

Artist's Life a Model of Victory, SGI President Says
COURTESY OF SGI NEWSLETTER
Hong Kong, Feb. 17

Distinguished Painter and calligrapher Fang Zhaoling overcame much hardship in her life to raise her eight children.

Declaring her to be a model of a truly victorious mother, SGI President Ikeda today met with distinguished Hong Kong painter and calligrapher Fang Zhaoling. Mr. Ikeda is in Hong Kong for the 22nd SGI General Meeting, the 16th SGI World Peace Youth Culture Festival and related activities.

“You shine like a jewel — a rare and precious jewel of life emanating from the earth and the universe, blazing more brilliantly than all the rest,” he said to her. “Adorned with boundless treasures, your life has been forged and polished by great vicissitude.” Mr. Ikeda first met the 83-year-old Mrs. Fang, who has triumphed over countless hardships, last year when they both received honorary doctorates from the University of Hong Kong.

Their warm and friendly conversation today focused on Mrs. Fang's life and artistic career as well as their shared desire for world peace. President Ikeda asserted his sincere desire to share her rich experiences with others. Mrs. Fang responded by expressing her deep appreciation for the poem “Great Mother Nurturing,” which Mr. Ikeda dedicated to her last year.

Born in 1914, Mrs. Fang grew up in a time of great disorder and upheaval in China. From childhood, encouraged by her mother who stressed the importance of education, she devoted herself to her studies and applied herself diligently to her true passion, painting.

Mrs. Fang and her husband, Fang Yingao, studied abroad at Manchester University in England in the 1930s. The year following their marriage, World War II broke out and the young couple decided to leave England. Because Mrs. Fang had passed the exam to study at Columbia University, they first traveled from Norway to New York.

But she was pregnant and the school told her to come back after the baby was born, so she and her husband decided to return to Shanghai. Internal strife there forced them to move from one place to another, and they eventually fled to Hong Kong. Then, in 1950, when Mrs. Fang was 36 years old, her beloved husband suddenly died of illness, leaving her to raise their eight children alone. She pressed on resolutely, taking on the management of her husband's trading business.

Her desire to learn and expand her mind never waned, however, and she later enrolled in the University of Hong Kong and then Oxford University in the United Kingdom to continue her studies. Despite the obstacles that befell her, Mrs. Fang somehow supported all of her children and ensured that they received the finest education.

Today, all eight of her children are highly accomplished, making significant contributions to society in a variety of fields, including law, medicine, government and business. Her daughter, Anson Chan Fang On-Sang, is the first Chinese, as well as the first woman, to become chief secretary of the Hong Kong government, the territory's highest government position. Mrs. Chan received an honorary doctorate from the University of Hong Kong together with her mother and Mr. Ikeda last year.

Mrs. Fang said that her formal training as an artist began in 1953 under her mentor, noted painter Dr. Zhang Daqian. Referring to the lines in the poem President Ikeda had written for her that read, “No life is happier than that based / on the way of mentor and disciple,” she confirmed with deep feeling that the happiest person is indeed one who has a mentor.

Title: Artist's Life a Model of Victory
Subject: World Tribune 03/07/97 n.3129 p.1 WT970307p01 Hong Kong, China 02/17/97
Author: SGI Newsletter
Keywords: 02/17/97 Artists China Dignitaries Hong Kong Life Meetings Model News People President
Victory Zhaoling

The artist explained that although she had mastered the technique and style of traditional Chinese painting, she gradually grew unsatisfied with imitating the method of artists of the past. So in 1960, Mrs. Fang followed her dream to broaden her perspective and moved to England. There, influenced by the works of such European Impressionists as Picasso and Matisse, she started to work on developing her unique painting style, a process, she said, that has taken 50 years. Praising her genuine creativity, Mr. Ikeda said that her many achievements are testimony to her boundless inner depth and potential.

Speaking of her strong opposition to war, Mrs. Fang related how when she was 11, her father was gunned down by Chinese soldiers before her eyes. She also shared an episode where she and her children were standing on a train platform strewn with corpses during the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong. These scenes of war, Mrs. Fang said, have remained with her and are the reason that she, like President Ikeda, embraces a passionate commitment to peace.

Sharing his recollections, the SGI leader said that as a boy, his four brothers were sent to the front lines to fight for Japan during the war. His eldest brother, on temporary leave from China, expressed his indignation toward Japan saying: “The Japanese army’s behavior is outrageous! I can only feel sympathy for the Chinese people!” That brother was killed in action.

Mr. Ikeda went on to say, “I joined the Soka Gakkai because when I heard that its founder, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and Josei Toda were imprisoned for their unbending opposition to Japanese militarism, I knew that these were people I could put my faith in.” President Ikeda added that he has put forth utmost energy toward conducting frank dialogues with world leaders in the pursuit of peace. And he said that while politics and economics, which are primarily concerned with power and profit, are of course important aspects of modern society, he has devoted his life, based on his beliefs, to the spheres of culture, peace and humanity.

The SGI leader mentioned that, at the beginning of this year, Mrs. Fang composed a piece of calligraphy comprised of four Chinese characters, reading, “I will scale a high peak once again.” He said he was moved to learn that Mrs. Fang, who has already challenged many great mountains of obstacles, is endeavoring to climb to yet a higher summit. This calligraphy embodies the artist’s undying and indomitable spirit, he continued, declaring that her example is truly a great lesson for all humanity.

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