



Smithsonian

National Air and Space Museum

Katherine Cheung Collection [Leschenko]

Patricia Williams

2021

National Air and Space Museum Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	Katherine Cheung Collection [Leschenko]
Date:	1930-2017
Identifier:	NASM.2021.0030
Creator:	Cheung, Katherine
Extent:	0.92 Cubic feet (2 flat boxes, 11 VHS tapes) 0.18 Gigabytes (7 digital images)
Language:	English , Chinese .
Summary:	Katherine Cheung (1904-2003) was the first woman pilot of Chinese descent to earn a pilot's license in the United States. This collection consists of material documenting the aviation career of Katherine Cheung.
Digital Content:	Image(s): NASM-9A18601-03, Katherine Sui Fun Cheung

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Dorothy Leschenko, Gift, 2021, NASM.2021.0030.

Processing Information

Arranged and described by Patricia Williams, 2021. Encoded by Jessamyn Lloyd, 2021.

Preferred Citation

Katherine Cheung Collection [Leschenko], NASM.2021.0030, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

No restrictions on access

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Biographical / Historical

Katherine Cheung (1904-2003) was born in China but moved to California at age 17 to study music. Her father would take her to Dycer Airport (Los Angeles) to practice driving a car, and during this time she became fascinated with aircraft and flying. After studying piano at the University of Southern California for

three years, Cheung quit school, married, and had two daughters before beginning aviation classes in 1931. She took flying lessons with the Chinese Aeronautical Association in Los Angeles; her flight instructor was Bert Ekstein, and she soloed after 12 1/2 hours of instruction. Cheung earned her license in 1932, becoming the first woman pilot of Chinese descent to earn a pilot's license in the United States. After attaining her license she started performing aerobatics at fairs and air shows in California. She also regularly entered competitive air races, including the 1936 Ruth Chatterton Derby from Los Angeles to Cleveland, and was friendly with many of the renowned aviators of the time. In 1935, Cheung obtained her international flight license, and in 1936 she became a US Citizen, although she began to contemplate returning to China to teach aviation. After Japan invaded China in 1937, she traveled to Chinese American communities across the country, raising more than \$7,000 to buy a Ryan ST-A plane, which she planned to fly to China and use to train volunteer pilots. However, on the day she was accepting the aircraft from a group of her benefactors at Dycer field, her cousin crashed the aircraft, ending his life and Cheung's dream of training Chinese pilots. In 1942, when she was 38, she quit flying and operated a flower shop until her retirement in 1970. Cheung was a member of the Ninety-Nines international organization of women pilots (joined in 1935) and was inducted into the Women in Aviation International Pioneer Hall of Fame. She was presented a medal by the Chinese Consul General of Los Angeles in 2001 on behalf of the Chinese government for her contributions as an aviation pioneer.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of the following material documenting the aviation career of Katherine Cheung: a photo album containing black and white photographs and negatives; newspaper articles; Cheung's 3 by 4.5 inch Stanavo Pilot's Handbook, 1932 (annotated); color snapshots; a scrapbook containing correspondence, newspaper articles, certificates, programs, photographs, and biographical information, in both English and Chinese; a DVD copy of the documentary, *Aviatrix: The Katherine Sui Fun Cheung Story*; a DVD copy of the documentary *A Brief Flight: Hazel Ying Lee and the Women Who Flew Pursuit*; eleven VHS tapes; three DVDs containing footage of Cheung; a cassette tape from a 1995 radio interview; and seven digital images.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged by type of material.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Aeronautics
- Women air pilots

Types of Materials:

- Digital images
- Photograph albums
- Scrapbooks
- Video recordings

Container Listing

Series 1: Scrapbook, Photograph Album, and Documents

Box 1, Folder 1	[Stanavo Pilot's Handbook, 1932 (annotated)]
Box 1, Folder 2	[Scrapbook] Notes: Loose items found in between pages of the scrapbook are displayed at the end of the slideshow.
Box 2, Folder 1	[Miscellaneous]
Box 2, Folder 2	[Newspaper articles]
Box 2, Folder 3	[Photos and negatives in album] Notes: Covers of the album and blank pages have not been digitally reproduced. Negatives in the album are for the image on pages 3 and 11 and the negatives have not been digitally reproduced. Images shown represent the entire contents of the album with the exception of the items listed previously.

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Series 2: Video and Audio Recordings

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Series 3: Digital Images

NASM-9A18682: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General](#)
Notes: Informal view of Katherine Sui Fun Cheung's daughters as young children.

NASM-9A18683: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: View of photograph displays at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School.

NASM-9A18684: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: View of photograph display honoring Katherine Sui Fun Cheung at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School.

NASM-9A18685: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: View of photograph display honoring Katherine Sui Fun Cheung at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School.

NASM-9A18686: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: View of photograph display honoring Katherine Sui Fun Cheung at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School.

NASM-9A18687: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: View of exhibit celebrating the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School. Panel honoring Katherine Sui Fun Cheung is visible at right.

NASM-9A18688: [Cheung, Katherine Sui Fun; Asian Pacific Americans in Aviation and Space Science; Women in Aviation and Space Science, General, 2008](#)
Notes: Close-up view of panel honoring Katherine Sui Fun Cheung at exhibit celebrating the 120th anniversary of the founding of Pei Dao Middle School.

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