

Dr Ann Hui On-wah *BBS, MBE*

DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES *honoris causa*

Citation

Dr Ann Hui is a Hong Kong filmworker who has been showered with numerous honours. She received an MBE in 1997, and has been conferred honorary fellowships or doctoral degrees by The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, The University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Institute of Education and The Open University of Hong Kong. Besides being Best Director at the Shanghai Film Critics Awards and twice at the Golden Horse Awards, as well as winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Asian Film Awards, Dr Hui also achieved an unprecedented record of being crowned Best Director four times at the Hong Kong Film Awards. Notwithstanding her peerless achievements, Dr Hui has never lost her modesty and introspection. In her words, her continuing enthusiasm for creation is attributable to her emphasis on continuous discovery. She lamented that people no longer have a “quota” for exploration as a result of today’s efficiency-oriented education system.

Dr Hui herself never seemed to have lost her quota. She was born in 1947 in Anshan, Liaoning province, to a Chinese father and a Japanese mother shortly after the Manchukuo had perished. At the age of five, she moved to Macau and then to Hong Kong, and graduated from the Department of English and Comparative Literature at The University of Hong Kong in 1972. After finishing her master’s degree, Dr Hui chose a path of uncertainty—to study film production in London. Upon return to Hong Kong with first class honours from London Film School, she worked as an assistant to director King Hu, who got a prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *A Touch of Zen*. Subsequently she joined TVB and RTHK. In 1977, Dr Hui made the anti-corruption promotional TV series *ICAC* for the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), based on true events. Two of the episodes in that series exposed corruption within the police force, and were barred from airing due to group protests from the police. In 1979, Dr Hui made her first film *The Secret*, a thriller that established her reputation as one of the most important *auteurs* in the Hong Kong

New Wave. Another film of hers, *Boat People*, filmed on Hainan Island in 1982, was the first Hong Kong movie made in mainland China after the Cultural Revolution.

Looking back at the first height of her career, Dr Hui said she had been carried away by the wide acclaim and box office success that *Boat People* received. Her triumph was therefore followed by a comedown that lasted for years. It is even more difficult to brave success than failure. Over the past 33 years, Dr Hui has made 25 full-length films and appeared in cameo in 13 movies. She has dealt with genres as diverse as TV drama, documentary, ghost story, thriller, martial arts, costume drama, comedy, semi-autobiography and literary romance. Furthermore, she has always been brave to feature controversial issues such as the Vietnamese refugees, the elderly, chronic patients, single motherhood, activities of Hong Kong leftists, spinsterhood, the June Fourth Incident, teacher-student romance, homosexuality, May-December romance and most recently, domestic helpers and transsexuals. While Dr Hui has to take into account commercial elements in her works to attract investors and appeal to the audience, she always manages to maintain the humanistic concern of an intellectual. This is why she has long been considered a fairly unorthodox director in Hong Kong. Her visual language and humanistic concern reflect not only a local flavour but a global perspective. In the history of world cinema, Dr Hui is undoubtedly one of the best women directors in both quality and quantity.

Dr Hui's inexhaustible "quota" is also seen in her perpetual craving for learning. She is interested in a wide range of subjects, from massage and fortune-telling to Buddhism and script-writing. Dr Hui may be the best spokesperson for cultural studies: four decades after she finished her dissertation on Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels at The University of Hong Kong, she still believes that comparative literature's emphasis on cross-cultural studies and textual analysis has a lifelong beneficial impact on her. Such training enables her to go beyond her limited experience and learn to respect different cultural traditions. Cultural systems are different and yet equal in value. Exchange and cross-reference are useful but none of them is necessarily better than any other, and so it is inappropriate to judge others by one's own standards.

All these attributes, including courage, diligence, sincerity, modesty, introspection, self-awareness, self-confidence and authenticity, are what drive Dr Hui to keep on learning, creating and advancing. These also make her the kind of person from whom we can always learn.

Mr Chairman, for her outstanding contributions to Hong Kong's film culture over the past 30 years and for her extraordinary accomplishments, may I invite you to confer upon Dr Ann Hui On-wah, in absentia, the degree of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.

Chinese citation written and delivered by Dr Yau Ching