

Mr. Tony LEUNG Chiu-Wai

Citation

Mr. Tony LEUNG Chiu-Wai's enigmatic virtuosity for bringing multi-faceted characters he portrays to life, not only inspires a global audience of all colors and creeds, but has garnered him the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival in 2023. The prestigious award has placed Mr. Leung, the first Asian actor to receive the accolade, in the league of film legends, and Hong Kong cinema at the center of international attention.

A child of 1960s Hong Kong, Mr. Leung and his younger sister were raised by their single mother after their father left the family when he was just six. His childhood ordeal led to his change of temperament to become a solitary soul. Mr. Leung soon found his emotional outlet when his mother started taking him to the cinema where they escaped from their bittersweet daily life, introducing him to European and Hollywood films which ignited his love for stories well told.

The teenage Mr. Leung dropped out of school and worked various odd jobs. It never crossed his mind to aspire to stardom, to dream big. As he was working as an electric appliance salesman, fate worked its magic when Mr. Leung took the advice of his friend, comedian Stephen CHOW, to audition for Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB)'s renowned acting academy in the early 1980s. Mr. Leung got accepted into the "star factory" and went through intensive acting and

martial arts training, preparing him for a lifetime in the performing arts. Acting became not just another emotional outlet for him, but also a ticket to an eminent acting career.

International stardom came knocking on Mr. Leung's door when he made the leap from playing leading roles in TVB dramas to pulling at heartstrings as a deaf-mute photographer in *A City of Sadness*, a poignant historical film by auteur HOU Hsiao-Hsien which made history as the first Golden Lion award-winning Taiwanese movie. The film was a watershed for Mr. Leung, who had an epiphany about his acting method, and went on to perfect the performing style of understatement and authenticity he became renowned for.

Another turning point in Mr. Leung's career was his starring in the Hong Kong maestro WONG Kar-Wai's *Days of Being Wild*, which led to a collaboration between the two spanning over two decades. Wong's ability to unleash the best actor in him, combined with Mr. Leung's inherent understanding of the director's vision, have made this master-and-muse partnership among the most fascinating in contemporary cinema. The year 2000 saw him cement his international stature by taking home Best Actor Award at the Cannes Film Festival for his achingly subtle portrayal of journalist CHOW Mo-Wan in *In the Mood for Love*, a melancholic masterpiece capturing romance's fleeting beauty.

The great care that Mr. Leung takes in selecting his parts meant turning down blockbuster roles which are stereotypical portrayals of Asian characters. This discretion resulted in delaying his Hollywood big break until 2021, which was much awaited by his fans worldwide. A celebration of martial arts, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, Marvel's first film with a stellar Asian cast including Mr. Leung, broke stereotypes on screen and smashed box office records for the Labor Day weekend during the pandemic. Letting his character's human side shine through, he played Wenwu, a terrorist group chief torn between his love for his son and his desire to seek revenge for his late wife.

Leveraging his super star power to tackle societal issues and enhance our community's awareness of supporting the youngsters in need, Mr. Leung made a donation and gifted a painting by Chinese artist ZAO Wou-Ki for auction to the Hong Kong Paediatric Society Bright Future Scholarship this year, with the lofty goal of providing support for the next generation with special education needs or chronic illnesses or from underprivileged families. In recognition of their indomitable spirit and hard work in their field of pursuit, a total of 190 local teenagers and children have received the Scholarship, including a 19-year-old HKUST freshman and local basketball talent whose family was struggling to make ends meet.

Mr. Leung is the first actor to have won a grand slam of Asia's top acting awards, starting with Best Actor accolades at the Hong Kong Film Awards, the Golden Horse Awards, and most recently the Golden Rooster Awards. But he is determined to not let all this success go to his head, and prepares for his role in the upcoming film *Silent Friend* by Hungarian director Ildiko ENYEDI with such diligence that he paid visits to neuroscientists at universities, including our very own President Prof. Nancy IP.

This never-settle-for-less mindset is best described by Ang LEE, who directed Mr. Leung in the internationally acclaimed *Lust, Caution*. As the Taiwanese filmmaker put it, he channeled "his talent, like a tranquil stream that flows with grace and power, to wherever his craft demands." This work ethos resonates with our University's pursuit of academic and research excellence to confront global challenges, emboldening our graduates to dream big like Mr. Leung.

Pro-Chancellor, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Mr. Tony Leung, the Golden Lion-winning actor, for the award of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.