

陶傑：年輪

The Rings of a Tree

By Tao Jie (Chip TSAO)

Translated by Josephine KUNG

He has passed away—an elderly artist blessed with ninety-one full years on earth. His death came like the fall of a gigantic tree in the jungle, making no little impact in our community.

This patriotic soul was a wandering Jew. Having partaken of a century's mishaps and tribulations of the Chinese nation, his force is spent. The giant tree, now fallen, is marked with clear rings.

When we kneel to count his rings, we unfold events buried deep and yet so stormy and tumultuous that time has been unable to wash away their memories.

In 1918, the year when the Titanic foundered after hitting an iceberg, he was thirteen.

When the May Fourth Movement broke out, when students of Peking University set ablaze the house of Cao Rulin, and the New Literary Movement gathered momentum, he was fourteen.

In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek started a purge of the Nationalist Party. By then he had already come of age. He was thirty-two when the Japanese army launched its attack at Marco Polo Bridge.

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Editor's Note: The Cantonese opera and film actor KWAN Tak Hing 關德興 passed away in Hong Kong on 28 June 1996. His most famous role was that of martial arts master Huang Feihong 黃飛鴻, a role which made him a household name in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout the 1980s and early 90s he was a regular on local TV charity shows, giving demonstrations of martial arts techniques, and later of calligraphy.

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LIU Kwai Ying, Jean 廖桂英

Banyan Tree II, 1995.

Set of two vertical scrolls, ink and colour on paper, 176 x 94 cm.

Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1996.

In the prime of his manhood, he joined a Cantonese Opera touring company to raise funds for the war against the Japanese. The Japanese put a price of \$10,000 on his head. Off he went to America, where he continued to work for his cause among the Chinese there and initiated a Warplane Donation Campaign to help the Chinese Republican government purchase combat aircraft.

By the time the war was won and Hong Kong liberated, he had already reached forty and was thus half-way through a normal lifespan. He did not see the golden age of his movie career until ten years later.

While he was still with us, few people gave much thought to what he had gone through. He was left to grow old and jeered at for all his attempts to defy old age. With a child-like innocence, the old man took the sarcastic captions he read in the showbiz supplements as genuine compliments. Little did he suspect that times had changed, people's hearts had hardened. Gone were the days when he took to the road to fight the Japanese invasion. Moral values were no longer the same.

The concentric rings, the marks of his life, were, each one, worthy of our greatest respect. Though his life's journey is run, he has left behind a picture of himself, shoulders bared, drawing a bow, and a living illustration of the Chinese verse "drawing a white bow full as the moon, I looked towards the Northwest and aimed at the Dog Star".

He was a real man. What he left after him was the last scent of chivalry to be found in our Chinese community.