

# The Queen, The Chairman and I



## Exhibition guide

# The Queen, The Chairman and I Kurt Tong

GRADE	DATE	OFFICIAL EXAMINER
9TH KUP		
8TH KUP	B 1/5/85	許 永 榮 7 級
7TH KUP	B 19/9/85	許 永 榮 7 級
6TH KUP	A 23/12/85	許 永 榮 7 級
5TH KUP	B 27/3/86	許 永 榮 7 級
4TH KUP	B 7/6/86	許 永 榮 7 級
3RD KUP	B 20/9/86	許 永 榮 7 級
2ND KUP	B 17/1/87	許 永 榮 8 級
1ST KUP	B 1/4/87	許 永 榮 8 級
1ST DAN	23/1/88	許 永 榮 8 級
2ND DAN		
3RD DAN		
4TH DAN		

NO. \_\_\_\_\_

NAME 唐果鋒

ADDRESS 84, Robinson Road, Flat 11A HK

DATE OF BIRTH 10th May 1977

SCHOOL/CLUB Wai Chai

HOLDERS SIGNATURE Tong King Fung

The Hong Kong Tae Kwon-Do



My project began with a storybook I made for my daughters.

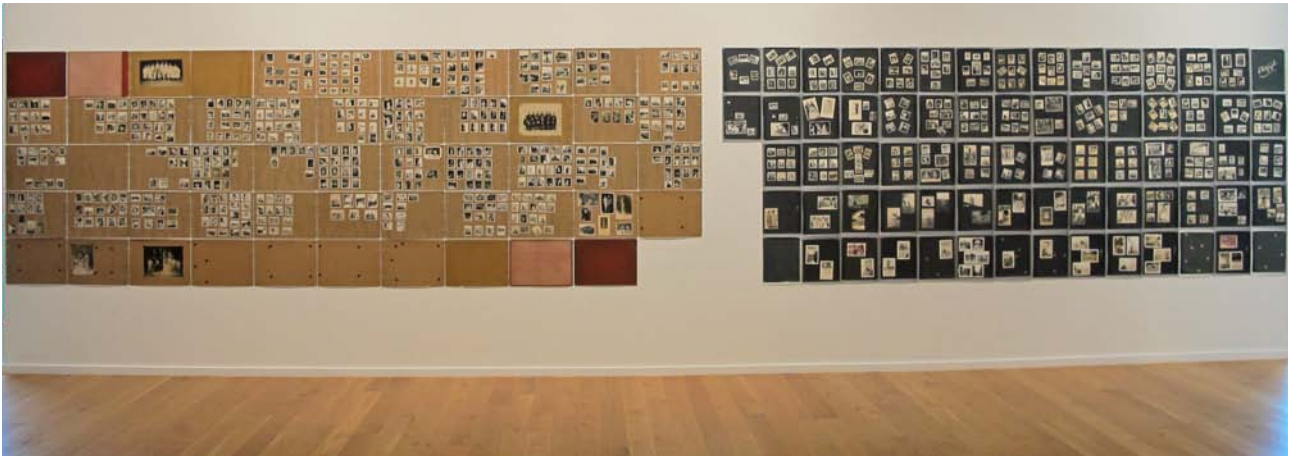
I was born in the city of Hong Kong in 1977, five years before China wanted it back. Us 'Honkies' have an identity that's very different to the ones of China, after all, I sang 'God Save the Queen' as my national anthem at school. I always knew I was going to live in England. My father studied there and disliked the communists; he had always told me that when Hong Kong was handed back to China, we would not be going back.

Go back he did. In fact, he never really left. I, on the other hand, got sent to England for school and later married a Scottish girl and started a family. Having grown up between three different cultures, one question is always at the back of my mind. How Chinese am I, or indeed, who am I?

I traced the history of my family in a bid to find out how two of the most influential people in history, Queen Victoria and Chairman Mao, affected my family. Giving equal importance to new photographs, found photographs and writing, this project reconnects me with the Hong Kong of the past, through the recollections of my extended family, humanising the political and social upheaval that took my family to Hong Kong and eventually to the UK.

I have found that the personal stories always prompt people to talk about their own family history, no matter where they are from and what ethnic backgrounds they are. *The Queen, The Chairman and I* deals with many different issues, family, displacement, migration, colonialism and multiculturalism".

# Chung Zak's Family Albums



**These two family albums belonged to Kurt Tong's maternal grandfather Chung Zak, a wealthy landlord in Southern China who was forced to move to Hong Kong in 1949 due to the rise of communism.**

Kurt Tong says, 'The brown one is mostly made up of photos Chung Zak took between 1910 and 1940, before he left China. Many were taken with his Leica in the 30s. It shows his wealthy playboy lifestyle, as well as finding love with my grandmother, Yun Nan, and starting his family. He was carefree and privileged.'

The blue one is mostly photos taken in Macau and Hong Kong between 1950 and 1970, after Chung Zak fled China in 1949. It shows the failed businesses and the family living apart. He struggled through many problems in the initial years and the images reflect the weight on his shoulders. The latter part of the album were mostly of images his sons sent to him from the USA where they left to study.

I wanted to show the albums in their entirety to see the drastic change in Chung Zak's life. He was affected by circumstances beyond his control and his children made a new life in new country, continuing the story of migration. He obviously edited and chose these images himself, showing how he wanted to remember his life.

The two albums were both located in Tucson Arizona. My uncle took them away after my grandfather passed and they were probably preserved pretty well due to the desert climate.'

The large framed images are a selection taken from Kurt Tong's artist book *The Queen, The Chairman and I*. Read excerpts of Kurt Tong's family history here, then take a seat in the teahouse to read the full story in Tong's artist book.



800 years ago, long before the Tong and Leung clans settled in what would become Tong's Bay, the surrounding area was a banyan tree forest. One day, on his way to the sea, a fisherman noticed that this particular tree resembled the Buddha, Siddhartha. Local villagers began praying and carried out offerings around the tree. Later, the Tong's temple was built in front of the tree. Both the temple and the tree survived the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976) and still stand today.



Hong Kong which means 'fragrant port' in Chinese was the name given to a small settlement on the southern shores of the island, one of the first points of contact between the British and the local fishermen. Fragrant incense was stored around the harbour, giving the port its name. After the Treaty of Nanking, the entire island was then referred to as Hong kong and the British began developing Victoria Harbour on the northern shores on the island.



After losing the First Opium War in 1841, the Qing government agreed to make Hong Kong Island a crown colony, ceding it to the British Queen Victoria "in perpetuity to provide British traders with a harbour where they could unload their goods". Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary at the time was less than impressed by the outcome, calling Hong Kong, "a barren rock with scarcely a house upon it". Hong Kong remained a British colony for the next 156 years.



When the Japanese occupied Hong Kong, Bunnan (Kurt Tong's paternal grandfather) took his family to the Portuguese colony Macau. On their way to join him, Bunnan's sister and her family were on board a civilian ferry when it was sank by the Americans, believing there were firearms on board. Everyone on board was killed. Fearing his mother would take the news badly, she was never told about the death of her daughter (Bunnan's sister). She believed her daughter had emigrated to the USA until her own death, 25 years later. Bunnan regularly sent his mother letters and money in his sister's name.



When World War II broke out, one of Bunnan's two German business partners decided to return to 'the Fatherland' to fight for the Nazi Party. The other partner, who disagreed with Hitler's ideology, left for Macau, a Portuguese colony. Neither man returned to Hong Kong after the war ended, both presumed dead. As a result, Bunnan (Kurt Tong's paternal grandfather) ended up with the company to himself.



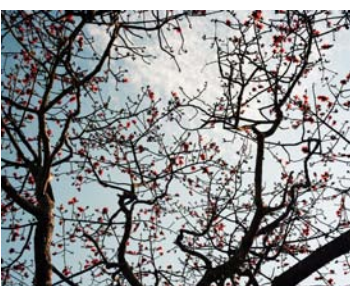
Kurt Tong's father, Tai Ching, moved here in 1940 soon after he was born. Having moved to Macau towards the end of the Japanese occupation, the family returned to Hong Kong and later moved to live across the street at 84 Robinson Road. Tai Ching's father, Bunnan, built a 12 storey high block of flats in the 1970s where Tai Ching still lives with his wife. "Everything has changed round here, except for that old wall with the trees growing on them. I used to be scared of them; I vaguely remember a dead body hanging from them during the Japanese occupation, perhaps it was only a tale my nanny used to tell me to scare me".



Chung Zak (Kurt Tong's maternal grandfather) underestimated the threat of the communists and refused to sell up and leave for Hong Kong. In 1949 he was eventually persuaded to seek refuge in Hong Kong when the communist armies were only days away from Guangzhou. Believing he would return in a matter of months, instead of carrying valuables such as gold bars and antiques, the family packed only daily essentials in a number of wooden trunks and, along with 21 servants, travelled to Hong Kong. Chung Zak never returned to his family home.



When the People's Republic of China was proclaimed in 1949, as many as 100,000 people fled to Hong Kong every month. An official controlled border was established in June 1951 to halt this flow of people but thousands continued to cross the border illegally for the next 50 years. Many chose to swim the Shenzhen Bay, including Bunnan's caretaker in late 1950s and his son, some 30 years later. Thousands drowned during this swim. The 3 miles crossing is now connected by the 6 lanes highway.



Tong's Bay, Guangdong, China



Bunnan preferred to pose almost every family photo in front of the Bamboo bushes at 84 Robinson Road, the Tong's family backdrop.



Bunnan (Kurt Tong's paternal grandfather) was awarded the MBE for his public services in 1963, given to him by the Duke of Edinburgh during his visit to Hong Kong. However, some of Bunnan's family felt that he got involved with his charity work in order to be known among the high society in Hong Kong and not because of a desire to help.



Mount Austin, Hong Kong



The 1980s and 1990s in Hong Kong was a contradictory time. Skilled people started to move abroad fearing what might happen when the communists took over; at the same time, the economy boomed with skyscrapers going up all over the colony.



The final part of the Lantau Links first opened two months before Hong Kong was due to be handed back to Chinese rule. Margaret Thatcher inaugurated the opening ceremony on the 27th of April 1997. The bridge connects Hong Kong to Lantau Island, primarily the new Hong Kong International Airport. Kurt Tong's parents, Tai Ching and Yip Hang emigrated to England on the 28th of June 1997 and one of the last things they did was to go for a drive on the bridge. Part of them feared they might never return to Hong Kong after the handover. They moved back in February 1998.

# Contemporary Chinese Teahouse



In China, the teahouse is often considered as a haven where ideas and thoughts can be shared across cultural background, social rank and political beliefs.

Partly inspired by artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, Kurt Tong wanted to create a space within the gallery which had more in common with a contemporary informal street teahouse, rather than a traditional ceremonial teahouse.

The nature of the building materials is reminiscent of the layering of fibres in traditional Chinese paper making, whilst retaining a simple, minimalist design.

The teahouse is intended as a quiet place to sit, reflect and read Kurt's book. Be inspired and share your family stories in our dedicated visitor's book.

To sample Chinese tea, drop in daily from 24 January between 12pm and 3pm or come along to one of our tea ceremonies throughout February and March. Pick up an events flyer or ask at the Welcome Desk for more details.

# Film: A Family Day Out



Regarding the date of the film, Kurt Tong says:

*"To be honest, even my dad is not 100% sure, it's purely based on how old he thinks he looked. So not a fact, but according to him, it was shot in 1949 -1950, around Robinson Road and Repulse Bay, Hong Kong."*

This film would have been commissioned by the Tong family, a rare and expensive and thing to do at the time. The family are dressed in fine clothing and the final film would have been viewed as a symbol of high status.

Kurt rediscovered this film in it's original 16mm format and transferred to DVD.

Running time: 15 minutes



# Join in the conversation

Let us know your thoughts about *The Queen, The Chairman and I*. Leave a message in our comments books or use the hashtag #ViewsFromChina to join in the conversation on social media.



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An Impressions Gallery Touring exhibition curated by Anne Mcneill

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