

Inno Design Tech Expo
設計及創新科技博覽

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An interview with Ada Ho



Ada Ho will speak as a panelist in a discussion on market trends during the Inno Design Tech Expo 2014 organized by the Trade Development Council (TDC). Ada has multifaceted roles in Hong Kong, being at once the head of a group of middle-aged skilled textile workers who have woven their way to success in a high-end wool factory in Tuen Mun and the producer of musicals like “the Awakening,” “Against the Wind” and the documentary “My Voice, My Life.” These engagements on their own make for a lot of fodder for an interview. However, behind all this media attention, which has branded her as a champion of the underprivileged, Ada is constantly asking herself what her calling in life really is.

Ada is not ungrateful. Rather to the contrary, she has a clear picture of the things that she has gained and lost in the past years. “I am very afraid of boredom. My thinking is that life should be full of new things, new challenges. I constantly need to learn more to be better than myself from yesterday. In this sense, thinking back to all the things I have done in the previous years, I did not expect to grow so much. It is just that, sometimes, I still think that something is missing. What is my real calling? Of course, ‘calling’ is a religious term. What I mean is the purpose that everyone is born

with,” says the Christian.

After graduating from Georgetown University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Foreign Service and from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School with a Master in Public Policy degree, Ada has worked in the business sector in strategic planning, management consulting, and currency derivatives trading at various international corporations. After moving from the business sector to the arts and academia, Ada has been serving as the Executive Director of the social enterprise L plus H Fashion and the non-profit L plus H Creations Foundation. Apart from engaging with the production of musicals and documentaries, Ada also writes books and columns and teaches politics and public policy at Hong Kong University.

The story of how the L plus H Fashion wool factory came about has been widely covered, but very few reports have focused on the organization’s most difficult period in its nascent stages.

Although the initial difficult period is over now, Ada, who is normally straightforward and not very sentimental, still talks about the process emotionally, “we were established in 2009 to allow a group of skilled and experienced middle-aged workers with poor education to have a chance return to their own jobs, so that their professions wouldn’t lose their value just because they are considered obsolete today.

Yet it was really difficult to hang on in the first 18 months. Honestly, I couldn’t even see the light at the end of the tunnel then. I just sighed, waited and hoped for the better every single day. Sometimes I asked myself, ‘doesn’t the saying go that people naturally flock to things with quality?’ I persevered with 80 craftsmen and workers. Was our whole direction wrong?”

She continued, “Also, there was so much to do in coordinating and arranging everything between the stakeholders and different people in order to get a stream of new customers coming in after 24 months. Now, we can finally produce woolen clothing for the top and most well-known brands and sell our own branded products under the label Love + Hope – that whole process was really an ordeal.”

In the panel discussion on 6 December, Ada will speak on the topic “The Secrets of Brand Success.” Speaking about this, she returned to her no-nonsense attitude as a successful businesswoman, saying, “I think there are four core values. First, you need to preempt other people with your forward-thinking. For example, when we are catering to our clients’ needs in the production process, we also try to take part in the creative design process to take the initiative. Secondly, you need to interact with the other party through flexible adaptation and communication so that new ideas can come about. After that, you just need to keep learning to breathe along with the market. Lastly, you need to move ahead with the times at the same time as finding value inside every individual. I think my philosophy is the same whether I am running a wool factory, producing a musical, or making a documentary.”

Since 2013, Ada has been the executive director of the new organization L plus H Creations Foundation, going from helping so-called “factory girls” to guiding young people. Through performances and training, the Foundation gives young people from underprivileged backgrounds opportunities to build confidence, team spirit and other positive values.

Ada has produced a series of shows, including “the Awakening,” “Against the Wind,” and the documentary “My Voice, My Life,” which reached a very wide audience with its media attention.

When asked about her view of the future of Hong Kong’s cultural sector and young people, Ada emphasized that she is only a “beginner” in the art sector and cannot give an opinion, but she still shared her thoughts. “These few years, I saw many talented designers and artists who wouldn’t accept other people’s or even their investors’ opinions. I want to say that people’s confidence in someone is built over time. Say if you are a wild horse, and other people put a wooden fence to limit your movement, you can still try to run inside those confines and show your ability. When people have enough confidence in you one day, they would naturally let you go beyond those boundaries and expand your horizons.”

She drew the same lesson from her personal experiences. “Dealing with people and the annoying details of work, and even writing – these are not things I enjoy doing. I don’t think I have accomplished my dream yet. I haven’t really found my calling.”

In the end, she seemed to have found an answer to her question, “nevertheless, this is perhaps the contradiction in life. Everything seems to be a “set menu.” If you want to take that star down, you have to experience all these other things. Looking back, the things I did want to do needed to be written down and shared with others. So, perhaps my calling is to learn the right lesson and find meaning in the process.”

何靜瑩專訪

何靜瑩 (Ada)，將在香港貿易發展局主辦的「設計及創新科技博覽」中擔任一場市場趨勢研討會的講者。她數數多多，先不論她帶領一班中年人士，在屯門的高級毛衣工廠「織」出一片天；單是她接連監製的音樂劇《震動心弦》、《逆風》和紀錄片《爭氣》，這堆故事，也堪細談。然而，在連串風光、為眾人領航背後，成功女子反倒在問：我的召命在哪？

她並非不知足，反之，對於這些年來的所得所失，Ada絕對地了解。「我很怕悶。我的想法是，人生應充滿新事物、新挑戰，要多學習，打倒昨天的我。所以這些年來，做到的這些事，所有成長，回想起來，是意想不到的。只是有時候會覺得，something’s still missing，究竟我的「召命」在哪？當然，「召命」是個宗教的詞，我指的是，「每個人與生俱來的一種使命」這位基督徒如是說。

畢業於喬治城大學外交學院，並於哈佛大學甘迺迪政府學院取得公共政策碩士學位；又曾於跨國企業從事戰略策劃、管理顧問和外幣衍生工具交易的行業。何靜瑩從商界再走出藝術、學術路，擔任社會企業L plus H Fashion、非牟利機構L plus H Creations Foundation的執行董事，除了涉足音樂劇、紀錄片，還會爬格子寫書、寫專欄，亦在香港大學的政治與公共行政學系任教。

L plus H Fashion毛衣廠的故事，其實早已廣泛流傳，但不妨由此，特別當中最辛酸的部份說起。

事過境遷，但本來快人快語的Ada，仍滿有感觸的分享道：「我們於2009年成立，想讓一班低學歷，但手工、經驗一流的中年工人，有重操故業的機會，不要令專業因時移世易失去價值。但守住最初的18個月最難捱。老實說，我當初是連曙光都看不到，每天望天打卦，仰天長嘆。有時不禁問：不是說有窮自然香嗎？我們和80名工匠及師傅已一直堅持，難道是方向錯了嗎？」

她續說：「還有，要在持份者、不同人、事之間周旋、協調，終於在24個月左右，陸續繼續有新客。到現在能為最頂級的知名品牌製造高質素毛衣，又能在中環專門店出售自家品Love+Hope的產品；整個過程，真的，全部都是捱過來。」

Ada在12月6日研討會上的講題是「品牌成功一營銷秘技」，說到這，她回復女強人的明快俐落：「我想是四個核心價值吧！首先是有種先發制人的前瞻性，譬如我們品牌在照顧客人要求時，除生產外，亦會嘗試參與創意、設計的部份，希望爭取主動。第二是與對方的互動性，彈性的適應和溝通，從而得出新想法。再之後就是不斷學習，要跟市場呼吸。最後是與時並進的同時，也從中找到每個人深處的價值。我想，無論是當我做毛衣廠、搞音樂劇、紀錄片等，也是同一道理。」

2013年起，Ada擔任新創辦之L plus H Creations Foundation董事，從扶起「工廠妹」到帶起年青人。透過藝術演出和訓練，讓來自基層或欠缺機會的青少年培養自信與團隊精神，建立正面價值觀。一系列由Ada監製的作品，包括音樂劇《震動心弦》、《逆風》和紀錄片《爭氣》，所帶起的回響，相信你即使沒有入場觀賞，也總略有聽聞。

問到她對香港文化界和年青人的展望，Ada強調，關於藝術，她只是「初哥」，不敢班門弄斧，只是有一點分享：「這幾年來，我看到有些設計師、藝術家，他們自恃有才華，便接受不了其他人，甚至投資者的意見。我想說的是，別人給你的信心，是要時間建立的。如果你是一匹野馬，別人用木欄圍住你，你仍大可在欄內試著跑，發揮自己，到有天別人對你的信任夠大了，自然會將空間擴闊。」

回到她自身經歷，也是同一道理：「處理人事、工作上的繁瑣，甚至寫東西，其實都不是我享受的事情。我好像還未做到我的夢想，找到我的召命。」

但最後，她為自己的問題，找到答案：「不過，這就是人生的矛盾吧，所有東西都像個『套餐』，你要摘到那顆星星，必須經過這些種種。回頭望，我想做的事情，正是需要我去寫、去分享。所以，或者，透過當中的得著，看到當中的意義，就已是我的召命吧。」

