

Ms Helena LO Yin-Ying (alias LAW Lan), MH

Ms Helena LO Yin-Ying (LAW Lan), is one of the most productive and respected actresses in Hong Kong. She rose to stardom in the 1960s, having never previously considered an acting career. In the 1950s, when she was still in secondary school, she accompanied friends to acting auditions, at which she was spotted for her talent, and invited to play bit parts. Her father's passing in the early 1960s shattered her hopes for further studies. She took up acting full time to make ends meet, and has never looked back: she has appeared in over 100 films since then.

Perhaps it was because of her slightly foreign looks that she was first cast in "villain roles". Certainly it was her hard work and perseverance that earned her a name in the "baddies" hall of fame. Whether as a shop girl, spoiled socialite, scheming mistress, or a nightclub hostess, she would strive to live up to the director's expectations of a villain. In those days "villains" came in distinct types, as did "protagonists". But instead of just reading from the scripts, Ms Lo would visit nightclubs, bars, and department stores, in order to understand the actual practices in these venues. Once when she was cast as nightclub hostess, she interviewed real life hostesses to learn about their work, their lifestyle, and most of all, their lives. Rather than feeling compromised because she was "type-cast", Ms Lo has come to see playing villains as a "calling". Through her acting, she has said, "the audience could realise the harsh realities behind these characters, who were often driven into these so-called "stigmatised jobs" because of the economic hardship that was prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s."

Acting has taught Ms Lo a few invaluable life lessons. Being an actress in those days did not necessarily guarantee fame and fortune. Instead, she had to struggle to make ends meet, especially when she had to buy the costumes she wore onscreen herself. She has had to creatively transform her used clothes by "playing little tricks" on them: a ribbon here, some beads there. Another thing she learned is to be thick-skinned, because actors have to put up with the prying eyes of onlookers when they shoot on location.

When the film industry went into decline in early 1970s, she had to explore alternatives another time. Those were trying times, when she would finish working on a film not knowing when and if her next job would come. "But that phone call always came," Ms Lo said. In the meantime, she pursued her studies, attaining certificates for business / secretarial studies and English. Again, fate smiled upon her when she was invited to join the Television Broadcasts (TVB), at a time when television was a burgeoning industry. Performing for TV was another challenge for her, because films can be edited, but live TV shows such as EYT cannot. Again, her looks and versatile acting enabled her to play various roles - from baddies to protagonists, and from Chinese empress dowager / martial arts guru to foreign characters such as "Lady Luran" or "Dina Buffett" - in shows of different genres, from epic dramas to contemporary comedies.

For most of the 1990s and until now, Ms Lo has multitasked, traversing between television and film. In this time Ms Lo's acting career reached a new peak. She starred as a medium in a series of super-natural horror movies in 1993 with such success that she was nominated not once but twice for Best Supporting Actress in the Hong Kong Film Awards. She also created a new series of horror films, with her as the leading role, "Dragon Madam." That role not only earned Ms Lo the nickname "queen of horror," but assured her a place in the many future films in the horror genre.

Her acting excellence was again recognised in 2000 when she won the Best Actress Award at the 19th Hong Kong Film Awards, for her role in the film *Bullets Over Summer*, directed by Wilson Yip. She became the oldest best actress in the history of the Film Awards. And why not? In her own words, "If you are basking in the light of the westering sun, why should you worry about it setting?" Her career in the TV business also earned her a Life Achievement Award in 2002, apart from various other nominations. In 2013, she was honoured again for her contributions to acting, when she was elected by her peers as the "Most Competitive Actor in the Profession."

Ms Lo is as active offscreen as on. She puts her Catholic faith into practice by lending support to charity events. She also makes frequent visits to the elderly care homes and hospitals. When people wonder how she manages the possible conflict between her horror roles and her religion, she simply replies, "That's the essence of professionalism: to be able to act whatever role is given to you." That is also her advice to young actors, as well as to young people in general: watch how others do it, persevere, put your heart and soul into everything you do, keep your eyes on the prize, and work to the best of your ability.

Mr Chairman, for her dedication and distinguished contributions to the acting profession, as well as her generous service to the community at large, may I present to you Ms Helena LO Yin-Ying (LAW Lan) for conferment of an honorary fellowship.

Citation written and delivered by Professor Lisa LEUNG