

## An Address given by The Honourable Wong Yan-lung, GBM, LLD(Hon), BA, LL.M, SC, JP

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### *50 years*

On behalf of all of us receiving the awards today, I would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to The Chinese University of Hong Kong for conferring upon us such exceptional honours. It is particularly special and fortunate for us as this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the university.

A 50-year-old university is, by international standard, a relatively young university. However, for a man like me who happens also to turn 50 later this year, I can certainly feel the weight of the saying that 50 is the youth of old age.

Abraham Lincoln said *“At the end, it is not the years in your life that counts; it’s the life in your years.”* And then you have John Lennon reminding us, *“Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans.”*

When you reach my age, or more so the ages of the other far more deserving award recipients today, going through your own CV can be a rather emotional exercise. Some achievements came through great efforts with sweat and pain. For others, however, while it is nice to have, you may in fact be thinking, and cherishing, more of the things you have sacrificed in exchange for those matters written down. Are you doing justice to your own life and to others who are closely affected by how you live your life?

### *Doing Justice*

Doing Justice is of course something I am closely associated with for many years. I hope you would not mind my sharing with you a few thoughts on this subject.

To do justice, the most elementary requirement is to love what is right and to uphold what is true, while hating what is wrong and denying what is false. It is the basic instinct and the core quality of the person. It is a commitment and calls for courage. It is easier said than done today in this age when everything seems relative, and when what you have always considered right could be condemned as wrong, and what you have always believed to be false could be hailed as the ultimate truth.

The right heart needs to be supplemented by many things. First, develop discernment, the ability to pierce through lies, half-truths, omissions, exaggerations and hearsay, to unearth the truth. It means always insisting on seeing the facts, the evidence and the reasoning, and using them to test the veracity of any proposition or conclusion.

Few people have the ability to pass on information accurately with no more or no less, either consciously or subconsciously. Establish a healthy scepticism, but do not lose the ability and grace to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Of course, the popular view may not necessarily be the correct one. However, while you seek to establish your own independent view, be careful you do not go to extremes just because you want to show others you can think differently and are not following the crowd.

Enlarge your perspectives horizontally and historically. Let me share with you the wisdom of two wise old men, both in their 90's.

Sir Sze-Yuen Chung told me he was once invited to spend 4 to 5 days visiting the then state-of-the-art facilities at the Houston Space Centre in the US in the 1970's. The hosts asked about his experience, and to their surprise, Sir SY said he felt very isolated and disconnected in the past few days. Your newspapers, Sir SY lamented, only reported local events and there was not a word about what was happening in the rest of the world.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of having dinner with the Minister Mentor of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. He enlightened me on many comparisons between Hong Kong and Singapore, reminding me to bear in mind the historical perspective, and how the varying circumstances in different decades, including the prevailing ideologies, could have produced drastically dissimilar outcomes, in terms of matters like political changes and the mentality of the people.

Second, fair process is essential. I am not talking rules of natural justice or court procedure here. It is perhaps more useful to give one or two examples as to what to avoid in order to promote fairness.

Most people would endorse the elimination of prejudice and discrimination. However, we can readily see the ring of truth when President Obama said there are very few African-American men, including himself before becoming a Senator, who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars.

Another thing to beware of is your own defence mechanism. I was visiting the House of Lords in London some years ago and had tea with Sir Geoffrey Howe. He gave me a very good piece of advice: whenever people say you are wrong, don't immediately jump up to fight back. Pause and think. No one can be right all the time. You might have chosen a wrong battle and yet you keep on fighting just because of face. Meekness can be strength. It embraces an inner ability to recognize one's own strengths and weaknesses, to cherish truth above all other considerations.

### *Doing Justice: more than the fulfilment of law*

Having been in the public administration of law and now back in private practice as a barrister, I appreciate more deeply the importance of the law as a means to do justice. At the same time, however, I also realize the law's inadequacy.

A major difference between science and law is that with science, you are trying to discover the law of the universe and of nature, but with the law of a particular land, we are talking about primarily prescribing the code of accepted behaviour, and the enforcement of it.

The law can only be a means to do justice. Fulfilling the law is just the beginning; it is but the bottom line. We need to do a lot more in order to do real justice, which has the power to heal as opposed to divide. Thus, for example, while in office as Secretary for Justice, I have joined many others to promote the cause of mediation, which has now become a key component to the dispute resolution culture in almost all established legal systems in the world. Mediation supplements litigation and can create a solution considered just by the parties, preserving their relationship, saving costs and avoiding pain.

### *Doing Justice: for others*

When one thinks of “doing justice”, what comes to mind may be protesters holding placards and chanting slogans to say they want to get equal with others in one direction or another.

However, doing justice can mean getting equal in another direction. In his book “*Generous Justice*”, Timothy Keller quoted a lovely example about a US town called Chilmark where a high proportion of its residents suffered from hereditary deafness in the 19th century. The amazing thing was the entire community in Chilmark learned to communicate in sign language. As the result, the deaf did not feel disadvantaged as a minority. Equality was achieved in the opposite direction.

World-renown investment strategist Mr. Kiril Sokoloff was speaking to the Harvard Business School Association in Hong Kong recently. He said the impact of modern technology resulted in a shrinking workforce; the angry displaced crowd created political pressure and appeasing handouts from governments, which was the recipe for sure decline. As the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in our world keeps widening, hatred against the rich escalated. This, said Sokoloff, is the biggest problem facing the world today.

There is no immediate solution but surely there can be mitigation. If our focus on seeking equality lies in the opposite direction, fighting for justice and well-being not so much for ourselves, but for others, particularly for those who do not have the ability to do so, then the cumulative injustice will be alleviated, however small. More significantly and immediately, there are bound to individuals who will benefit, however few.

On this note, I salute you Dr Elsie Tu, for devoting your entire life helping the poor in Hong Kong. I salute you Sir David Li, for your steadfast efforts to create opportunities for generations of young men and women from Hong Kong to equip themselves for service. I salute you Professor Zhong Nanshan for your tireless work in the fight and prevention of diseases saving many lives. I salute you Professor Barry James Marshall for your many breakthroughs in medical research bringing relief and hope to those who suffer.

Finally, I salute all of you working hard at The Chinese University of Hong Kong for building up the lives of so many who spend their formative years in this wonderful campus and fraternity. May the Lord bless you all to move the university forward into an even brighter and more fruitful era ahead.