

## Honorary Fellow A Citation



### **Dr the Honourable Simon Li Fook Sean, GBM, LLB**

In October 1986 Dr Simon Li gave an address on behalf of the Honorary Graduates at the Thirty-First Congregation of this University. He chose as his theme Rights Under the Basic Laws. There was nobody better qualified to speak on this subject. Dr Li was then working on the Drafting Committee for the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Presciently, the first Right he identified on that occasion as being most crucial yet requiring the most “careful consideration” was the right of abode. Dr Li ended his learned and highly topical address with some words about the conditions needed in order for the law itself to retain its authority in any society:

*The Basic Law will be but a piece of paper. Whether it can enable us to achieve the object of preserving the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong will depend on good faith and good will. What is more important is people’s respect and observance of the rule of law. Ultimately it requires an impartial tribunal which will interpret and enforce the law without fear or favour, malice or ill-will; and that such tribunal is permitted to perform its task without interference or political pressure.*

These words are as relevant to the future of the territory today as they were 16 years ago. They were the distilled wisdom of over 30 years of distinguished service of the law in Hong Kong, both as lawyer and judge.

Dr Li’s legal career began when he graduated with an LLB from University College of London University, in 1950 and was admitted to the Bar at Lincoln’s Inn in 1951. He returned to Hong Kong, working as Crown Counsel and later as Senior Crown Counsel, from 1953 to 1966. He then received a number of judicial appointments, rising from District Judge to be the first Chinese to be appointed to the High Court. He broke new ground again when he was appointed Justice of Appeal in 1980, finally becoming Vice-President of the Court of Appeal in 1984, where he served until his retirement from the bench in 1987. On retirement, he became a Director of the Bank of East Asia.

Apart from his work in helping to frame the Basic Law, Dr Li played several key roles in the handover of sovereignty to China. In 1984, during the Sino-British negotiations, the Hong Kong government set up an Assessment Office for the purpose of gauging social reactions to the Sino-British Agreement. Dr Li was one of two Monitors, along with the Rt. Honourable Sir Patrick Nairne, appointed to oversee the work of the Assessment Office. In 1992, he was appointed a Hong Kong Affairs Adviser; from 1993 to 1995 he served as a Deputy Director of the Preliminary Working Committee of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and in 1996 he became Deputy Director of the Preparatory Committee itself. In the critical years of transition, Dr Li played no small part in ensuring the effective establishment of



the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as we know it today.

Dr Li comes from a distinguished Hong Kong family with deep roots in the region. His great grandfather ran a maritime freight and wholesale rice business, which was handed down ultimately to his father, Mr Li Koon Chun.

Dr Li himself was born in Hong Kong in 1922, educated at King's College and admitted into the University of Hong Kong in 1941. The Japanese Occupation forced him to leave Hong Kong and take up his university studies again in mainland China. While he was enrolled at Guangxi University he met a girl called Yang Yen Ying Lillian, who was to become his wife. When the Japanese entered Guilin, he was forced to flee again. He fell dangerously ill and was in a coma for three weeks. Amidst great personal danger Lillian nursed him back to health. They were married in 1946, just before Dr Li left for the UK to resume his studies.

Dr Li has dedicated himself to the service of the Hong Kong community in a variety of ways. He has been Director and Chairman of the Widow and Orphan Pension Scheme; Honorary President of the Scout Association of Hong Kong; Steward of The Hong Kong Jockey Club; and Council Member of the Society for Rehabilitation. He is an Honorary Steward of The Hong Kong Jockey Club, a founding member of the Society of Homes for the Handicapped and a Director of King's College Old Boys' Association School Board.

Dr Li and his family have been major benefactors of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has contributed significant funds to support various student and staff development programmes, research programmes, as well as academic exchange activities. He has also supported the improvement of facilities on the University campus. Over many years, Dr Li has been a great supporter of the advancement of this University.

It is my privilege, Mr Chairman, to present to you Dr the Honourable Simon Li Fook Sean for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.