telling me that he once called you because he wanted to buy some books that came through a dealer. I don't recall the whole circumstance of it.

05-00:39:22

Calhoun: Not really. I don't recall that. We had a librarian who was a very prickly character for a long time. He was a librarian with a library that he didn't want anyone to come in and mess with. [laughter]

05-00:39:33

Rubens: That's often the case.

05-00:39:36

Calhoun: Yes. I usually don't give advice unless I'm asked for it. But once in a while, if I think there's something that might go wrong, then I volunteer it. And usually it's pretty good, yeah. [laughter]

05-00:39:58

Rubens: Well, we've asked the question before about your legal services. You said you're not directly involved in any of the negotiations or contracts that are

made to bring art over here from different museums or for this museum to loan to Kyoto, for instance. You're not at that level?

05-00:40:18

Calhoun: Well, no. Those would be done by the curators and they would bring the proposal to the exhibitions committee.

05-00:40:28

Rubens: But it's bandied about that you are a legal consul?

05-00:40:34

Calhoun: That's misleading.

05-00:40:34

Rubens: Your legal advice is—

05-00:40:35

Calhoun: Well, the museum has a city attorney's office, you know. So I don't step on their toes. I would say that I've suggested that they consult with the city attorney's office on occasion and I think that's kept them out of trouble. Sometimes they don't want to consult with the city attorney's office because they're afraid the advice will be negative or something. But our city attorney's office is very practical, very positive. And my experience has been they always try to make things work out. But they try and make it work out right.

05-00:41:19

Rubens: So hearing some discussion that was taking place at the commission, it might raise a hackle about if the museum is taking a step in a direction that you think this requires consultation with the—

05-00:41:32

Calhoun: Well, I've suggested that on some occasions they talk to the city attorney. One occasion was the restructuring of the bonds. And the board members that were involved didn't want to talk to anybody and they didn't want anybody messing with them, least of all me. But I suggested to Jay that he's a city official and he was involved with it, so that he ought to keep the city informed, which he did, and it worked out very well. Nothing. So I think if you talked to Jay he'd say that I don't interfere but that when I do say something it's been helpful to him. I hope so.

05-00:42:32

Rubens: I want to ask you a reflective question. But what is it that has kept you—sustained your interest and commitment to this institution?

05-00:42:44

Calhoun:

Well, I'd like to learn more about art. And you do have a chance to learn more about it. And I enjoy being involved. I am not from San Francisco. I moved here when I was twenty-eight, I guess, or twenty-five. Twenty-eight, I think. Well, I joined everything that I could join. [laughter]

05-00:43:13

Rubens:

So you're a joiner.

05-00:43:18

Calhoun:

If you asked me to join. I wasn't like the—what were the Marx Brothers where he said that any club that would invite me to join I wouldn't want to belong to? So I wanted to become part of the community and the museum was one thing where my background and my interest and being part of the city community all kind of came together. I could have been on the Port Commission because I was a maritime lawyer. But others were maybe not quite so logical. But this one sort of made sense and still sort of makes sense.

05-00:43:57

Rubens:

Something that just draws you. That just keeps you doing more.

05-00:44:01

Calhoun:

Yes, yes. And I can contribute. I can't contribute a lot of money. I contribute a little money. And I can contribute from my relationships. Well, Jay recently went to an opening in Shanghai with some exhibit and he had Jerry Yang with him and a bunch of other people. And a friend of mine in Shanghai whom I had introduced to Jay invited them all to dinner. I suppose they could have had other people invite them to dinner. But anyway, they all went to dinner. So I was able to add a little something to that trip.

05-00:44:45

Rubens:

Kind of an ambassador.

05-00:44:49

Calhoun:

I just told my friend that they're coming and you might want to do something for him. So he contacted Jay. And I wasn't involved in the guest list or anything. That's all I did.

05-00:45:15

Rubens:

Was the rewriting of the ethics code a passionate interest—

05-00:45:20

Calhoun:

On my part?

05-00:45:21

Rubens:

Yes, this is in two thousand eight—

05-00:45:25

Calhoun:

Hardly, no. No. [laughter] There was a very able young woman, I don't remember her name, but she was given that assignment. And so she reviewed the ethics code of the American Association of Museums and the Metropolitan and she put together a proposal and I looked at it and maybe made a couple suggestions. And maybe it should have been my initiative but it wasn't, it was hers. And she probably was put up to it by Jay and he was put up to it because we were coming for accreditation. And part of the reaccreditation was do you have this kind of a code. So I don't know if we even had one before. Presumably we did but we updated it.

05-00:46:22

Rubens:

But that's a good example of where your legal expertise has been called on.

05-00:46:26

Calhoun:

It was more just commonsense and judgment. But we did adopt it and we got reaccredited and then she tells me—no, not she but the person who was negotiating with Larry Ellison's lawyer about his exhibit. And he wanted certain terms in the provision and she pointed out to him that we couldn't agree to that because our ethics code specifically said we couldn't. So she said he dropped it right away. And Larry Ellison has a reputation for being kind of difficult to deal with. So do I get credit for that? Yeah, I got credit but I didn't really do a lot about it. [laughter]

But on the ethics thing, most people want to do the right thing. So you have to be sure that they know what the right thing is. And I say the museum by and large has done a pretty good job of that.

05-00:47:41

Meeker:

So let me just ask a couple wrap-up questions and then if we have more time we can go back to the specific ones you were talking about. All right? I really just have two broad ending questions. And these are questions I might well ask anybody who we interview. It seems like one of the founding rationales for the museum was that here we are in San Francisco, the gateway to the Orient, it was once described. We need a museum here so that it allows people in the West, meaning the United States and Europe, I guess, to better understand Asian culture. And I kind of want to turn that on its head to a certain degree. And I'm wondering if you've seen any evidence of people from Asia coming to the United States, looking at the museum or engaging with it in some fashion and getting a better understanding of how Americans understand Asia or perhaps don't understand Asia. Meaning rather than the museum being a sort of lens from America to the East, does the museum also serve as a lens from Asia into the United States?

05-00:49:18
Calhoun:

Well, yeah. The original thought that was voiced by these four ladies was that San Francisco is a gateway to Asia. Or I guess in those days we even called it the Orient. A colonial term. [laughter] It was kind of ridiculous that it didn't have any collection of Asian art or a museum to house the collection. So, yeah, we should have it. I don't know that they went out and were so socially concerned in those days to educate Americans on Asia, although that is a principal objective of the museum now. As far as Asian, well, this program where they bring Asian curators here and send curators to Asia, that exchange program, and then Jay took advantage of that funding to have a meeting of curators from Asian museums here and he intends to continue that. Sort of make this museum the gateway for Asian museum curators to the United States in a way. You're not going to preempt the Met or the one in Washington, the Freer. But in some ways you can play a role similar to what they might do. So I think that in some kind of vague general way, that informs them as to Americans reaction to Asian art and to Asia. And then there are tourists from Asia that come to the museum. And Jay has been working on expanding his reputation in Asia. He's gone on quite a few trips. He attends openings there. And he gives talks and we have a couple of board members from Hong Kong or maybe even China, just a couple, who we hope maybe someday they might give us their collections. There's one gentleman, what the heck is his name now? Anyway, he comes from a wealthy Hong Kong family. And he's given quite a lot of money, certainly for the terra cotta warriors exhibit and for other exhibits. So we're getting financial support from people in Asia. And I think Jay has in it in mind to create kind of an international support group. We have supporters from Chicago, supporters from New York, largely as a result of Jay's activities. And I believe they're now on the board of the foundation. At least some of them are. So he's trying to make it into an international presence more than it has been.

Just since he's been here, we now have a special group that's committed to contemporary art and we've had exhibits of contemporary art. So that's to make it more relevant and in connection with the maharaja exhibition, they had an artist from the—

05-00:53:24
Meeker:

Berkeley or —

05-00:53:26
Calhoun:

Well, he's with the company that makes all these films, animated films [Pixar]. We had an exhibit of his drawings, and he's from India originally. So based on his drawings related to the Ramayana, I think the big Indian myth, mythology. So there are a lot of new activities, trying to make the museum more relevant and interesting to a new and younger clientele.

05-00:54:12

Meeker:

This is going to be just an extension of that same question. Again, this is just a broad final question of mine. Brundage used to talk about this collection in the museum as sort of serving as a bridge of understanding between the West and the East, the United States and Asia. And let's say that in fact is and has been one of the goals of the museum over the years. But how far across that bridge do you think we've traveled in the nearly fifty years since it's opened?

05-00:54:55

Calhoun:

Well, you should go to this current exhibit and look at the people that are in there. Very diverse. For this particular exhibit, not many Indian but there are a lot of Chinese people, lot of elderly Chinese, lot of young Chinese. And a lot of Chinese that look kind of Chinese. So maybe they aren't Chinese Americans. Maybe they're even students or something. And then the fact that they have one day a week, Monday, committed to school groups. I'd say they've come a long way. And some of those kids that are going in school groups, particularly this particular show, because it's dramatic and it's historical and they also now have improved listening things so that you're guide who's taking you through, she sends it by radio to you, so she doesn't have to shout to overcome the noise of the people around you. So it's a terrific system. So I'd say just in the last couple of years it's expanded its educational outreach a lot and I would say that different shows, some are kind of esoteric, like the calligraphy show was a great show and the didactic materials were great. But not a lot of people are interested in calligraphy. But there are people who are. This show, and then the samurai show, which was also a very interesting show about the history of Japanese samurai, families, and traditions, and they had the head of the Hosakawa daimyo, the Hosakawa clan here and he had been briefly a prime minister but only for nine months or twelve. He didn't do good as prime minister. [laughter] Then he resigned and he went and he spent a year interning with a potter and now he produces really good contemporary pottery. Anyway, it used the collection of that family and the history of that family to tell a history of Japan for a certain era and also about certain Japanese cultural expressions. The Zen and tea ceremony and all of that. So I'd say that it is fulfilling that aspiration.

05-00:58:05

Rubens:

I think that's it. I was going to add when you talked about what explains your longevity, your commitment to this institution, you've also worked with people I think that you've really cared about and trusted and been—

05-00:58:23

Calhoun:

Oh, yes. Well, there's some wonderful people. In the non-profit world, people are dedicated. They're never going to get rich. So it has to be something that

really interests them and that they're dedicated to and that they feel is worthwhile. And so you meet a lot of good people.

05-00:58:50

Rubens: Who remain friends?

05-00:58:52

Calhoun: Oh, yeah, very good friends. Very close friends. [laughter]

05-00:58:57

Rubens: Some of the people you worked with the longest died around 2008. Gerstley. Fritz Jewett.

05-00:59:13

Calhoun: Yes, he died. I thought Gerstley lasted a little longer than that. But, well, I've been around so long that I've lost a lot of friends. And right now they're dying like flies. It's terrible. So you have to make new friends that are younger because the old ones—hardly any of them are around. I have a buddy, we were in the Army in World War II, and he's over at the Redwoods in Mill Valley, a retirement home. He's about the only one from those years that's still alive. And I'm fortunate in that I'm still pretty healthy and still can speak with some logic, I hope. I hope. You can tell after you review the text.

05-01:00:08

Rubens: No, I think we've gotten some wonderful material. Just really wonderful insight.

05-01:00:14

Calhoun: Well, Connie's trying to look for some photographs of Mrs. Kent and Mrs. Bissinger. So if we get those we'll either email them to you or send them to you.

[End of Interview]