

ARTIST NOTE

“Tian Tian Xiang Shang” by Danny Yung

“Tian Tian Xiang Shang” (make progress everyday) is a Chinese proverb, a proverb that Mao Zedong once said in the 1950s to motivate children. These four words were also the four most common words found to be written on the school gates of all Chinese primary schools. This proverb inspired me to create a conceptual comic in 1970s in which I drew children who asked an un-ending barrage of questions and refused to focus on their studies. Five years ago, I began to plan a “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” comic exhibition and workshop. I named the protagonist of this comic Tian Tian, and designed a three-dimensional body for him. To me, Tian Tian’s white, three-dimensional body is like a blank piece of paper full of possibilities that people can write or draw on. The person who invented “blank paper” is a truly artistic designer: the material, dimensions, shape and texture of blank paper are all measures of the designer’s creativity. A blank sheet of paper is a platform or vessel that people can write on, express themselves and discuss things. Our thoughts are expressed in what we write; this expression of our thoughts can be discussed; and the contents of these discussions could become further platforms or vessels for creativity. The more that is written, expressed and discussed, the more likely it is that creativity will be stimulated. I have a greedy expectation for this plan: I believe that creativity will lead to more creativity and that art can promote discussion; I also hope for even more creative platforms to arise from this plan.

Hong Kong has always been a free port as well as an open, multi-cultural platform for the circulation of information. Hong Kong culture has always been a platform which promotes freedom, openness, interaction, participation and tolerance. Hong Kong’s creative cultural spirit has always promoted the forming of connections with creative persons from around the globe to jointly direct a tolerant spirit involving “interaction, participation and co-operation.” The spirit of “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” is Hong Kong’s spirit as well as a starting point for further Chinese creativity. The “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” series of exhibitions made its first appearance in 2007 at an exhibition held in the 1933 Shanghai building with Freeman Lau as the curator. It then appeared in the Beijing Today Art Museum in 2010 in an exhibition with Darcy Hu as the curator, and made a further appearance at the Shanghai World Expo in the “Creative Ecologies — Business, Living, Creativity” exhibition of Hong Kong Design Centre where Kai-Yin Lo and I served jointly as the curators. In the Beijing exhibition, we invited hundreds of Chinese children to take part in the creative process. We asked them to paint different colors and symbols on miniature 12cm-sized “Tian Tian” figures to tell a story about themselves through “Tian Tian.” At the Shanghai World Expo, 65 Hong Kong designers and artists (including myself) tapped into our inner selves to realize our dreams and creativity as we designed 50cm-sized “Tian Tian” figurines. These 65 “Tian Tian” figurines have become a cross-section depicting Hong Kong culture in the 21st century.

The “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” Creativity-For-Community and School Development Programme promoted by Zuni Icosahedron (Zuni) in 2012 will extend the concepts of creative design to high schools and primary schools

around Hong Kong and 2,000 children. In Beijing and Tokyo, more than 100 contemporary artists and designers will respond to the 65 “Tian Tian” figurines created by Hong Kong artists and designers by creating “Tian Tian” figurines of their own in a move which allows Chinese and Japanese creativity to interact. At the same time, Zuni is also providing children in areas affected by the northeastern earthquake with workshops to promote next generation cross-border cultural exchange activities that are more meaningful.

I am extremely delighted to have created this creative platform – a platform that reflects the spirit of Hong Kong creativity. I am also overjoyed with the number of children who have given us their interactive participation and support by unleashing their creativity; this platform also reflects the importance of cohesive and interactive co-operation in group creativity exercises. “Tian Tian” may be a blank sheet of paper, but without us realizing it, he has brought everyone together on a journey to explore the relationship between form and content, and dreams and vision while unleashing children’s bold imagination and spirit of learning through experimentation.

Foreword: Tian Tian Xiang Shang – Conceptual Comics by Danny Yung

Is it possible for comics to become a vessel for interactive thinking? Can comics become a source of creativity? I decided to give this a try and find out. I searched for my position and a direction in nine-frame comic strips, and sought to challenge things in the lab environment I created for myself in these nine frames – I hoped that this lab environment could inspire me with new ideas and new perspectives to challenge things with. In my four-frame comic strips, I tried to study things to acquire more knowledge. For example, this could be a study of speech and thinking in my drawings, or a study of objects that communicate symbolically. What I looked forward to was for my operations to facilitate an exchange of ideas on many levels. In my three-frame comic strips I waited for my opportunities to play direct games with words; practicing methods of developing ideas with low limit thresholds is also a good excuse to practice dialogue writing. Some people claimed I was trying to change the roundabout process of “clarifying definitions,” “breaking norms” and “establishing new rules,” whereas others have said that I am “telling my own story” in an alternate way. As a matter of fact, I believe that creation should begin from “telling our own stories”. As long as “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” does not become too subjective, then creation itself will naturally become a platform for creative interaction: the expansion of these platforms will naturally become a collective source of power for multi-cultural development.

Foreword to little ones at “Tian Tian Xiang Shang” Exhibition in Beijing Today Art Museum

Tian Tian stands there motionlessly with a raised head and a finger pointing up above. Is there something above Tian Tian? Is it the sun, the moon, stars, the blue sky, colorful clouds, a rainbow, pigeons, dragonflies, flies, kites, Superman, aircrafts, flying saucers, or missiles? What is above Tian Tian? Is there something above the thing above Tian Tian? Is it hope? Is it the future? Is it our dreams?

Tian Tian stands there motionlessly with a raised head and a finger pointing up above. Is there something above

Tian Tian? How did it come about? Who created the thing above Tian Tian? Is God up there? How can we get up there to take a look? What came first, the thing above or the thing below? Is the space above Tian Tian empty? What does empty mean? Is the sky empty? Tian Tian continues to ask these questions, as if under a spell.

Tian Tian stands there motionlessly with a raised head and a finger pointing up above. He stands motionlessly during day and night. He stands there motionlessly as summer, autumn, winter and spring pass him by. He stands there motionlessly as the times change. He stands there motionlessly throughout the stages of life. He stands there motionlessly through war and peace. He stands there motionlessly throughout the joys and sorrows of life. He stands there motionlessly through ridicule and scorn. He insists on standing there motionlessly pointing up above, even as his surroundings continue to change.

Tian Tian stands there motionlessly with a raised head and a finger pointing up above, as if under a spell! Who has casted a spell on Tian Tian? Is it a classmate? Is it his teacher? Is it his parents? Is it his boss? Is it his wife? Or is it the artist who created him? Is it an inventor? Is it an industrialist? Is it an educator? Is it a revolutionist? Is it a politician? Is it a philosopher? Or is it Tian Tian himself?

Hong Kong Design Centre - "Tian Tian Xiang Shang" Creative Project (Shanghai & Hong Kong Edition)

- a creative collaboration of designers across different disciplines

Sixty-five designers have been invited by Hong Kong Design Centre to present their own creative solutions to the "Tian Tian Xiang Shang" sculptures that convey cheerful confidence – created by Danny Yung of Zuni Icosahedron. The installation presents variations on the theme of "a better tomorrow" as an expression of energy/inventing spirit and aspirations by designers on the rise to recognition and stardom a compelling statement of the new creative power.

The "Tian Tian Xiang Shang" sculptures have been showcased at the "Hong Kong: Creative Ecologies - Business, Living, Creativity" exhibition at the World Expo 2010 Shanghai and subsequently roved to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in 2011.

Danny Yung

Born in Shanghai 1943 Danny Yung grew up in Hong Kong. At the age of seventeen, he moved to America to study architecture at Berkeley in California and computer science, city-architecture and -planning at Columbia University in New York. In 1979, he returned to Hong Kong and showed his one-man-cartoon-exhibition at Hong Kong Art Centre. Here he also presented his first structuralist theatre play "Broken Record #1". In 1982, Yung founded the art association "Zuni Icosahedron", which works with performing art, press events, art education and youth festivals nationally and internationally. Yung also became a founding member responsible for the

establishment of art policies in Hong Kong and chaired the Arts Education team. Yung is also paying close attention to the local education. He is currently the member of the board of the HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity. The Hong Kong based multi-artist Danny Yung is one of the most dynamic cultural figures in Hong Kong.

Brief of Organiser

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (Tokyo)

As the representative office of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government in Japan, the office seeks to promote closer economic and trade ties, understanding and co-operation, as well as cultural and tourism exchange between the two places. It provides a focal point of contact for Japanese people and organisations interested in Hong Kong. Apart from organising promotional and cultural activities in Japan, the office also facilitates senior level visits of individuals and delegations between the two places.

Brief of Co-organizers

Design Association NPO

Design association NPO is a driving force of a movement where companies, designers, schools, embassies and media with interests in the promotion of design and art in lifestyle participate beyond genre and nation through our design and art event, "Tokyo Designers Week" and our TV show "Tokyo Designers Week.tv"

Zuni Icosahedron

Co-Artistic Directors: Danny Yung, Mathias Woo

Zuni Icosahedron, founded in 1982, is one of the nine professional arts companies in Hong Kong. Zuni is a Hong Kong based international experimental theatre company which has produced more than 190 original productions of alternative theatre and multimedia performances, and has been active in video, sound experimentation and installation arts, as well as in the area of arts education, arts criticism, cultural policy research and international cultural exchange. Over the years, Zuni has been invited to more than 30 cities in Europe, Asia, and America for cultural exchange and performances.

Zuni is always keeping a close watch on the cultural development in Hong Kong as well as in the Asia Pacific regions. Zuni has actively organised and participated in more than 100 exchange programmes of various natures, including Alliance of World Cultural Forum, Asia Arts Net, Hong Kong-Taipei-Shenzhen-Shanghai City-to-City Cultural Exchange Conference, etc. In the year 2000, Zuni co-presented "Festival of Vision: Berlin / Hong Kong", the first ever large-scale cultural exchange between Asia and Europe. More than 1000 artists from 35 different cities in Asia and Europe participated in that monumental event of diverse content, crossing disciplines and regions. In 2009, Zuni's Artistic Director Danny Yung was awarded the Merit Cross of the Order of Merit by the German Federal Government in recognition of his contributions towards the arts and cultural

exchange between Germany and Hong Kong.

Brief of Supporting Association

Hong Kong Design Centre

Chairman: Victor Lo

Executive Director: Dr. Edmund Lee

Design for Society is a major undertaking of the Hong Kong Design Centre - a publicly-funded, non-profit organisation established in 2001 with the support of the design industry in (i) promoting and celebrating design excellence, (ii) championing strategic and wider use of design for creating business added value and community benefits; and (iii) educating the professions and the community to be resourceful and champions for sustained developments through design and innovation.

The long-term success of HKDC requires continued feedback and staunch support from the community and different professions across various design fields, education, commercial, voluntary and public sectors.

Acknowledgement

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HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity(Hong Kong)

HKFYG Lee Shau Kee College(Hong Kong)