

# *Breaking the glass ceiling*

*Liberal arts education  
incubates an aspiring  
young entrepreneur's work  
on empowering women*



Text: Lee Wing-sze  
Photos: Fox Woo, interviewee





## *Bernice Li*

BA (Hons) in Contemporary  
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In her Instagram profile, Bernice Li states “Education is elevation”. The Lingnan University alumna knows just how education can change a person’s life. Her studies, and the opportunities she received at LU, have inspired her in many ways both personally and professionally.

“I had a path with many twists and turns. I did go through depression, and had to take a semester off and then slowly get back into it. Lingnan helped me so much in becoming who I am today,” says the Contemporary English Studies graduate.

Today, she is a brand and creative director whose creative work spreads across APAC and her client profiles include upscale French restaurant *Écriture*, *Plume* wine bar, *Female Entrepreneurs Worldwide*, *Forbes Global Alliance*, *Rolls Royce*, and British fashion designer *Emma Wallace* in Hong Kong. She is also the founder of a fashion brand *WMXN Collective* and community *SoleSoul Club* — and both aim to empower women and challenge the status quo.

Through the outfits designed by *WMXN Collective*, Li advocates for body image, encouraging women to honour their bodies and to normalise a new style of femininity. “I’m offering women an alternative. You don’t have to wear clothes that make you feel like you have to fit a certain body type to be valued and taken seriously. See the blazer I’m wearing right now? It’s not shaped like a really traditional feminine one,” says Li, who is sporting one of her own single-breasted, boxy khaki jackets. “Look at me. Do I not seem feminine to you? You can’t pigeonhole femininity.

“*WMXN* is in fact a play on the word ‘women’,” she adds. “I don’t like gender stereotypes and gender roles. They cause the downfall of so many women out there. You take out all the vowels as if you’ve taken all the gender roles and stereotypes out, but you can still recognise ‘women’. The intention is to make you rethink, to reshape what femininity is and your role as a woman. I do that by providing a good look, and then issuing a demand.”

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*You owe it to yourself to find out what success and happiness look like to you. Once you know that, go for it, no matter what anyone says.*

— *Bernice Li*

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the full interview



SoleSoul Club is curated for growth-oriented women to discuss goals, mental health, empowerment and other issues that concern women through events, charity projects and podcasts. “But we also welcome men, because I don’t believe that women empowerment is about excluding men. Women’s empowerment and feminism are about human rights, about not providing two different sets of education, reward systems for men and women,” says Li, who is an avid reader.

The obstacles and challenges Li has overcome in recent years have made her focus on women’s empowerment. “I see so much unconscious bias

against women, so many obstacles to women’s success,” she continues. “I believe everybody deserves to be successful. When you start to think about all these gender roles and social roles, you also start to rethink all the definitions of success.

“I want everyone to be authentic enough to go after what they wish for so that they can lead the most fulfilling life for them.”

But what influenced Li’s work for women’s empowerment the most was studying at LU, and especially the Language, Gender and Sexuality course that she took. “It was such an inspiring module to me. The lecturer

was great. The way she talked about all those things on the course inspired me to become a feminist, to work on women’s empowerment because when you see there is so much unconscious bias in our language, you can’t run away from it.

“I always tell my friends about that module. I believe in planting seeds — whatever you say or feel is a seed that’s been planted and, in the future, there will be a day when you see the flower.” Li, who has turned 27 this May, goes on to say: “When I was studying at Lingnan, I probably didn’t know that module would do so much for me. But then standing here, being where I am today, I look back and I know where





As a brand and creative director, Li's clients include international brands such as Rolls Royce and Écriture.

I come from. Lingnan gave me that opportunity."

During her studies in LU, Li was a member of the Dancing Society, and able to indulge her passion for dancing. Later she studied in the UK for a month, which opened up her world internationally. While she was in the UK, she had an offer to be a dance choreographer and teacher. "It gave me a lot of confidence in what I was doing and whatever I wanted to do, because I saw that if I wanted to do something and if I didn't limit myself, I could achieve it."

Li appreciates her learning journey at LU, which has shaped who she is today. "Even professionally as a brand

director, I need to help my clients think of ways to get the message out. The way I do it is by using the right tone. How do I do that? I learned that through all my studies at Lingnan. I couldn't be more grateful for all the things that Lingnan has brought me."

Beside the brand and the community club, Li has set her heart on writing a book. "I will write a book. I know that that's coming. I'm a big believer in manifestation. My manifestation is that you visualise your ultimate self. When you see your ultimate self, you ask, what am I not doing now? If you can see the horizon, then you can go for it." Li hopes to bring more changes to people around her in the future.

Lastly, her advice for the younger generation and LU students is: "You owe it to yourself to find out what success and happiness look like to you. Once you know that, go for it, no matter what anyone says."

So, what does success mean to Li?

"Success means waking up in the morning everyday feeling excited about what I'm about to do, and knowing that I'm going to meet so many amazing people, knowing that I'm going to be inspired, and I'm also going to inspire," she says. "Knowing that I'm doing something not because other people tell me to, but because I feel like it. That's success to me." ■