

Hong Kong Institute of Education
CITATION FOR
Dr Elizabeth Wang Ming-chun
Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*

Mr Chairman,

Dr Elizabeth Wang Ming-chun is a widely respected Hong Kong artist who has dedicated herself to the performing arts and entertainment industry for nearly half a century. She has been responsible for exciting new developments in Cantonese opera, a traditional art that has encountered considerable difficulties, reviving public awareness of and interest in the art form through her unparalleled drive and tireless commitment. It is my honour today to present Dr Wang for the award of the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*.

Born in Shanghai, Dr Wang relocated to Hong Kong at the age of nine. Her interest in the performing arts was first inspired by extracurricular activities such as drama, choral singing and speech recitation during her primary and secondary school years. In 1966, Rediffusion (Hong Kong) Limited offered its first artist training programme. Selected from over a thousand candidates, Dr Wang emerged as a rapidly rising star strongly supported by Rediffusion upon completing the programme. Her remarkable career as a performing artist thus began. In 1970, she travelled to Japan to pursue further studies in singing and dancing at the prestigious academy run by Toho Entertainment. It was as exhilarating as it was tough, a formative experience from which she developed important life skills such as being independent.

In 1971, Dr Wang joined Television Broadcasts Limited, where she was engaged in a full range of performances. Apart from being a main host of the long standing variety show *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*, she also appeared in numerous popular drama series and programmes in addition to releasing many successful recordings. Her elegant presence as a host, exceptional talent as an actress and sonorous voice as a singer have been well recognised by the public. Some of the iconic roles she has played include those in *A House Is Not a Home*, *The Heaven Sword and the Dragon Sabre*, *Yesterday's Glitter*, *The Awakening Story*, *Wars of In-laws* and

Limelight Years, to name but a few. Her two theme songs for TV, “Love and Passion” from the drama of the same name and “The Brave Chinese”, have become timeless classics that have enchanted the Chinese-speaking world. Ever dedicated to continuous learning and advancement, Dr Wang has taken part in acclaimed theatre and musical productions in addition to television appearances.

When Cantonese opera master Leung Sing-po saw Dr Wang in Cantonese opera costume, he commented: “So beautiful, you must perform for Cantonese opera.” In 1983, Dr Wang and renowned master Lam Ka-sing starred in the canonical opera *Tin Sin Pui* (literally “A Heavenly Match”) to popular acclaim, achieving a new box office record. In 1988, Dr Wang and Mr Law Ka-ying co-founded the Boom A Bliss Cantonese Opera Troupe. Although not classically trained in Cantonese opera, Dr Wang demonstrated exceptional determination and put tremendous effort into honing her skills in the art form. She starred in the title role of Muk Kwai-ying, a well-known heroine adapted from a popular work of historical fiction. Her performance was highly commended. Subsequently, the opera troupe presented new works in line with its artistic vision, instilling exciting new elements into the traditional art form, from an adaptation of Shakespearean classics to dramas and other theatre genres. In 2010, the troupe presented *De Ling and Empress Dowager Ci Xi*. While remaining faithful to the essence of Cantonese opera, Dr Wang has also been boldly innovative in many respects, such as by using a set of costumes designed by students of the Hong Kong Design Institute, a design education institution under the Vocational Training Council (VTC). Not only is Boom A Bliss a brand name in Hong Kong’s Cantonese opera sector, but it has also borne witness to the fabled romance of Dr Wang and Mr Law.

In 1992, Dr Wang assumed the position of Chairwoman of the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong, making her the first woman to have chaired the Association. In addition to re-launching the Association’s Cantonese opera academy, she has also led a number of major new projects, including the acquisition of the Association’s headquarters through a successful fundraising initiative, securing funding to jointly organise a certificate programme for Cantonese opera training with the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The latter signified an exciting new chapter in the development of local talent for Cantonese opera. To date, Dr Wang has served as Chairwoman of the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong for seven terms, and has dedicated herself to the promotion and continuation of Cantonese opera heritage and education. Some of the Association’s most notable

initiatives include reforming the Cantonese opera academy in 2007, turning the Association into a registered charitable organisation in 2009, introducing formal Cantonese opera education in junior secondary years in 2010 and jointly offering a full range of Cantonese opera production courses with the VTC in 2011. In 2012, the Cantonese Opera Young Talent Showcase under the Yau Ma Tei Theatre Venue Partnership Scheme was launched. Over the course of three years, more than 100 new artists appeared in over 450 performances across 110 productions, together receiving more than 2,300 training hours.

In addition to her work with the Association, Dr Wang has been involved in many different aspects of the promotion of Cantonese opera. In the 1980s, with the shortage of performance venues and a continual lack of government support, the sector encountered great difficulties in retaining young talent. Dr Wang dedicated great effort to lobbying for the sector through on-going communication with the government. In 1996, she was appointed a committee member of the Arts Development Council. In 2005, Sunbeam Theatre, the only privately operated Cantonese opera performance venue at the time, was due for demolition. Through Dr Wang's mediation, the landlord, the Cantonese opera sector and the government were able to hold candid dialogues, leading to a successful renewal of the lease. To this day, Sunbeam remains an important venue for Cantonese opera in Hong Kong.

Recently, Dr Wang has been actively involved in the work of the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee. A member of the West Kowloon Cultural District Performing Arts Committee, she is involved in the Committee's planning and development work. With the construction of the Xiqu Centre, the first venue of the West Kowloon Cultural District, due to be completed in 2017, a new chapter for Hong Kong's Xiqu, or Chinese Opera, is eagerly anticipated.

An all-round artist, Dr Wang has received numerous awards over the years, scooping many Gold Albums and Platinum Albums, in addition to winning the 27th Golden Needle Award presented by Radio Television Hong Kong in 2005, the Montblanc de la Culture Arts Patronage Award (Hong Kong District) in 2007, and the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (Hong Kong Group) Limited 45th Anniversary Hall of Fame Award. Her other awards include being selected as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons in Hong Kong in 1981, a Silver Bauhinia Star from the HKSAR government in 2004, an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the City University of Hong Kong in 2007, and Honorary

Fellowships from the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the Vocational Training Council in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

Her artistic career aside, Dr Wang is actively involved in public service, having served as a founding member of the Zonta Club of the New Territories, Director of the Board of Directors of Po Leung Kuk and Pok Oi Hospital, member of the Board of the Hong Kong Dance Company, and currently member of the Executive Committee of the Hong Kong Anti-Cancer Society. Ever dedicated to the welfare of her motherland, Dr Wang served as a Hong Kong/Macau delegate of the National People's Congress from 1988 to 1997. From 1996 to 1997, she also served as a member of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and a member of the Selection Committee for the First Government of the Special Administrative Region. Since 1998, she has served as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a position that she will hold until 2017.

Dr Wang has modestly attributed her remarkable achievements to “an attitude to equip herself continually, to grasp opportunities as they arise, and to work to her best ability”. Nevertheless, it is apparent that her rigorous, meticulous and disciplined work ethic and a tireless drive to seek self-improvement are the keys to her success.

Mr Chairman, Dr Wang has made tremendous contributions to performing arts and Cantonese opera. It is my pleasure and privilege to present Dr Elizabeth Wang Ming-chun and request that you confer on her the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*.