

Notes to Royal Asiatic Society Blog, 'Revisiting "Ancestral Worship"', by Raymond Mann

31 May 2024

Note I: Traditional Chinese was written column by column from right to left. Most of the characters on altar banners are illegible except, surprisingly, the smaller ones on the right edge of the right banner. Apparently the top two characters are out of the frame and the rest read 'treasure house, opening's joy' 寶號 開張之喜.

On the left wall, the 1st banner (rightmost)

smaller 耀華大寶號 新張 illegible below

larger 德業久長

耀華 Yao Hua

大寶號 big treasure house

新張 new opening

(characters below illegible)

德業 virtuous enterprise

久長 long-time grow

2nd banner

smaller 德之仁翁先生 駿業之喜

larger 端木聰明 億則屢中

3rd banner

larger 陶公事業 富有益新

smaller 周同發拜賀

德之 name of receiver, Tak Chee

仁翁 kind senior

先生 mister

駿業 advanced enterprise

之喜 's joy

端木 Confucius' student 子貢 (Duanmu Ci), who was a businessman and a scholar

聰明 smart

億則 guess then

屢中 repeatedly centre (bullseye)

陶公 historic figure identified with 范蠡

事業 business enterprise

富有 rich with

益新 further new

周同發 name of sender, Chow Tung Fat

拜賀 bow to congregate

The couplet made the historical reference to the earliest figures of 儒商 scholars-businessmen, 子貢 and 范蠡, details of them can be easily found online. The second half of the couplet means extension of enterprise with new development. This is consistent with his opening of a new studio.

4th banner(leftmost)

smaller 耀華寶號 開張之喜

larger 月利月增 可久可長 actually the first and last characters cannot be seen but

can be guessed according to the symmetry of couplets

耀華寶號 Yao Hua treasure house

開張之喜 opening's joy

月利月增 monthly profit monthly increase

可久可長 will last will grow

The banners either addressed formally to the shop's name, Yao Hua 耀華, or affectionately to the owner's name Tak Chee 德之.

Note II: From (<https://bcc.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/artcollection/204-3-an21>), caption on the Postcard, 'The worship of ancestors costs the Empire of China £30,000,000 annually. The total number of Christian adherents in China in connexion with the C.M.S. is placed at 27,000.' Published by the Church Missionary Society at Salisbury Square E.C. as one of the 'Picture and Fact' Postcards.

Note III: From archives of legal documents([a] and [b], below), we can see Hong Kong-born Sino-British Star Talbot used the Chinese names 施圓明 and 施德之, which correspond respectively to Sze Yuen Ming and Sze Tak Chee. The phonetic transcription is very good if it was based on Cantonese. Some authors ([c] and [d]) suggest that Talbot used 施雨明 as the Chinese name of Sze Yuen Ming, but the middle character there sounds distinctly different in Cantonese from 'Yuen'. Barring error with those authors' reports, Sze Yuen Ming might have used that name for a while before settling on 施德之 instead.

From all accounts, Talbot was a shrewd businessman and knew how to promote to different clienteles, by putting his dual cultural background to good use. Yao Hua 耀華 ([e]), which roughly means 'shining China', was the name advertised to his local clientele. For foreigners, Sze Yuen Ming & Co was well known probably before the studio was a successful business, for the reason below. 'Yuen Ming', in Chinese, 圓明 was the Dharma name of the 4th emperor of the dynasty and rarely used by anyone outside a religious context. Because of the emperor, the Old Summer Palace (destroyed in the 2nd Opium War) was given the name Yuen Ming Yuen (spelling at the time), where the last Yuen means 'garden'. A road near the Shanghai Bund, which foreigners frequented, was named Yuen Ming Yue Road. Thus, it would be great for brand name recognition to use it. In fact, Talbot started his studio sometime after getting married at Yuen Ming Yue Road.

Around the time of the Boxer Rebellion, Talbot's new business was a patent medicine, Magic Life-Saving Medicinal Syrup, 神功濟眾水. The medicine was very popular during these tumultuous times and is probably still selling in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

If we can speculate, like most Chinese, Talbot might consider 施圓明 inappropriate for matching the image of a medicine provider, some sort of a saviour, as he later cast himself. The first two characters of the name 施雨 means 'spreading rainwater', which was a metaphor used for 'helping the masses', similar to the name of the medicine 濟眾. However, 施德之 would be even better for conveying the idea of a holy giver as the first two characters of the name was a term used in ancient texts to describe kings and great men doing good deeds. The last character 之 means 'to do' or 'to proceed', so the name 施德之 can be loosely translated as 'to do good deeds (to the masses)'. The name 施德之 was the one by which Talbot was eventually well known to most Chinese, and became the Trade-Mark for the medicine. Talbot used it while Chairman of the Watson's Co. and of the Martial Arts Association 精武體育會.

Talbot's life and family are written in [f][g][h] as well.

[a] <https://archive.org/details/star-talbot>

[b] <https://archive.org/details/will-of-star-talbot>

[c] <https://kknews.cc/zh-hk/collect/6gp8okl.html>

[d] 中國照相館史 (1859-1956) By 全兵雲

[e] <https://photo100.org/yaohua-photographic-studio/>

[f] <https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/4j03d497n>

[g] <https://www.csueastbay.edu/history/files/docs/the-east-bay-historia/2022-east-bay-historia-updated.pdf> P.138-160 "Sze Yuen-Ming, alias Star Talbot" By Alex O. Wood

[h] https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/faculty_pubs/3205/ Zaixin Hong, University of Puget Sound "An Entrepreneur in an 'Adventurer's Paradise': Star Talbot and His Innovative Contributions to the Art Business of Modern Shanghai."