

Mr Warren Chan Chee-hoi, QC, SC

Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*

Citation

Mr Warren Chan Chee-hoi graduated from The University of Hong Kong with an LLB (Hons) in 1977 and a PCLL in 1978. He was called to the Hong Kong Bar in the same year, and to the Bar in England five years later. Subsequently, Mr Chan was also admitted to practice by the Supreme Court of Victoria (Australia), the Supreme Court of Singapore and the State of New York (USA). In 1994, he was further appointed Queen's Counsel, renamed Senior Counsel in 1997. His distinguished practice has gained high repute over the years, and his earnest guidance of younger professionals has earned deep respect within the legal profession.

Mr Chan's career and success do not reflect a typical story of "winning at the starting line". On the contrary, he grew up in Sham Shui Po, worked part-time while studying, toiling for the basic needs of livelihood: one might say he was "born among the grass roots and seasoned in the marketplace". He struggled in his studies prior to university, even changing school four times during his five years of secondary schooling. He decided to work hard in his sixth form, though, and gained admission to the history programme at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. While fascinated by the study of history, philosophy and culture, Mr Chan had to think about the practical issue of a future career; having finished his first year at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, he was admitted as a private candidate to the Department of Law of The University of Hong Kong. A learner with a sense of inadequacy redoubles his diligence: persisting under the dual pressure of study and part-time work, Mr Chan studied hard day and night. Three years later, through firm will and stamina, he became the only graduate in his LLB class to earn first-class honours.

From rapidly raising his Chinese and English proficiency and gaining admission to the two universities, to unswerving perseverance in his study and career, Mr Chan's story is a paradigm of constant self-reliance, self-improvement and self-remoulding; it is an inspiring journey of struggle "under the Lion Rock", a testament to the Hong Kong spirit of patience and resilience. Never fond of socialising and network-building, Mr Chan only believes in constant resoluteness and application. Recalling the hardship of bygone days, he said: "Don't blame others or expect social welfare when you face adversity; rather, learn to adapt and advance through hardship. Only then will you have a fruitful and successful life. To be born rich might seem like a stroke of fortune, but in fact it easily dissipates one's motivation to improve." He even joked seriously: "Poverty in youth is priceless!" That destitution and adversity can be turned into upward drive is Mr Chan's conviction and experience, as well as the message he wishes to share with young people. He is convinced that what he has overcome can be achieved by others equally resolute and industrious. In the spatio-temporal coordinates of life, there are different starting lines and half-way finish points at various stages; the twists and turns of life allow one to turn adversity into advantage, to constantly rewrite gain and loss, success and failure. To do one's best with a sincere heart is the most fundamental attitude to life.

Law is undoubtedly the cornerstone of operation in modern society. Precisely for this reason, Mr Chan sees law as a matter for the populace rather than a privilege of the minority. He hopes to see more law firms move into grass roots districts like Sham Shui Po and Tin Shui Wai, providing affordable legal services for the common people. He strongly believes that both Hong Kong and mainland China need to train more high-quality lawyers, in order to meet the needs of a swiftly changing economy and a society of deepening tensions. He is very concerned about developments

related to the rule of law and legal education in Hong Kong and Mainland China; he sees full establishment of the rule of law and enhancement of the quality of legal education as the biggest challenges in China's move to modernisation. Thus Mr Chan actively supports the Law School of Tsinghua University, and, through donation and other work, rendered much help to The Chinese University of Hong Kong in establishing its Law School in 2004. As to his *alma mater*, he is a staunch supporter through donation and advice. More than once he has advised The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong to make further strides in order to become top-tier universities in the world.

As an intellectual, Mr Chan's existential horizon is certainly not confined to law; reflection on social ideals and truths in life are perhaps the deeper reasons underlying his abiding interest in history over the years. Not long ago, he published a general world history entitled *All Kinds of Everything: from Chinese Civilization to World History*. A narrative covering 4500 BC to 1911, this two-volume bilingual work juxtaposes, connects and brings together Chinese and world history, along with personal observations and insights. The book's core idea and aim is to "set forth facts and reason things out" instead of "justifying predetermined conclusions"; Mr Chan believes that a basis of fair and objective understanding, coupled with compassion and tolerance, will facilitate the future development of civilization. This is a humanistic concern transcending personal profession, and is also the spirit of liberal arts education and thinking.

Over the years, Mr Chan's devotion to the enhancement of legal education in Hong Kong and Mainland China has made him an exemplary professional widely praised by the legal community. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by The University of Hong Kong in 2004, and by The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2013.

Mr Chairman, in recognition of his distinguished professional achievement and his significant contribution to the legal communities in Hong Kong and Mainland China, may I present Mr Warren Chan Chee-hoi to you for conferment of the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

Chinese citation written and delivered by Professor Charles Kwong