

Ms Ng Wing-mui

DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES *honoris causa*

Citation

Ms Ng Wing-mui, well known as “Mui E” (Auntie Mui), is a master singer in both Cantonese operatic song *yuetkuk* and Cantonese narrative singing *naamyam*. Mui E began singing these two genres in her teens. Having been a professional singer since she was seven, Mui E made a name when she was thirteen. Since the 1930s, she has made music with all of the celebrated artists of Cantonese music of the time. With eighty years of practice and performance experience, Mui E excels in the two genres of *yuetkuk* and *naamyam* and is now considered a grand master artist of *shiniang qiang* (style of the blind female singers). In her early years she learnt from *gushi* (blind male singers) Liu Jiu and *shiniang* Renxin and Yinjiao, capturing the essence of Cantonese *naamyam* singing. In addition to being a gifted singer, Mui E is also a very talented instrumental performer. She is especially skilled in two musical instruments, the long-neck plucked lute *qingqin* and the hammered dulcimer *yangqin*.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the prominent Hong Kong Cantonese musician, Siu Tit-hung, composed the famous piece “Flowing Water and Moving Clouds”. Chan Luk-ping of Macau set this melody with lyrics and turned it into a well-known piece of Cantonese operatic song *yuetkuk*, “My Man Returns Late”. At thirteen, Mui E premiered the song and immediately gained a reputation in Hong Kong and Macau. Knowing of Mui E’s talent and fame, Siu went to Macau and played his musical instruments to Mui E’s singing. After their ensemble, he offered to take her as a disciple. At seventeen, Mui E became a wife and home-maker, devoting herself totally to her family. Her gifted singing disappeared from public performance for almost three decades. After raising five children, Mui E resumed to music making in her mid-forties, collaborating with the leading singers and musicians in the field. Since the 1980s, Mui E has stopped singing in public, but remained active as an accompanist and continued to perform with generations of singers and musicians.

Her voice was heard again unexpectedly in 1996. It was on an occasion when she tried to help a senior male master singer get back to the right track after getting lost musically during a recording session of *naamyam*. Recognising Mui E’s unique voice in the style of *shiniang qiang*, Yu Siu-wah, Director of the Chinese Music Archive at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, repeatedly invited Mui E to sing *naamyam* since 2005, but Mui E preferred to stay low profile. After many persuasions and invitations, eventually in 2008, Mui E sang excerpts from the voluminous classic work “Counting the Five Watches at Night in Sorrow” (*Tan Wugeng*) at the Hong Kong Central Library. Her singing amazed the hall. Those who knew that particular singing style were excited to hear it again, for it had not been heard for decades, and they deemed Mui E a born-again *shiniang* with open eyes. Mr Sum Bing-wo, the renowned Macau music connoisseur and writer, was there that evening. Having just finished listening to Mui E’s “First Watch”, Sum immediately telephoned the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macau and announced in excitement that he just heard the true cultural bearer of Cantonese *naamyam*.

In 2009, Mui E was invited to sing at the Nan Lian Garden for the Hong Kong Arts Festival. Her singing moved the audience to tears. Subsequently, Macau TV invited Mui E to do a complete performance of “Counting the Five Watches at Night in Sorrow” on television. Only after that event did the Macau SAR Government realise the existence of such an amazing successor to the art of Cantonese *naamyam* and such a rare national treasure. It is for her mastery of the style of *shiniang qiang* of *naamyam* singing that the Macau government named her the cultural bearer of *naamyam*.

The art of *naamyam* has subsequently been proposed to the Beijing central government as an item of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), with Mui E as one of the representative artists. She received the Award of Distinction from the Macau SAR Government in 2012. Subsequently Mui E was nominated by the Macau SAR Government to the central government in Beijing as the successor of Cantonese *Naamyam* music – in particular, the *shiniang qiang*, with the title of “bearer” of ICH endorsed in 2013.

Mui E has been living in Hong Kong for decades. She has played musical accompaniment for many big names in the Cantonese music field for over 70 years, including playing the *qinqin* for renowned *naamyam* singers Kum Ming-chiu and Au Kwan-cheung, and making CD recordings with them. Her *qinqin* accompaniment carries a pure tone, and her technique has reached an exalted state. It is said that her accompaniment is like a shadow following its form, blending with the singing effortlessly.

Currently, this voice of a bygone age is embraced as an invaluable treasure of our cultural heritage. In order to hand down this heritage of her art, she has taken talented students of *naamyam* and become more active in performance, despite approaching 90 years of age.

Mr Chairman, for her distinguished artistic contribution and her devotion to the continuation of the Cantonese art of *naamyam*, as a national bearer of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Cantonese singing, may I present Ms Ng Wing-mui to you for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.

*Chinese citation written and delivered by Dr Li Siu-leung
(English rewriting only)*

吳詠梅女士

榮譽人文學博士

贊辭

吳詠梅女士是隱於鬧市的曲藝大家，身懷廣東本土「粵曲」藝術、繼承極具代表性、卻在消逝中的嶺南曲藝「南音」的餘韻。更具體地說，吳女士是頻臨失傳的「地水南音」傳人。

人稱「梅姨」的吳詠梅女士為人一向低調，所以她的藝術成就不易被人察覺。梅姨自幼學唱粵曲和南音，定居香港三十多年，經常往來香港和澳門，是兩地資深的曲藝名家，更是當下能真正掌握「師娘腔」的唱家。曲藝以外，梅姨對秦琴及揚琴等樂器的演奏也極為精妙。她早年和警師劉就以及潤心和銀嬌等師娘同遊，盡得警師、師娘「地水南音」的神髓。梅姨是澳門特別行政區政府文化局向北京中央政府提名的「地水南音師娘腔」承傳人，二零一二年榮獲澳門特別行政區政府頒授功績獎狀，二零一三年獲國家文化局頒發「國家級非物質文化遺產項目—南音說唱代表性傳承人」的榮譽。

二十世紀三十年代末四十年代初，香港粵樂名家邵鐵鴻創作了著名的譜子〈流水行雲〉，澳門的陳陸平師傅用來撰曲，成為名曲〈郎歸晚〉。梅姨當時只有十三歲，在澳門首演這首樂曲，即時名噪港澳兩地。邵鐵鴻聽聞梅姨的曲藝天才，專程攜同樂器，乘大船由香港去澳門邀請梅姨一起唱曲，並且親自拍和。邵鐵鴻更說收梅姨為徒，不過梅姨未曾跟他學唱。梅姨十七歲時結婚，其後相夫教子，絕足菊壇二十八年。其後五個兒女長大成人，她才重踏江湖，和著名唱家與及拍和名家如鄺一笑、廖森、王粵生等合作。二十世紀八十年代開始，梅姨停止開腔，專擅南音拍和，以「樂手」身分隱伏於港澳曲藝界，其樂器伴奏的高超技藝，在曲界中眾口交譽。

一九九六年，香港中文大學音樂系教授余少華參與南音名家甘明超的錄音拍和，因緣際會得以記錄梅姨高超曲藝的一段軼事。甘明超當時已是八十三歲，錄音時稍稍失神，在環迴的南音樂句中茫茫然失了方向，未能收結。當時梅姨為甘明超拍和，見情勢不妙，於是開腔相助，帶他重入記憶，錄音得以完成。由於南音的旋律和行腔有不斷的重覆，它的過序（或稱過門）特別如是，很有點「微模簡約」的樂風。和不少粵樂小曲一樣，南音樂句的連接很容易令唱者或演奏者「困雞籠」。若果稍不留神，會游不出週而復始的旋律汪洋，無休止地唱奏下去。就是甘明超這樣資深的名家和老手一不留神，也會自困。梅姨當年的說法是：「遊花園了！」。她的開腔相助是把唱者在遊花園後帶到出口，使一眾樂手與唱者不致在旋律上迷途，能連上結尾，完成全曲。

梅姨那次幾十秒的行腔，除了勾起知南音者往昔夜聽潤心師娘的南音〈嘆五更〉或銀嬌師娘的粵謳〈桃花扇〉等錄音的塵封記憶，學者有心人更覺得欣喜，因為得悉「師娘腔」還未消亡，當今還能體現於令人縈繞心懷的歌聲之中。二零零五年，梅姨現身於香港中文大學中國音樂資料館為杜煥警師南音錄音推廣的活動，館長力邀復出演唱。梅姨的隱於鬧市的作風，最初令她再三婉拒，但最後終於被館長的誠意感動，二零零八年時在香港中央圖書館開腔，演唱〈嘆五更〉選段，震動全場，懂南音的人欣聞舊調，都以為「師娘」再世。澳門資深曲藝家沈秉和適逢其會，也是座上客，他聽完「一更」之後，便急不及待打長途電話去澳門文化局，欣喜地告訴他們：發現了「地水南音」正宗傳人。

二零零九年香港藝術節邀請梅姨在南蓮園池再唱〈嘆五更〉的三更，席間有聽眾感動落淚。其後澳門電視台特別邀請梅姨演唱全本〈嘆五更〉，這時澳門才知曉「梅姨」是該埠的文化瑰寶、「地水南音」傳人。於是，梅姨潛藏幾十年、久被埋沒的廣東南音藝術，重新廣為公眾所認識。梅姨的歌聲和演唱風格，重現了消逝多年的「師娘腔」文化遺產。為延續南音，梅姨雖已近九十高齡，今天仍然悉心授徒，不惜勞累。

久居香港的梅姨，從粵樂各大名家唱曲奏樂已七十多年，曾經用她精擅的秦琴為南音名家甘明超和區均祥拍和，灌錄多張鐳射光碟。梅姨的秦琴拍和，音色純和，彈、挑、輪、撥等技巧，已臻化境，和唱腔如影隨形，自然渾成。梅姨兼擅唱曲與拍和，在曲界無出其右，是僅存的南音高手。

主席先生，吳詠梅女士體現並繼承了嶺南獨特的非物質文化財產，為國家級南音說唱代表性承傳人。為表揚吳女士成就非凡的藝術人生，本人謹恭請閣下頒授榮譽人文學博士學位予吳詠梅女士。

中文贊辭由李小良博士撰寫及宣讀